

YOUNG **HUMAN RIGHTS** **REPORTER** **OF THE YEAR**

Rings That Bind Us

Anna-Beth Brogan, Oxford High School for Girls, Oxford

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The bride walks down the aisle towards the man she loves, tears of happiness sparkle on her glowing cheeks; it is the happiest day of her life. The bride walks down the aisle towards a man she's never seen before, tears of sadness stream down her innocent yet devastated face; it is the worst day of her life. Which bride would you rather be?

Sadly there are many brides who are forced into marriage. Forced marriages are a very big issue, an issue that violates human rights. Every three seconds a girl's human rights are replaced with a ring - a ring which changes their lives forever. Girls as young as five, who don't even know what marriage is are dragged down the aisle.

Imagine being forced to marry a man you don't love, know or want to marry; this is the reality for some girls and it is brought to them by the people who should love them most, their parents. Forced marriage happens when one of the spouses does not want to marry the other, it can often be confused with arranged marriage but they are not the same thing - Arranged marriage is when the bride or groom can choose not to marry the spouse presented to them by their parents.

Sometimes, the husband abuses the girl after they are married, hurting and raping her; but sometimes he is in the same position as her, feeling betrayed by her own family. Not only does forced and child marriage bring misery to the

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people involved but it also can endanger their children, who may end up having the same fate as their mother. Young Indian girls, barely adults, who have been living happily in Britain for their whole lives are suddenly dragged back to India for their wedding.

I believe that nobody should have to be taken away from their country or have to marry against their will but every day girls are forced to do just that. The girls are made to feel guilty so that they agree into marrying; they are even sometimes physically abused until they agree. Why can't these parents see what they are doing to their children?

Recently, a law has been passed that any parents forcing their children to marry will be sent to jail, our Prime Minister David Cameron says, "forced marriage is abhorrent and little more than slavery. To force anyone into marriage against their will is simply wrong and that is why we have taken decisive action to make it illegal." Despite this new law, so many cases go unnoticed because the victims lack the means or confidence to speak out and tell us what's happening to them.

On December 10th 1948, the United Nations vowed that slavery would never happen again, but isn't this slavery? Isn't every ring on the finger of a girl forced into marriage a link in the chains of misery? We've stopped slavery once, why can't we stop it again? Fight against forced marriage!