



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

POSITION ON CHILD MARRIAGE

May 2016

As the world's largest spiritual organization led by women, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) is especially committed to the realization of the potential of girls and women. We understand that it is not only the right of girls and women to be educated and to express their talents and potential to the fullest extent, but it is also in the best interest of our world to experience the unrestricted gifts of women and girls. Child marriage limits their education, inhibits their health and compromises the full potential of girls to contribute to the world at a time when we most need their contribution. The BKWSU unequivocally supports gender equality and opposes the practice of child marriage.

Since 1983, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) has worked in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. The role of the Brahma Kumaris has been to connect what the UN was doing on a global scale with BKWSU projects in the same areas of social and humanitarian development. By using the expertise of the Brahma Kumaris in spiritual growth, the BKs have been contributors to many UN initiatives. Supporting global action on a personal scale across cultures and continents has been the hallmark of the Brahma Kumaris' participation with the UN.

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University wholeheartedly endorses the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015.

In particular, we re-affirm our support for **Goal 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"**, **Target 5.3 "Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation."** In a 2013 joint press release issued by UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, UN Women, the United Nations Foundation, World Vision, Girls Not Brides, Every Woman Every Child, World YWCA and The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, child marriage was described as an "appalling violation of human rights...[that] robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospects.... A girl who is married as a child is one whose potential will not be fulfilled." Many international agreements already outlaw child marriage, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

While child marriage applies to both females and males under age 18, it is far more common among young women. Estimates by the United National Population Fund (UNFPA) indicate that 37,000 girls under age 18 will be married each day. This practice has a significant correlation with poverty, systemic gender inequality, and deeply rooted cultural and religious traditions that put girls at risk for physical and psychological harm in today's world.

A central theme of the Brahma Kumaris is that in order for change to occur in the outer world, there has to be a concurrent transformation of the inner awareness that is predicated upon the dignity and worth of all people. According to Gayatri Naraine, BK Representative to the UN in New York, "This spiritual trajectory is the vital force that influences whether we move towards a socially, ecologically, and spiritually satisfying future or whether we move into further violence, poverty, and environmental degradation."

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University upholds spiritual principles that nourish the inner world of self-respect, building a foundation of dignity for ourselves, our families, and our society. The UN Sustainable Development goals related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are consistent with our beliefs and practices, and we look forward to supporting these goals in our Centers worldwide.

Mohini Panjabi B.K. Jt

Sister Mohini Panjabi, Brahma Kumaris representative to the United Nations in New York
Sister Jayanti Kirpalani, Brahma Kumaris representative to the United Nations in Geneva

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU), with its spiritual headquarters in Mt. Abu, India, comprises a worldwide network of centers in 110 countries and is an international non-governmental organization of the United Nations accredited with General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); Associate Status with the Department of Public Information (DPI); Consultative Status with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Observer Status to the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Observer Organization to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); Flagship Member of Education for Rural People (ERP), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

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