



**SPEAK AND CHANGE**

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**Press Release**

**It's time South Asian governments take the concrete steps necessary to eliminate  
child marriage in the region: Zia Awan**

**Government should make commitment to end child marriage by  
2020 in Pakistan: Zia Ahmed Awan**

**Founder of Madadgaar shares 12- point Call for Action announced at Kathmandu to  
end child marriage in South Asia**

Karachi (Press Release) Founder of Madadgaar National Helpline Zia Ahmed Awan Advocate said that federal and provincial governments should strive utmost to nip the evil of child marriage in the bud from Pakistan. He was addressing a press conference organized at Madadgaar National Helpline office to highlight details of Kathmandu Call for Action. Organized by the SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat and the Center for Reproductive Rights and hosted by the Government of Nepal, a one and half day Regional Convening on Using Law to Promote Accountability to End Child Marriage was held from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2014 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Convening unanimously endorsed a Kathmandu Call for Action to end Child Marriage in South Asia.

Sharing the details of the convening, Mr. Awan told that Officials from the member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) adopted 12-point call for action, particularly focusing on how the lack of government accountability is leading to these human rights violations against young women. The call for the urgent actions to be taken by governments in South Asia is as under:

1. Formally recognize and denounce child marriage as a human rights violation that governments in the region are obligated to monitor, prevent, punish and address through legal remedies and administrative measures.
2. Review and harmonize national laws and policies relating to child marriage in line with constitutional guarantees of fundamental rights, commitments made in SAARC instruments and state obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights under international law and comply with reporting requirements and implement recommendations.
3. Eliminate discriminatory provisions concerning marriage in all laws, including personal laws by establishing a uniform minimum legal age of marriage of 18, clarify the legal status of child marriages within a specific time frame, creating safeguards to ensure the full and informed consent of parties to a marriage, removing burdensome requirements for ending a child marriage and amending specific provisions to ensure equal rights within marriage regardless of religious background.



Madadgaar National Helpline, 201-204, 2nd Floor, Panorma Center-1, Zaibunnisa St., Saddar, Karachi, Pakistan. Ph: 1098, 92-21-35685824 Fax: 92-21-35684926  
Lahore Office :92-42- 36366771-4, 1098 Peshawar Office: 92-91-5274548, 5284748 , 1098 Quetta Office: 92-81-2869130-2, 1098

[www.madadgaar.org](http://www.madadgaar.org) | [madadgaar@cyber.net.pk](mailto:madadgaar@cyber.net.pk)

4. Ensure access to legal remedies for girls whose rights are violated as a result of child marriage by introducing appropriate laws, raising legal awareness, providing legal counseling and legal aid and enforcing penalties for violations of the law.
5. Harmonize child marriage prevention and prohibition laws with laws that protect against all forms of violence including sexual violence, require birth and marriage registration, determine property rights and ensure equal citizenship rights and other relevant laws.
6. Introduce legal reform recognizing marital rape as a punishable offense without establishing an age limit for its recognition as a crime and prescribing a lesser punishment.
7. Strengthen the enforcement of national laws prohibiting child marriage, specifically by ensuring that local government officials have the authority and capacity to execute their responsibilities to prevent child marriages in local communities.
8. Ensure that girls who are married under 18 years, or have left a child marriage, have access to various forms of institutional support including psycho-social counseling, protection mechanisms including toll free help lines and opportunities for economic empowerment.
9. Ensure access to a full range of sexual and reproductive health information and services for girls and boys to inform them about the risks of early marriage and ensure immediate access to such information and services to married girls as a means to protect them against the risks and consequences of early pregnancy.
10. Support efforts by national human rights institutions to promote accountability for violations resulting from child marriage and ensure compliance with international norms and concluding observations issued by U.N. treaty monitoring bodies.
11. Support the inclusion of a specific target to eliminate child marriage under the goal on gender equality in the post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.
12. Ensure the effective implementation of the Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage in the South Asia by allocating adequate resources for its successful implementation in 2015-2018.

Zia Awan said that too many young girls in South Asia are forced into marriage and robbed of their childhood. Governments in the region have been complicit in violating the fundamental rights of young girls by failing to effectively prohibit and punish child marriages. It's time South Asian governments take the concrete steps necessary to eliminate child marriage in the region through law reform and enforcement. He appreciated the Sindh government for implementation of Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013. The Act bars the marriage of girls and boys before the age of 18. Males above the age of 18 contracting in child marriage and perpetrators involved in solemnizing shall be imprisoned no less than 2 years and may be extended to 3 years. He urged other three provinces to introduce such laws to curb the menace. He also demanded federal government to approve Madadgaar helpline number 1098 as toll-free number to extend helpline outreach to victim of child marriage. He demanded the government to make a commitment to end child Marriage in Pakistan by 2020 as government of Nepal made.

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