

GLOBAL **INTERFAITH** WEEKEND
TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

12-14 SEPTEMBER 2025

**FAITH COMMUNITIES'
ACTION PACK**



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Thank you for taking part in the Global Interfaith Weekend to End Child Marriage! You will be joining faith communities all over the world in making a commitment to end child marriage.

We've created this pack to provide you with information and ideas for working with your faith community during the weekend and beyond to end child marriage. Everything can be adapted to suit your community and the time you have available. We also have additional information on our [website](https://faith.childmarriagefree.world).

Every year millions of children, mostly girls, are forced to marry. It has devastating effects on the child's education, health, childhood, and future. The world's faiths are united in the belief that children are a blessing, to be nurtured and protected by their families and their communities. By raising awareness with your community to end child marriage, you will be protecting childhoods and supporting children's healthy growth and development.

Child marriage will only be eliminated in a community when enough people in that community recognise that an adult marrying a child is unacceptable. Faith leaders have a critical role in realising this ambition.

If you require further information or support, please visit <https://faith.childmarriagefree.world> or email us: faith@childmarriagefree.world

Thank you again for taking part in this vital weekend.

faith.childmarriagefree.world

About child marriage

In this pack we've focused on the impacts of child marriage. More information about child marriage is available on our [website](#). For in-depth information, including where it happens, its root causes, and a global database of national child marriage laws, you can visit the [Child Marriage Free World website](#).

Child marriage is a formal or an informal union where one or both people are under the age of 18.

Child marriage is much more likely to happen to girls than to boys. An estimated 640 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday, compared to 115 million men.

Worldwide, one in five young women were married as children, many aged 12, 13 and 14.

What are the impacts of child marriage?

Child marriage denies girls many of their basic human rights, and it puts their health, education, and wellbeing at risk.

- If girls who are married used to be in school, child marriage usually ends their formal education. Not going to school limits girls' ability to understand their rights or to learn about the law and stops the development of their learning and skills.
- When a girl enters a marriage, she usually ends up taking on many hours of household chores for her husband and his family. This means child marriage forces many girls to become child labourers.
- Physical violence against girls by their husbands is more likely to happen. This is because of the power dynamics between a girl and a husband who is usually an adult, and likely to be much older than her.

- Child marriage also makes girls vulnerable to sexual abuse and rape. Usually, child marriages occur when a girl is below the legal age of consent for sexual relations, which would mean that a husband having sex with a wife under this age is rape. However, very few countries make sexual relations between an adult man married to a child illegal.
- When a married girl becomes pregnant, her health and her life are put at risk. Her body may not yet be developed enough to cope with pregnancy, creating a higher chance of health complications, and even death as a result of early childbirth or complications related to childbirth.
- Early childbirth also risks the health and survival of the baby.
- When girls are married and are denied their rights, especially to education, their ability to ensure their own children receive their rights is limited.

About the Global Interfaith Weekend to End Child Marriage

The first ever Global Interfaith Weekend to End Child Marriage will unite leaders of all faiths and mobilise the power of their communities to put an end to child marriage, all over the world.

All the faiths believe that children must be protected, nurtured, and provided with the special support they need to grow healthily. Child marriage puts children - predominantly girls - in the path of physical, emotional, and developmental harm. The weekend aims to be an historic moment for faith communities in every part of the world to work side by side, demonstrating a strong, united, global front to prevent any more children from enduring these harms.

The Global Interfaith Weekend was inspired by faith leaders across India uniting to end child marriage by forming the Child Marriage Free India Interfaith Network. Since its establishment in 2024, the network has mobilised tens of thousands of local faith leaders all over the country to participate in the campaign to end child marriage in India, and more than 12,000 child marriages are estimated to have been prevented as a result of campaign events to raise the awareness of the harm created by child marriage.

What will happen during the Global Interfaith Weekend?

During the weekend - 12-14 September 2025 - faith leaders all over the world will raise awareness among their community on the urgent needs to protect children, preserve the solemnity of marriage, and prevent the harms caused by child marriage. This is likely to occur during the regular weekly prayer meeting, or during a larger, dedicated event hosted by faith leaders and members of their community.

By taking part, you and your community will become part of the global safety net to prevent child marriage.

Faith positions on child marriage

It is possible that some of your community members believe that there is doctrine within your faith which may permit child marriage. You will know best how to combat this, and below we have provided some general guidance.

