

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3175

To protect girls in developing countries through the prevention of child marriage, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 25, 2007

Ms. McCOLLUM of Minnesota (for herself, Mr. HONDA, Mrs. CAPPS, Mr. TERRY, Mr. BERMAN, Mr. ELLISON, Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, and Ms. CLARKE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

A BILL

To protect girls in developing countries through the prevention of child marriage, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “International Pro-
5 tecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2007”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) Child marriage, also known as “forced mar-
9 riage” or “early marriage”, is a harmful traditional

1 practice that deprives girls of their dignity and
2 human rights.

3 (2) Child marriage as a traditional practice, as
4 well as through coercion or force, is a violation of
5 Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human
6 Rights, which states, “Marriage shall be entered into
7 only with the free and full consent of intending
8 spouses.”.

9 (3) An estimated 51 million girls in developing
10 countries now ages 20–24 were married under the
11 age of 18, and if present trends continue more than
12 100 million more girls in developing countries will be
13 married as children over the next decade.

14 (4) In developing countries, other than China,
15 approximately one in seven girls marry before the
16 age of 15 and one in three girls are married before
17 the age of 18.

18 (5) Child marriage “treats young girls as prop-
19 erty” and “poses grave risks not only to women’s
20 basic rights but also their health, economic inde-
21 pendence, education, and status in society”, accord-
22 ing to the Department of State.

23 (6) In 2005, the Department of State con-
24 ducted a world-wide survey and found child marriage
25 to be a concern in 64 out of 182 countries surveyed,

1 with child marriage most common in sub-Saharan
2 Africa and parts of South Asia as well as the Middle
3 East

4 (7) In Ethiopia's Amhara region, about half of
5 all girls are married by age 14 with 95 percent not
6 knowing their husbands before marriage, 85 percent
7 unaware they were to be married, and 70 percent re-
8 porting their first sexual initiation within marriage
9 taking place before their first menstrual period, ac-
10 cording to a 2004 survey.

11 (8) In Afghanistan, where the legal age of mar-
12 riage for girls is 16 years, 57 percent of marriages
13 involve girls below the age of 16, including girls
14 younger than 10 years, according to the United Na-
15 tions Children's Fund (UNICEF).

16 (9) In some areas of northern Nigeria, 45 per-
17 cent of girls are married by age 15 and 73 percent
18 by age 18, with age gaps between girls and the hus-
19 bands averaging between 12 and 18 years.

20 (10) Between half and three-quarters of all
21 girls are married before the age of 18 in the fol-
22 lowing countries: Niger, Chad, Bangladesh, Mali,
23 Guinea, the Central African Republic, Nepal, Mo-
24 zambique, Uganda, Burkina Faso, and India, ac-
25 cording to Demographic Health Survey data.

1 (11) Factors perpetuating child marriage in-
2 clude poverty, a lack of educational or employment
3 opportunities for girls, parental concerns to ensure
4 sexual relations within marriage, the dowry system,
5 and the perceived lack of value of girls.

6 (12) Child marriage has negative effects on
7 girls' health, including significantly increased risk of
8 maternal death and morbidity, infant mortality, ob-
9 stetric fistula, and sexually transmitted diseases, in-
10 cluding HIV/AIDS.

11 (13) In developing countries, girls ages 10 to
12 14 who become pregnant are five times more likely
13 to die during a pregnancy or in childbirth than
14 women ages 20 to 24.

15 (14) Child marriage can result in bonded labor
16 or enslavement, commercial sexual exploitation, and
17 violence against the victims, according to UNICEF.

18 (15) Out-of-school or unschooled girls are at
19 greater risk of child marriage while girls in school
20 face pressure to withdraw from school when sec-
21 ondary school requires monetary costs, travel, or
22 other social costs, including lack of lavatories and
23 supplies for menstruating girls and increased risk of
24 sexual violence.

1 (16) The World Bank reports in 2006 that it
2 is estimated that “about half of girls in Sub-Saha-
3 ran Africa who drop out of primary school do so be-
4 cause of poor water and sanitation facilities”.

