

Press Statement: Do Not Use Islam to Justify Child Marriage

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Sisters in Islam (SIS) upholds that there can be no acceptable circumstance which can allow child marriage to take place in our country today, given our ambitions for comprehensive and inclusive socio-economic progress and modernity. It is therefore imperative that the government is seen to lead a cultural and social mind shift in order to ensure complete eradication of child marriage.

Islam was revealed to us as salvation and liberation from oppression, and the spirit of how the religion captivated its followers in the past through benevolence and justice should be the cornerstone of how we depict and practice Islam today. The use of Aisha's age in order to justify child marriage and the refusal of certain parties to accept that a total ban in child marriage is the way forward demonstrates how Muslim women are legally expected to live within standards that can be continuously exploited in the name of Islam.

For as long as the government refuses to take quick strong actions on moral issues such as child marriage, there will be people who will continue to suffer as a consequence. It is unfortunate to point out that their suffering is not something new. In our latest publication, "Child Marriage: Its Relationship with Religion, Culture and Patriarchy, a National Report on Malaysia," written in collaboration with Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), we found that based on the 2010 Population and Housing Census, nearly 153,000 persons below the age of 19 were married in Malaysia and were mostly from the Malay Muslim community.

Of this, 80,000 were girls and the remaining were boys. It is also important to point out that while in many parts of the world, poverty is the perpetuating factor for child marriage, religious conservatism, patriarchal beliefs, and reasons of sexual impropriety were the main drivers of child marriage in Malaysia.

A recent joint report by UNICEF and Al-Azhar University in Egypt declared that "child marriage is no more than a custom; it is not part of Sharia or worship and it leads without doubt to significant adverse effects. Therefore, the preferred age of marriage is after the age of 18 years. Marriage is a religious and social responsibility that demands the ability and willingness of both husband and wife to bear its responsibilities, so it is not right to apply this burden to children." It also needs to be noted that many Muslim majority countries that have raised the minimum age of marriage including Algeria (19 for both men and women), Bangladesh (18 for women and 21 for men), Morocco (18 for both men and women) and Turkey (which raised the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18 for women).

As the recent child marriage case in Kelantan is also a polygamous one [\[1\]](#), the conditions of the men's wives must seriously be taken into consideration alongside legal requirements and permissions to take on more wives. This includes his ability to responsibly provide for all his wives and families equally and fairly.

In order to prevent such incidents from perpetuating in Malaysia, child marriage must immediately be banned in the country for all children, Muslim and non-Muslim, with absolutely no exceptions.

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<http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.1543.41>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article45199>