- All the faiths are united in the belief that children are a blessing, to be nurtured and protected by their families and their communities.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as someone who is below the age of 18. The UNCRC has been ratified by every country in the world (except the United States).
- No doctrine in any religion says that children should be married to each other, or that an adult must be married to a child.
- There is a shared belief across faiths that marriage is a serious institution which should be entered into with an understanding of the commitment it entails. Children will not have developed a full understanding of their faith, and cannot make the kind of commitment that marriage requires.
- Many of the faiths hold that marriage must be entered into with mutual consent by the bride and groom. This is not possible in a child marriage, as a child cannot give consent.
- Discrimination against girls, financial hardship, and lack of access to education and other public services are the main reasons why child marriage still happens today. Child marriage is not driven by faith.
- Although some countries may have formal personal laws which recognise traditional marriage practices, many more countries do not. This means that marriage should be governed by the laws of the state, and that a marriage should not be entered into without meeting all of the requirements of the law. National laws usually include a legal age for marriage, and a requirement of mutual consent.

Leaders of many of the faiths all over the world have also publicly stated that child marriage is a violation of the teachings of their religion, as it directly places children in the path of harm. Similarly, other faith leaders have provided clear direction that marriage cannot be undertaken by children, as they are unable to make a solemn, informed commitment under their faith.

Examples of faith positions and faith leaders against child marriage

CATHOLICISM

The Holy See has made repeated statements condemning child marriage and supporting international efforts to end poverty and ensure girls' education as means to end child marriage, as well as other breaches of children's rights.

"Poverty is also a major cause of so-called child "marriage", a harmful practice that affects mostly girls. A family struggling to provide for its members may view the marriage of their daughter as a way of securing her future and easing its own financial burden. Harmful social norms that undervalue women and girls compared to boys and men also perpetuate this practice. These same social norms, often exacerbated by poverty, also contribute to the practices of prenatal sex selection and female infanticide, which end the lives of girls at the earliest stages. It is vital to promote the recognition of the equal dignity of women and girls with men and boys, so that these acts are condemned and outlawed. It is also necessary to address external aggravating factors such as poverty through education, social protection, and ensuring adequate living wages."

From the Statement by the Holy See at the Third Committee on Rights of Children, October 2024

PROTESTANTISM

Marriage is not a sacrament in the Protestant Church, and several denominations explicitly state that marriages should be conducted according to the law of the land. In addition, some denominations and high-profile leaders within the Church have taken active positions to end child marriage.

The late **Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu** (Anglican Church) was a founder of Girls Not Brides, a global campaign to end child marriage.

“Millions of girls are married as children. This fact harms our human family and reminds us how deeply biased our world still is against mothers, sisters and daughters. We now have a moral duty to end one of humankind's most destructive traditions. Experts say it is feasible in one generation... Marrying a girl young, often to a much older man, is a sure way to inflict poverty and inequality in her community. But there is an alternative: to end this cycle is to free a girl to be safe and healthy — to let her flourish and become who she wants to be, on her own terms.”

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Financial Times, November 2016

The **Lutheran World Foundation** actively campaigns to end child marriage, and supports national members which have been part of campaigns to raise the marriage age in their countries.

The Book of Discipline of the **United Methodist Church** contains a passage explicitly condemning child marriage, and some national chapters have led campaigns to end child marriage in their countries.

The **Salvation Army** considers child marriage to be forced marriage and a form of modern slavery.

“Child labour, child sexual exploitation, the trafficking of children and child marriage are all forms of child abuse that are included in the term modern slavery. They all impact negatively on the health, education and well-being of the child. Forced marriage at any age involves both labour and sexual exploitation of a spouse unable to leave the situation.”

Salvation Army Positional Statement: Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, May 2020

ISLAM

Marriage in Islam is a solemn covenant, and one which can only be undertaken with the mutual consent of the bride and groom. Many of the prerequisites for a marriage in Islam also require both spouses to make mutual agreements in advance of the marriage taking place. This means that both spouses should have reached sufficient maturity and understanding of the commitment that marriage entails, which is not possible if one of the parties is a child.

The Islamic Relief Foundation, working with Girls Not Brides, has created a comprehensive information pack on child marriage and Islam, which is available [here](#).

Many Islamic leaders have stated their opposition to child marriage.

In 2019, a group of imams attended the First African Summit on Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriages. **The imams issued a fatwa against child marriage**, which contains the following text (informal translation):

"Marriage in Islam is based on the consent of both parties, particularly the young woman. Such consent requires the young woman to have reached the age of maturity and reason, so that her consent is validly given.

The age of 18 marks the stage at which a woman can validly express her will to marry. This guarantees that she can enjoy her fundamental rights to childhood, education, and the capacity to assume the responsibilities of marriage. Before that age, she will not have had access to those necessary rights and is not able to assume the responsibility of marriage; and God would not impose on His servants an obligation that they cannot fulfil."

Also in 2019, in **Mauritania** a group of imams participated in a radio campaign - targeting rural areas with high prevalence of child marriage and early pregnancy - stating why child marriage is haram and must not be permitted.

"Islam is a religion that honours human beings. Any action that harms an individual's physical or mental health is therefore forbidden... But some people are wedded to traditional practices and do not understand the danger of these customs."