5 (17) UNICEF reports that investments in im-
6 proving school sanitation resulted in a 17 percent in-
7 crease in school enrollment for girls in Guinea and
8 an 11 percent increase for girls in Bangladesh.

9 (18) Investments in girls’ schooling, creating
10 safe community spaces for girls, and programs for
11 skills building for out-of-school girls are all effective
12 and demonstrated strategies for preventing child
13 marriage and creating a pathway to empower girls
14 by addressing conditions of poverty, low status, and
15 norms that contribute to child marriage.

16 (19) Most countries with high rates of child
17 marriage have a legally-established minimum age of
18 marriage, yet child marriage persists due to strong
19 traditional norms and the failure to enforce existing
20 laws.

21 **SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

22 It is the sense of Congress that—

23 (1) child marriage is a violation of human
24 rights and the prevention and elimination of child

1 marriage should be a foreign policy goal of the
2 United States;

3 (2) the practice of child marriage undermines
4 United States investments in foreign assistance to
5 promote education and skills building for girls, re-
6 duce maternal and child mortality, reduce maternal
7 illness, halt the transmission of HIV/AIDS, prevent
8 gender-based violence, and reduce poverty; and

9 (3) expanding educational opportunities for
10 girls, economic opportunities for women, and reduc-
11 ing maternal and child mortality are critical to
12 achieving the Millennium Development Goals and
13 the global health and development objectives of the
14 United States, including efforts to prevent HIV/
15 AIDS.

16 **SEC. 4. ASSISTANCE TO PREVENT THE INCIDENCE OF**
17 **CHILDHOOD MARRIAGE IN DEVELOPING**
18 **COUNTRIES.**

19 (a) ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZED.—The President is au-
20 thorized to provide assistance, including through multilat-
21 eral, nongovernmental, and faith-based organizations, to
22 prevent the incidence of child marriage in developing coun-
23 tries and to promote the educational, health, economic, so-
24 cial, and legal empowerment of girls and women as part

1 of the strategy to prevent child marriage in developing
2 countries established pursuant to section 5.

3 (b) PRIORITY.—In providing assistance authorized
4 under subsection (a), the President shall give priority to—

5 (1) areas or regions in developing countries in
6 which 15 percent of girls under the age of 15 are
7 married or 40 percent of girls under the age of 18
8 are married; and

9 (2) activities to—

10 (A) expand and replicate existing commu-
11 nity-based programs that are successful in pre-
12 venting the incidence of child marriage;

13 (B) establish pilot projects to prevent child
14 marriage; and

15 (C) share evaluations of successful pro-
16 grams, program designs, experiences, and les-
17 sons.

18 (c) COORDINATION.—Assistance authorized under
19 subsection (a) shall be integrated with existing United
20 States programs for advancing appropriate age and grade-
21 level basic and secondary education through adolescence,
22 ensure school enrollment and completion for girls, health,
23 income generation, agriculture development, legal rights,
24 and democracy building and human rights, including—

- 1 (1) support for community-based activities that
2 encourage community members to address beliefs or
3 practices that promote child marriage and to edu-
4 cate parents, community leaders, religious leaders,
5 and adolescents of the health risks associated with
6 child marriage and the benefits for adolescents, es-
7 pecially girls, of access to education, health care,
8 livelihood skills, microfinance, and savings programs;
- 9 (2) enrolling girls in primary and secondary
10 school at the appropriate age and keeping them in
11 age-appropriate grade levels through adolescence;
- 12 (3) reducing education fees, and enhancing safe
13 and supportive conditions in primary and secondary
14 schools to meet the needs of girls, including—
- 15 (A) access to water and suitable hygiene
16 facilities, including separate lavatories and la-
17 trines for girls;
- 18 (B) assignment of female teachers;
- 19 (C) safe routes to and from school; and
- 20 (D) eliminating sexual harassment and
21 other forms of violence and coercion;
- 22 (4) ensuring access to health care services and
23 proper nutrition for adolescent girls, which is essen-
24 tial to both their school performance and their eco-
25 nomic productivity;

