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# Amnesty International

## MONTHLY ACTION

ACTIVISM TEAM, Amnesty International UK  
HRAC, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA



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March 2016

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## My Body My Rights/ Individuals at Risk

### Stand in solidarity with girl survivors of forced marriage in Burkina Faso

#### Early and forced marriage

In Burkina Faso, whether you're a woman or a girl, you are prevented from making crucial decisions that belong to you. Decisions like whether or when to get married, whom to marry, and whether or when to get pregnant. Early marriage is common and most girls are married by the age of 19 (some as young as 10). The age difference between a girl and her future spouse can be enormous. In some cases the bride is 30 to 50 years younger than her partner.

Physical and sexual violence against women and girls in forced and early marriages is common. Of particular concern is the large number of pregnancy complications among young girls whose bodies are not yet ready to bear children. Some young girls may die during childbirth as a result of obstructed labour, or suffer life-threatening injuries, including obstetric fistula which can leave them incontinent.

In Burkina Faso Amnesty International is working directly with 5 of the shelters that house girls that have been subjected to Early Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation but managed to seek help. Shelters like these are crucial to support young women and girls when they have no one else to turn to.

#### Case study

At 13 years old 'Maria' was forced to marry a 70-year-old man who already had 5 wives. She walked 169 kms over three days to get to a shelter for young girls escaping early and forced marriage.

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#### GOT QUERIES OR WANT TO DO MORE?

If you have any queries about this action, please contact:  
Amnesty Country coordinator for Burkina Faso,  
Rona Keen at [rona.bkeen@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:rona.bkeen@amnesty.org.uk)

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## MONTHLY ACTION

### Background Information

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## My Body My Rights/ Individuals at Risk

During the Write for Rights campaign back in December you sent over 5,300 messages of support to girls like 'Maria'. You have also sent thousands of letters to the government of Burkina Faso calling on them to take action and prevent early forced marriage.

In late December the Burkina Faso authorities adopted a national strategy and three-year action plan to prevent and eliminate child marriage in Burkina Faso. This is fantastic news, but there is still much work to be done to ensure girls don't end up forced into marriage in the future.

Amnesty International is calling for an amendment to the penal code to prohibit Early Forced Marriage conducted under traditional customary law or religious law within Burkina Faso. Working with communities and campaigners in Amnesty Burkina Faso we aim to increase pressure on the government to act.

## Take Action

### Create a bunting triangle

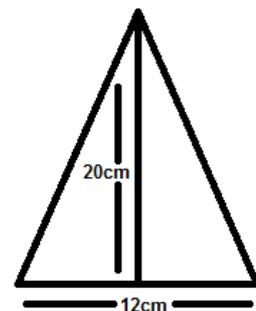
#### WHAT WE'D LIKE YOU TO DO

We'd like to show solidarity with the young women and girls staying in shelters across Burkina Faso and for the women working there. We are asking you all to write messages of solidarity and add these to a triangle shaped pieces of fabric / bunting triangles.

The idea is for these to be compiled and displayed in the five shelters that Amnesty Burkina Faso is working with, to show the women working there and the girls seeking shelter that they are not forgotten.

#### How to make your bunting triangle

- Create a bunting triangle out of colourful fabric. Make the triangle 12 cm wide and 20 cm long (see diagram).
- Write a message of support and solidarity on the bunting triangle and your name
- Please feel free to be creative and add images and designs to your triangles.



#### Where to send your messages and bunting

Please return your actions to the address below, making sure to include a note with the name of your group:

Community Organising Team  
Amnesty International UK  
17-25 New Inn yard  
London  
EC2A 3EA

**Deadline:** 15 April

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## **MONTHLY ACTION**

### **Background Information**

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## **My Body My Rights/ Individuals at Risk**

In Burkina Faso, whether you're a woman or a girl, you are prevented from making crucial decisions that belong to you. Decisions like whether or when to get married, whom to marry, and whether or when to get pregnant. These barriers to choice are fueled by social attitudes that value men and boys over women and girls.

This discrimination results in abuses of the basic human rights of women and girls, including their right to life, to education and to quality health care, particularly sexual and reproductive health care.

Above all, this discrimination denies women and girls their sexual and reproductive rights – rights which allow them to freely make decisions about what happens to their bodies and their lives without threat of violence. This includes the right to proper information and services on sexual health, family planning and sexuality.

The consequences of these abuses are clear when you look at the numbers. Only 64.2% of girls can access education but many of them are forced to give up school to get married or to take on domestic work. By the time they are 19 years old, most girls have already become wives, and nearly half of all young women are already mothers.

Early and forced marriages are illegal, but the law is not strictly enforced. One problem is that the law often doesn't cover traditional and religious marriages, which are very common. Many girls far younger than 17 are married in traditional ceremonies. What's more, the law discriminates against girls. The legal marrying age for girls is just 17, compared to 20 for boys. Girls under 15 and boys under 18 can be married if a court awards special dispensation, although this is rarely used as many marriages are conducted in traditional ceremonies.

### **Watch this space**

9-10 April - We will take this action to this year's AGM in Nottingham 9-10 April 2016. If members of your group don't have the chance to take part in the action in March, do come & join us in the Action Centre at the AGM.

18 April-18 July – For three months this year the Department for International Development (DfID) will be doubling money raised by Amnesty to support a project to prevent cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Early Forced Marriage (EFM) in Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone. Through a programme of education targeting 36 communities across both countries, we are hoping to prevent thousands of cases of EFM and FGM. We need your support to make this project happen. News on how your group can get involved will go out in the next mailing.

25 April - Amnesty is issuing a new report on Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Burkina Faso. The report will be available to download here from 25 April:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/search/?q=Burkina+Faso>