Hademine Saleck Ely, Imam, Central Mosque of Nouakchott, Mauritania

In 2017, a group of female clerics in **Indonesia** declared a fatwa against child marriage, calling it harmful and stated that ending it was mandatory. They called on the Indonesian government to raise the legal age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18. In 2019, the Indonesian Marriage Act was amended to raise the legal age of marriage to 19 for women, in line with the existing legal age of marriage for men.

HINDUISM

Hinduism is practised predominantly in India and Nepal, and both countries have had strict laws against child marriage for decades, with minimum ages set at 18 for women and 21 for men in India, and 20 for both women and men in Nepal. Even though there are personal laws in India, whereby religious doctrine may be used to determine some aspects of life, there are no exceptions to the law on child marriage. In Nepal, there are no personal laws.

Faith leaders in both India and Nepal have been active in their work to end child marriage.

- In **Nepal**, religious leaders worked with the government and other stakeholders to draft the national strategy to end child marriage. UNFPA has also supported programmes which engage with religious leaders to help them combat child marriage in their communities.
- In **India**, the Child Marriage Free India campaign convenes a national interfaith forum to end child marriage. The forum involves representatives from all of India's major faiths, including a number of denominations of Hinduism. In 2025, the interfaith network ran a campaign during Akshaya Tritiya, a festive period which marks an auspicious time for marriage, and during which many marriages including illegal child marriages take place. More than 45,000 leaders from 20 faiths took part in the campaign, with almost 6,000 events taking place all over India.

Joining the Global Interfaith Weekend

Leaders of all faiths are welcome to participate in the weekend. We also welcome faith communities of all sizes. For example, if you have a regional or national role within your faith, please feel free to invite other faith leaders in your network to take part!

In addition, if you already represent your community as a member of an existing interfaith network, you could encourage leaders from other faiths to join you in hosting their own events in their communities during the weekend.

What do I have to do for my event to be part of the Global Interfaith Weekend?

You need to let us know where and when the event is taking place and how many people are likely to take part. You can do that through the website [here](#) or by emailing faith@childmarriagefree.world

You can register before or after your event takes place. If you register in advance, we'll send you a link to upload your photo and/or video content.

Raising awareness of the damage caused by child marriage
During your event, it's important to raise awareness about child marriage and the harmful impact it has on children's lives. We have provided some information in this pack and [on our website](#), and created a [sample flyer](#) you can use, but you are welcome to adapt this and use other materials you create yourself.

You could use some of the information on the website or in the leaflet, giving the reasons why the community should end child marriage. You can also distribute materials within your community which explain why child marriage should end, to encourage more people to support the call to eliminate child marriage.

What does the event look like?

We suggest the core areas for your event should include:

- **Explanation:** Welcoming everyone to the event and an explanation of why you are talking about child marriage, what child marriage is, and how damaging it can be for the children involved.
- **Doctrine and leadership support:** guidance from your faith and any statements you have from leaders in your faith about why they are opposed to child marriage.
- **Consider asking your community to take a pledge:** making a communal pledge can be an important moment to demonstrate the scale of support for ending child marriage where you live. It can also be a transformational experience for the children and adults who take part – making a public pledge, particularly among your faith community, is significant and is likely to mean people will stick to it. Participants can also draw strength from the commitment of others. We've created a pledge to end child marriage (see below), and you are welcome to adapt parts of this if you wish.
- **When taking the pledge:** share the pledge with those present. One good way to do this is to have it written on some large pieces of paper beforehand. Read it out loud for everyone beforehand and ask them to think for a couple of minutes if they are ready to take the pledge. Either individually or in groups recite the pledge for children followed by the pledge for adults. Ask everyone to put their hand straight up in the air while they are taking the pledge!
- **Event Close:** Closing remarks that thank everyone for taking part and share the vision that one day the community and the world will be child marriage free. If everyone gives their permission, you can take some photos or videos during the event.

If the event has gone well and you want to do more you can invite people to a follow up meeting to discuss the issue and consider other actions.

The pledge to end child marriage

All faiths are united in the belief that children are a blessing, to be nurtured and protected by their families and their communities.

I will not stay silent. I pledge to do all I can to end child marriage in my country and the world.

For children to recite:

I will:

- Complete school as I have the right to education
- Decide for myself as an adult who I marry
- Protect other children by safely reporting child marriages.

For adults to recite:

I will:

- Report anyone who marries a child
- Protect all children from adults who want to marry them
- Make my community child marriage free.

Please note: faith leaders are welcome to adapt the pledge in line with the needs of their community. However, the line in bold must stay the same for it to count as part of the global pledge.



Preparing to take photos and videos

It's really important to make a visual record of your day, as this will help demonstrate how important ending child marriage is to you and your faith community after the event. However, it is just as important to make sure you have the permission of everyone – especially any children - featured in the photos and videos, so that you are able to post them online.

