



South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children [SAIEVAC]
SAARC Apex Body

In Solidarity with the Children of SAARC

SAIEVAC Statement

for Ending all forms of Violence Against Children on
'INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD'

Kathmandu (Nepal), 11 October, 2014

On the International Day of the Girl Child, SAIEVAC (South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children) join hands with the UN and all other organizations and advocates in the region and globally to promote the theme **"Empowering Adolescent Girls: Ending the Cycle of Violence"**. Empowering girls is now a commonly held fact and an irrefutable strategy to end the cycle of violence and as the Apex Body of SAARC for children; it is our privilege to call on all our Governments and people of SAARC to rededicate ourselves to the cause.

South Asia has many harmful practices that affect children based on tradition, culture, religion and superstition. These barriers ingrained in the very fabric of South Asian society pose serious consequences to the girl child. They face neglect, discrimination and violence as a result of the patriarchal attitude and the notions of impunity and masculinity.

Many girls in South Asia suffer from violations of their most basic human rights: to be free from neglect, discrimination, violence, to get access to schooling, to inherit properties, to make decisions to marry or not. For example, early marriage is the most prevalent harmful practice in South Asia. More than half of the World's child brides are in this region.

According to UNICEF reports, almost half or 46 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 with 1 out of every 5 adolescent girls married or are forced into a marital union in South Asia. Early marriages have lasting and devastating impacts on the health, development and wellbeing of adolescent girls, compromising their right to take part in informed decision making. Although marriages of underage boys do take place, but those most likely to experience early/forced marriage are again the girls.

Furthermore, UNICEF data indicates that 29 percent of adolescent girls (15-19 years) are currently married or in union. This is a great challenge. National statistics on child marriage also show that the percentages of young women within the age group of 20-24 years are married before 18 years. It is 43 percent in Afghanistan, 64 percent in Bangladesh, 47 percent in India, 51 percent in Nepal, 24 percent in Pakistan and 12 percent in Sri Lanka. This is indeed a cause for serious concern to SAIEVAC. This grim situation is further exacerbated by the fact that minimum age of marriage is not uniform in the region. SAIEVAC has been mandated to ensure/promote a uniform minimum age of marriage to 18 years, for both boys and girls in accordance with the CRC, which is fortunately ratified by all SAARC member states.

There is an unrecoverable loss of a girl's childhood due to the ills of child marriage. First of all, she becomes a school dropout, and then she becomes a "child-mother" victim, exposed to unwanted and unplanned pregnancies which pose life threatening reproductive health risks and diseases. As a "child-mother", she not only loses her childhood but also becomes a subject of sexual exploitation, domestic violence and unbearable psychological torture.

Early marriage too has a very complex association with Trafficking of girls. The social acceptance of the parents to often send off their daughters to the first proposer without understanding the age, character and motives is a common practice. This makes the girl child susceptible to the evil motives of traffickers, who even conduct fake marriages and issues fake certificates as a way to procuring young girls within the backdrop of a region where both birth and marriage registrations are still not mandatory.

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Similarly, sexual abuse and exploitation of children continues to be a hidden problem and is rampant in South Asia. Girls, in large number are the victims of this heinous crime. There are evidences that over 50 percent of all sexual assaults are committed against girls under 15 years. Sadly, they are the victim in their own family, in our education institutions, on the streets and in our institutional care settings. In the name of 'family honor' and the honor of the girl herself, incidences of violations are rarely reported to the law enforcement agencies. Lack of proper laws and policies and ineffective implementation make the girl child more vulnerable. In this way, the girl child is further victimized by the system lethargy and apathy of the society. It is important to understand that the girl child is the victim and it is not her fault.

As recommended by our 3rd Technical Consultation on Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children in South Asia based on Tradition, Culture, Religion and Superstition held in 2013, SAIEVAC is well underway in the documentation of a regional positive caring practices for children in order to build on/contribute towards addressing harmful practices including inter-generational dimensions as a priority in collaboration with our national mechanisms, NACG agencies, SACG and Children's Forum. In this way, our approach to empowering girls will be an effort to address both positive as well as negative practices through our strategic interventions, which are built upon the three pillars of legal reform, awareness creation through public information and education and child participation.

In tandem, SAIEVAC is committed to the philosophy and principles envisioned in the various international and regional human rights treaties. We draw our inspiration and vision from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children and the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution.

On this International Day of the Girl Child, SAIEVAC would like to express our solidarity with the United Nations, its agencies working for children, INGOs and the Civil Society to leave no stones unturned to inform, educate and empower the girl child to end the vicious cycle of violence. We request all SAARC Member States, the influentials and citizens alike, including children, women and men to pledge to protect our children, particularly the girl child from all forms of violence.

Finally, we request our partners; respective National Mechanisms, National Action and Coordinating Group for ending Violence Against Children (NACG), South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children (SACG) and all the other partners to take necessary steps to end all forms of violence against children by strengthening child protection systems and services across the region. This can be done by helping us to addresses problems and issues related to our five key thematic areas of child marriage, corporal punishment, child labor, sexual abuse and exploitation of children and child trafficking.

On this Day, SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat renews our commitment to end the cycle of violence against the girl child "In Solidarity with the Children of SAARC".



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