

Response to Change.org's 'Stop Dehumanisation of Nigerian Girl Child' campaign

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Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) is an issue that I take very seriously. At the 58th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting my Department was instrumental in ensuring agreement on ending harmful practices, including on CEFM. The CSW Agreed Conclusions also included a call for a dedicated goal on gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment and the human rights of girls and women; ending all forms of violence against women and girls; economic empowerment; leadership and participation in decision making; as well as ending harmful practice, including Child, Early and Forced Marriage, and Female Genital Mutilation.

We are building a strong coalition with others to ensure that gender equality features prominently in the framework that is eventually agreed by member states of the United Nations. The voices of people living in poverty, including girls and women, must be at the heart of the debate.

We are also looking to build momentum toward this year's Girl Summit to be held in July which will focus on ending CEFM and female genital mutilation. I will be galvanising support among civil society and business leaders in advance of this event.

Nigeria, particularly northern Nigeria, has some of the highest rates of early marriage in the world but tackling CEFM is highly controversial as it is a highly sensitive issue politically and that it is such a widely accepted practice in many communities. Our development investment in Nigeria includes programmes that are contributing to tackling Violence Against Women and Girls and, more specifically, raising awareness of the extent of CEFM and of its multiple impacts on girls and women.

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