1 (5) increasing training for adolescent girls and
2 their parents in financial literacy and access to eco-
3 nomic opportunities, including livelihood skills, sav-
4 ings, microfinance, and small-enterprise develop-
5 ment;

6 (6) supporting education, including through
7 community and faith-based organizations and youth
8 programs, that helps remove gender stereotypes and
9 the bias against girls used to justify child marriage,
10 especially efforts targeted at men and boys, pro-
11 motes zero tolerance for violence, and promotes gen-
12 der equality, which in turn help to increase the per-
13 ceived value of girls;

14 (7) creating peer support and female mentoring
15 networks and safe social spaces specifically for girls;
16 and

17 (8) supporting local advocacy work to ensure
18 that governments and law enforcement officials are
19 meeting their obligations to prevent child and forced
20 marriage as well as legal literacy programs at the
21 community level.

22 **SEC. 5. STRATEGY TO PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGE IN DE-**
23 **VELOPING COUNTRIES.**

24 (a) STRATEGY REQUIRED.—The President, acting
25 through the Administrator of the United States Agency

1 for International Development, shall establish a multi-year
2 strategy to prevent child marriage in developing countries
3 and promote the empowerment of girls at risk of child
4 marriage in developing countries, including by addressing
5 the unique needs, vulnerabilities, and potential of girls
6 ages eight to 18 in developing countries.

7 (b) CONSULTATION.—In establishing the strategy re-
8 quired by subsection (a), the President shall consult with
9 Congress, relevant Federal departments and agencies,
10 multilateral organizations, and representatives of civil so-
11 ciety.

12 (c) ELEMENTS.—The strategy required by subsection
13 (a) shall—

14 (1) focus on areas in developing countries with
15 high prevalence of child marriage; and

16 (2) encompass diplomatic initiatives between
17 the United States and governments of developing
18 countries, with attention to human rights, legal re-
19 forms and the rule of law, and programmatic initia-
20 tives in the areas of education, health, income gen-
21 eration, changing social norms, human rights, and
22 democracy building.

23 (d) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date
24 of the enactment of this Act, the President shall transmit
25 to Congress a report that includes—

- 1 (1) the strategy required by subsection (a);
- 2 (2) an assessment, including data disaggregated
- 3 by age and gender to the extent possible, of current
- 4 United States-funded efforts to specifically assist
- 5 girls in developing countries; and
- 6 (3) examples of best practices or programs to
- 7 prevent child marriage in developing countries that
- 8 could be replicated.

9 **SEC. 6. DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S COUNTRY REPORTS ON**

10 **HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES.**

11 The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 is amended—

- 12 (1) in section 116 (22 U.S.C. 2151n), by add-
- 13 ing at the end the following new subsection:

14 “(g) The report required by subsection (d) shall in-

15 clude for each country in which child marriage is prevalent

16 at rates at or above 40 percent in at least one sub-national

17 region, a description on the status of the practice of child

18 marriage (as defined in section 7 of the International Pro-

19 tecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2007)

20 in the country.”; and

- 21 (2) in section 502B (22 U.S.C. 2304), by add-
- 22 ing at the end the following new subsection:

23 “(i) The report required by subsection (b) shall in-

24 clude for each country in which child marriage is prevalent

25 at rates at or above 40 percent in at least one sub-national

1 region, a description on the status of the practice of child
2 marriage (as defined in section 7 of the International Pro-
3 tecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2007)
4 in the country.”.

5 **SEC. 7. DEFINITION.**

6 In this Act, the term “child marriage” means the
7 marriage of a girl or boy, not yet the minimum age for
8 marriage stipulated in law in the country in which the girl
9 or boy is a resident.

10 **SEC. 8. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

11 To carry out this Act and the amendments made by
12 this Act, there are authorized to be appropriated
13 \$25,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

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