



Statement from The Elders

Delivered by Mabel Van Oranje, CEO

Brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007 and chaired by Archbishop Tutu, The Elders is an independent group of global leaders who offer their collective influence and experience to support peace building, help address major causes of human suffering, and promote the shared interests of humanity.

The Elders are pleased to contribute to the objectives of the Global Partnership for Education by committing to work to end child marriage.

Child marriage is a harmful traditional practice that affects 10 million young girls every year. It is not only a violation of human rights, but also directly hinders the achievement of six of the eight Millennium Development Goals.

I remember meeting a girl in Ethiopia who married at the age of 15. When asked about her wedding day, she shyly replied: 'It was the day I left school.'

Let me be clear. We will not achieve universal education when every year some 10 million girls are pulled out of school to get married – too many of them as young as 9 or 12 years old. Many parents don't even send their girls to school because they intend to marry them off before they complete their education.

[Child marriage has long been hidden and unspoken. Perhaps there has been reluctance to take on a practice that is so bound up in family traditions and cultural practices. But The Elders know that traditions are man-made, and therefore they can change.]

The Elders support the efforts of the Global Partnership for Education by committing to work to end child marriage and by creating *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*.

This partnership will bring together civil society organisations working to end child marriage. It will enable them to raise awareness of the harmful impact of child marriage; to learn from each other; and to mobilise all necessary policy, financial and other support to end child marriage.

Universal education for girls cannot be achieved if the traditional practices and social norms that perpetuate poverty are not challenged. The Elders hope to contribute to this effort with their work to end child marriage.