



United Nations Mission
in South Sudan

11 October 2012

**EMBARGO: The following press release is embargoed until 10 October
Midnight 24:00pm EAT (+3GMT)**

PRESS RELEASE

International Day of the Girl Child 2012: "My right, My Life, End Child Marriage"

United Nations calls to end child marriage in South Sudan

Juba, 11 October 2012 – On the International Day of the Girl Child 2012, commemorated for the first time, the UN calls on families, communities and governments at all levels to end child marriage in South Sudan. The day focuses attention on the need to address the challenges girls face and to promote empowerment and the fulfillment of their human rights.

"The UN family is committed to protecting the rights of every South Sudanese girl," said Ms. Hilde F. Johnson, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to South Sudan, "Violence against girls must be stopped and everything done to promote their access to education so they can play a leading role in the development of their nation, South Sudan."

In South Sudan, child marriage continues to affect thousands of girls undermining their development prospects and participation in education and other developmental activities. The 2010 Sudan Household Health Survey (SHHS) indicates about 40% of girls are married when they are still children.

"Child marriage robs young girls of their childhood and chance of going to school. If you value her, educate her. Let's all work together to end early marriage today" said Pelucy Ntambirweki, Officer-in-charge, UNICEF South Sudan.

Globally, more than one in three young women aged 20-24 years were first married before they reached age 18. One third of them entered into child marriage before they turned 15.

Mary, 17 from Lakes state says her decision to not get married was simple, "early marriage is not good. When you marry earlier, you cannot complete your school. I've seen some friends and family members who married young and some of them have resulted in early and unwanted pregnancies, posing life-threatening risks for them".

Izeduwa Derex-Briggs UN Women Country Representative, South Sudan added "The girl child in South Sudan is often impeded from achieving her full potential and denied her rights largely due to early and forced child marriage, and daily exposition to violence and abuse. These practices are not only unlawful by virtue of the Child Act 2008, but also prevent girls from receiving an appropriate education to improving their lives and those of their families and ultimately rebuilding the nation".

Preventing child marriage will protect girls' rights and help reduce their risks of violence, early pregnancy, HIV infection, and maternal death and disability. When girls are able to stay in school and avoid being married early, they can build a foundation for a better life for themselves and their families and participate in the progress of their nations.

UNFPA Representative in South Sudan, Mr. Barnabas Yisa, called on all to join the cause "It is time for policy makers, parliamentarians, communities, families and young people to address this issue head on. Let's deliver a South Sudan where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. Let girls be girls".

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, UN agencies including UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women is working on a range of activities to commemorate the day and create awareness among the general public on the need to prevent and end child marriage in South Sudan.

Planned national activities include broadcast of radio materials and special debates on TV and radio with key stakeholders from the government and partners.

In addition to the activities in Juba, Lakes state will organize discussions with youth groups, women groups and advocacy with faith based organizations to prevent child marriage.

— * —

For further information contact:

Siddartha Shresthal, UNICEF, Chief of Strategic Communication
sidshrestha@unicef.org (m) +211 912 177 592

Kouider Zerrouk, UNMISS A/Spokesperson zerrouk@un.org (m) +211 912 39 65 39