
30 January 2020

Senator Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Women
PO Box 1420
PARRAMATTA NSW 2150

Dear Senator Payne

On behalf of Zonta International members across Australia, we urge you and the Australian government to develop a national strategy to eradicate child marriage and forced marriage.

For more than 100 years Zonta International, a global human rights organisation dedicated to empowering women worldwide through service and advocacy, has championed that women's rights are human rights and no woman should live in fear of violence. Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive human rights violations and a global epidemic. It threatens countries, inhibits economic progress, and prevents women from contributing to their community and from creating better lives for themselves and their families.

Throughout the world, almost 650 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday and an estimated 280 million more girls are at risk of becoming brides. If current trends continue, the number of girls and women married as children will reach nearly 1 billion by 2030. In 2018 Zonta International committed US\$2 million to support the UNICEF/UNFPA Global Programme to End Child Marriage in 12 countries. We acknowledge this will be a long-term project but is vital to ensuring women's empowerment and safety.

No one community is immune to the practice of child marriage – it is not limited by culture, religion or socio-economic status. Here in Australia organisations such as My Blue Sky (<https://mybluesky.org.au/>), Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand and the Australian Federal Police are working to eliminate this practice and help victims.

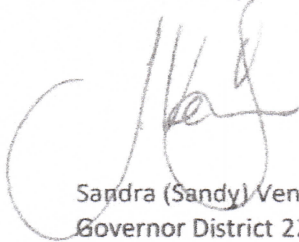
In addition, Zonta members from across Australia are working within their communities to raise awareness to this pervasive issue through various campaigns, particularly during the 16 days of Activism against Domestic Violence in November and December each year.

In the two years from January 2017 more than 170 cases of forced child marriage were investigated by the AFP. It is imperative that this good work continues and Australia's robust laws against forced marriage are rigorously enforced.

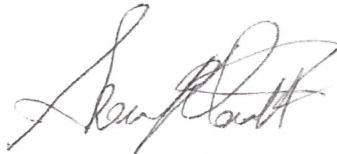
We encourage the federal government to pledge support for our campaign and its broad reach by developing a national strategy against forced marriage which ensures appropriate resources and support are available for organisations at the front-line, communities and victims.

Thank you for your support

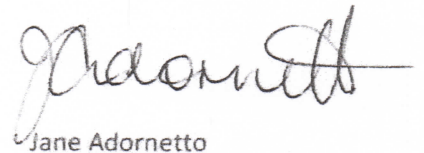
Yours faithfully



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Senator Richard Collbeck
Minister for Youth and Sport, Aged Care and Senior Australians

Mr Greg Hunt, MP
Minister for Health

Mr Peter Dutton, MP
Minister for Home Affairs

Mr Daniel Tehan, MP
Minister for Education

Senator Anne Ruston
Minister for Families and Social Services

Mr Jason Wood, MP
Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs

Ms Michelle Landry, MP
Assistant Minister for Children and Families – Michelle Landry