- If children will be at your event, you can ask their parents to sign a document which you prepare in advance and states that the people signed below give permission for their child's image to be used on social media and websites to promote the campaign. You only need one document, and everyone can sign it.
- If you cannot get signatures, you can specifically ask parents at the start of the event if they give permission verbally for their children to be in the photos and videos.
- If anyone does not give permission, you must ensure they are not included.
- If the event is for adults only, you can let everyone know at the start of the event that photos and videos will be taken which will be shared publicly. If anyone does not want to be in these photos or videos, they can let you know and you must ensure they are not included.

Once you know you have permission to share your photos and videos, you can share them with us at faith@childmarriagefree.world as well as post on your social media profiles. You can also ask other participants to share them on their profiles too.

Other ways to support the campaign

Faith Leaders' Pledge to End Child Marriage

As well as organising an event during the Global Interfaith Weekend, all faith leaders are invited to take the Faith Leaders' Pledge to End Child Marriage.

Faith leaders play a significant role in their communities, not only by providing guidance and support, but also by presiding over significant moments in the lives of their community members - including marriage. We have created a dedicated pledge in recognition of this important role. In addition, we believe that the faith leaders' pledge will act as a powerful demonstration of the strength of feeling against child marriage, across many different faiths. Faith leaders can [take the pledge on our website](#) and the full text of the pledge is on the next page.

Child Marriage Free Community

It is possible to end child marriage, community by community, by commitments and actions taken by members of those communities. Laws and policies will only work if communities themselves work to eradicate child marriage. If you have enough support from within your community, you can also invite other community leaders to agree that child marriage should be eliminated, and create a joint agreement to declare that the local community will become 'child marriage free'.

A Child Marriage Free Community declaration is a statement of intent by senior community leaders including faith leaders, and it is realised if there have been no child marriages in the community a year after the declaration. In India, thousands of communities have already pledged to become Child Marriage Free Communities, with the support of faith leaders across the country. They aim to declare entire districts – comprised of many local communities – free of child marriage.

If you do decide to work towards being a child marriage free community please email faith@childmarriagefree.world and we will send you details of our pilot scheme and Child Marriage Free Community pack.

Faith leaders' pledge to end child marriage

Marriage is a solemn covenant which can only be undertaken by those with the maturity to understand the contract of marriage and the commitment it entails. Marriage must only take place between adults.

Children cannot understand this commitment and they cannot provide their full consent. Any marriage involving a child is disrespectful to the solemnity of marriage.

Our faiths are united in the belief that children are a blessing, to be nurtured and protected by their families and their communities. Child marriage is in direct opposition to this, as it places a child in the path of harm. Child marriage stops a child's education, enables child sexual abuse, and can cause their premature death as a result of early pregnancy and childbirth.

It is time to eliminate child marriage.

As leaders of different religions, we pledge to do all we can to end child marriage in our communities and the world. Together, we commit that:

- We will not officiate or solemnise any marriage of a child
- We will not give permission for any child to marry
- We will raise awareness in our places of worship that child marriage is a harmful violation of the rights of our children, and that neither a betrothal nor a marriage of children can be practised in our communities.

Considerations for working with your community during the Global Interfaith Weekend

Child marriage happens all over the world, across different cultures and faiths, and some of your community members may already hold some beliefs about child marriage, or have had some experience of child marriage. With this in mind, below are some ideas to help you to prepare for your event in advance.

Let the community know in advance about your event and your participation

Once you have registered your participation in the weekend, it's a good idea to let your community know in advance that you will be taking part. This gives community members time to ask you questions or mention any sensitivities they may have. For example, if a member of your community has personal experience of child marriage, this may have been traumatic, and they may want to talk to you about this privately. Letting your community know in advance also means that anyone who is interested in speaking about the issue during your event can be included in your forward planning.

Using the appropriate forum for your event

For many faith leaders, dedicating the weekly worship meeting during the weekend to the subject of child marriage will be the most appropriate way to raise awareness within the community. The weekly meeting can also be an excellent way for members to show their commitment to ending child marriage, for example by taking a shared pledge to end child marriage at the end of the meeting.

For other communities, it may be more productive to have an informal meeting during the weekend, during which members of the community can ask questions and discuss the issue in an interactive way. This may work well if your faith community has a youth group, for example.

If you are a faith leader working in a faith-based school, you may want to dedicate a lesson period or a full-school assembly to the issue. The organisers of the Global Interfaith Weekend, Child Marriage Free World, have developed dedicated resources for schools which can be [downloaded for free here](#).

If your community is already committed to ending child marriage, you may want to hold a larger, public event to engage the broader community in which you are based, or to ask your local decision-makers to make a commitment to end child marriage. Child Marriage Free World has also developed materials for organisers who wish to hold a public event, which can be [downloaded for free here](#).



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