



# FORCED CHILD MARRIAGE IN BURKINA FASO

## MEET MARIA

At 13 years old, Maria has never been to school. Her father forced her to marry a 70 year old man who already had five other wives. He threatened her by saying “If you don’t go to join your husband I will kill you.” Her four sisters and six cousins have also been subjected to forced marriage.

After being married off to the 70 year old man, Maria spent three days with her five co-wives at the man’s house before fleeing. She walked 169 kms over three days to get to a shelter for young girls escaping early and forced marriage.

When her father learnt that she had fled, he asked her to go back to her husband’s house. He even threatened to attack the priest who was accused of helping her escape.

Maria’s escape was seen as potentially threatening social harmony in the village. Maria cried and wept before finally deciding to leave the shelter to return to her family for the sake of peace in her village.

Upon her return, Maria was beaten by her father. A few weeks later, he forcibly sent her back to the imposed 70 year old husband. She again, fled the house of her husband on foot and sought refuge at the nearest police station where she filed a complaint against her father.

The police chief threatened to press charges against Maria’s father if he married off another girl. The father agreed to sign a written commitment that he would not force Maria or any other girls into marriage before he was allowed to take Maria back home. She is currently living with her family. She hopes to be able to attend school some day in the future.

Thousands of girls across Burkina Faso are subjected to early and forced marriage. The majority of the girls are married off as early as 11 – 12 years old so that their parents can benefit from the dowry. Girls who are forced to marry by their family are rarely sent to school and have little or no education.

Once married, the girls are expected to do the large majority of household chores such as cleaning, hauling water and cooking as well as working on the farm. It is also expected that they should bear many children and the task of raising these children, whilst they themselves are still children falls on them. The decision on if and when to have children and how many children to have, as well as the use or not of contraception is almost always made by the husband.

Forced and early marriage is particularly prevalent in the Sahel region in Burkina Faso. The Sahel region has very high rates of poverty, weak institutions, a lack of basic services.

However, despite incredible family and societal pressure, many girls have refused such forced marriages and have overcome huge obstacles in order to escape. Amnesty International visited and interviewed some of these girls in five shelters. One shelter has in the last two years, given refuge to 60 girls. It’s at this shelter that our researchers met Maria (not her real name) who shared her story.



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## TAKE ACTION

### TARGET DETAILS:

President Roch Marc Christian

**Salutation:**  
Your Excellency

**Address:**  
President Roch Marc Christian  
C/O  
Kabore Embassy of Burkina Faso  
16 Place Guy d'Arezzo  
Brussels B-1180

**Twitter account:**  
@rochkaborepf

**Facebook Page:**  
<https://goo.gl/Jqr5J5>

### LETTER WRITING

Please write to the President of Burkina Faso, via the Brussels Embassy. Draft your own letter using the key messages below, or use our template overleaf.

### KEY MESSAGES

- Two years ago, the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and Civic Promotion made a commitment to eradicate early and forced marriages in Burkina Faso. Two years later nothing has happened. Please remind the Ministry of Justice that a "promise is a debt"
- More than half the girls in Burkina Faso are married before the age of 18 and 10% are married before the age 15. The Ministry of Justice must keep its promise to end this early and forced marriages

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Suggested messages:

More than half of all girls in Burkina Faso will be married before they're 18. @rochkaborepf you have the power to end this.

.@rochkaborepf More than half the young girls in your country will be forced into marriage and giving up their education. What are you doing to stop this?

Girls in Burkina Faso want their childhood back. @rochkaborepf that a promise is a debt and your government @rochkaborepf must stop early and forced marriages

# TEMPLATE LETTER

This letter is also available as a word document (editable) at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/forced-early-marriage-burkina-faso-template-letter>

Your Excellency,

I am deeply concerned about the risks faced by girls in relation to their human rights and sexual and reproductive rights in Burkina Faso as a result of early and forced marriage.

Early and forced marriage is a serious human rights violation. In Burkina Faso, one in three girls is married off before the age of 18. Many of these girls are having to run away from their homes and those of their designated husbands to escape early and forced marriage.

Early and forced marriage has a range of human rights impacts, including early pregnancy and pregnancy complications, to the detriment of young girls and women's health and lives. It also hinders their right to education.

Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Burkina Faso's Constitution, women and girls are entitled to the same human rights as men and boys. But in practice, they are discriminated against and denied their rights. They are frequently denied their right to decide if and when they marry, and to whom they get married, and whether to have children and if so when and how many.

This situation must be urgently addressed.

In November 2015, Burkina Faso finalized a National Strategy to End Child Marriage by 2025 and the Ministry of Justice promised to eradicate early and force marriage and revise the penal code in a press release.

Five years after this positive step and commitment, there have been no concrete actions towards ending early and forced marriage. As a result, many girls continue to be married before the age of 18 and without their consent.

It is a matter of urgency for thousands of girls that the Code of Persons and Family is amended to set 18 years as the minimum age of marriage, including for traditional and religious marriages, for boys and girls.

It also of the utmost importance that the Penal Code is amended to ensure that forced marriage is clearly defined.

I call on you to ensure that the National Strategy to End Child Marriage by 2025 is fully implemented.

I urge you to ensure that the Burkina Faso complies with its international legal obligations and re-commit to end early and forced marriage.

I also urge you to publicly declare a zero tolerance towards early and forced marriages and to conduct a nationwide campaign in communities, schools and health centres, providing information about the laws on forced and early marriage, raising awareness about the negative impact on girls' human rights, as well as disseminating information about how to access support services if girls find themselves at risk.

Yours sincerely

