



## **Accelerating an End to Child Marriage: Girls as Drivers of Change**

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**Thursday, March 15, 2018**  
4:30 - 6:00 PM

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**4 W. 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, Green Room**  
New York, NY 10036

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*This interactive panel discussion, organized by Zonta International and UNICEF USA, features expert and youth speakers, and will examine child marriage and how it impacts marginalized rural girls and their health, future, economic opportunities, and well being.*

### **Speakers**

**Rachel Steinberg**, UNICEF USA (Moderator)  
**Sonja Hönig Schough**, President, Zonta International  
**Nankali Maksud**, Coordinator, Global Programme to End Child Marriage, UNICEF  
**Zoe Birchall**, Global Policy & Advocacy Officer, Girls Not Brides  
**Satvika Chalasani**, Technical Specialist, United Nations Population Fund  
**Emily Spellman**, Youth Delegate, National Alliance of Women's Organisations

## Accelerating an end to child marriage: Girls as a driver of change

### NAWO YWA speaker- Emily Spellman

### Zonta Event 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018

This event was a moderated Q and A. Chairing the event was Rachel Steinburg who is the senior director for cause partnerships at UNICEF USA who began the session with some harrowing facts much as one in five children world wide are married as children and that 650 million of the women who are alive today were married as children but Rachel also celebrated the fact that over the last 10 years the percentage of children married as children has decreased by 15%

Sitting on the panel for this event was Sonja Honig Schough, Nankali Maksud, Zoe Birchall, Satvika Chalasani and Emily Spellman. The biographies for the panel are on a separate page.

To begin discussions, chair Rachel Steinburg posed the question 'who child marriage is effecting them most and why and what your two organisations are doing for this?' to Chalasani and Maksud. Chalasani answered the first part of the question stating that the 'typical girl you think would be effected is lower class, forced into it and rural however there is an untypical girl- middle class, urban from a developed country and perhaps married by choice.' Maksud agreed with this and set out the GlobalSat program which works in the countries with the highest rates of child marriage and its strategies:

1. Empowering girls
2. Supporting households and encouraging a positive view and attitude of young girls
3. Strengthening systems that provide services to young girls e.g. education, protection and sexual reproductive health services
4. Ensuring laws and policies in place
5. Generating and using data that informs policies and learning what works with different situations

Zoe Birchall then answered a question about what other consequences child marriage may have and how this effect the daily struggles of Rural girls by saying 'In all SDGs (sustainable development goals) child marriage could be seen as a factor. We know once a child is married she is pulled out of education in order to look after the house or children. This limits her ability to choose her life and do more learning. This can trap the girl in the cycle of poverty. There are massive economic impacts of child marriage, for example we know that £500 billion per year of benefits that are received worldwide are due to child marriage.' This shocking figure really made the audience think more about the economic impact that child marriage worldwide has and not just focus on small scale impacts.

Steinburg then asked why this issue is so important and Sonja Honig Schough, president of Zonta international stated the need for engagement in this issue. 'we need to plan for the future' she also reminded the audience that to change this issue we need to be aware that we are changing fundamental values of cultures which will take time but the statistics that have come out in the last few years, for example the 25% decrease of child marriages in the last 10 years as mentioned at the beginning of the session, provide hope and help organisations like Zonta carrying on the work they are doing.

Emily Spellman from the NAWO Young Women's Alliance also had an answer to this question. Emily explained the need for all different cultures worldwide to understand this issue and become engaged in it.



She also used her own unique viewpoint as a young woman sitting on such a distinguished panel to express how she empathises with these women and told the audience how if she was put in the position of a child bride she doesn't know how she would be able to handle it, 'its just so hard to understand and imagine' she said.

Zoe Birchall then commented on the importance of civil societies as shown below:

1. Unique opportunity to work inside communities and see the unique drivers that work within the society

*Emily Spellman talking at the Zonta Event- photo courtesy of NAWO YWA*

2. Learning that they can take from working in these spaces and can make link between global and small scale
3. Important role in speaking out and holding governments to account to put pressure on them. Don't have political restraints that can hold other organisations back.

Steinburg then asked the panellists 'what can I girl do if she wants to say no?'

Maksud answered first, relating back to the GlobalSat project that she mentioned in a previous answer saying that due to the project 'girls can feel so empowered they go to another girl's household and take it upon themselves to stop other girl's marriages. But in some cases, it's not that easy one girl become ostracized from her community when she said no. The community classified her as a trouble maker and she had to move out of village.'



*Sonja explaining the need of educating families, not just girls- picture courtesy of UNICEF USA*

Sonja Honig Schough made a valid comment about education. 'it is not enough to just educate the girls. Families and whole communities need education'

When the panellists were asked about any specific examples that stuck with them through their work, each gave a story of a girl showing courage and bravery.

Emily retold the story of Mohinda who came to talk to all of the NAWO YWA delegates. Mohinda lived in an Indian

home in the UK and after refusing to give in to her parents offer of child marriage, was kicked out of the home and out of the family.

Sonja talked about a 14-year-old girl from Nepal who got married. She is now 29 and has a 3-year-old son. Instead of preaching the need of child marriage to the young girls in the village like so many others she warns against it.

Zoe told the story of a girl whose family tried to marry her at 11 and 14. Used music to refuse this through rap. She put song on YouTube and went viral. Now studying in America and is an advocate for GNB

The final remarks from all panellists were hard hitting and left the audience with something to think about. Satvika Chalasani said 'child marriage is an

exploitation of girl's labour, fertility and sexuality. Fundamental exploitation of girl's bodies and capacities. We must think about the effect other problems in women's right in the countries.' She later added 'go the extra mile to reach that girl in the hardest to reach place'

Sonja made her call to action clear, concise and influential 'We must fight it wherever we see it' and Zoe did the same 'we must not become complacent' she said Emily left the audience with a powerful remark. 'No matter the background , we all have that possibility to stand up and raise awareness and make change;



*All of the panellists and the chair from the event 'accelerating an end to child marriage- girls as a driver of change – Photo courtesy of UNICEF USA*

## Speaker Bios



**Sonja Honig Schough-** President of Zonta International and Zonta International Foundation. She is a former business consultant for IFS Scandinavia, where her responsibilities included counselling, training and implementation of information technology support for customers, primarily in Scandinavian countries. Prior to IFS Scandinavia, Sonja worked for 25 years as a human resources director for Beiersdorf AB, a Swedish subsidiary of an international consumer goods company.

Sonja can speak English French and German and fully understands Danish and Norwegian. Her personal interests include sports, literature and traveling along with spending time with her two grandchildren who live in France.



**Zoe Birchall**- As Global Policy & Advocacy Officer at Girls Not Brides, Zoe develops global-level policy strategies, recommendations and initiatives, and supports the engagement and alignment of member organisations in global advocacy.

Prior to joining Girls Not Brides, Zoe worked at Freedom United, designing and running international advocacy campaigns on the subject of modern slavery, which included campaigns around forced child marriage. Zoe also previously worked at the

Commonwealth Secretariat in the Youth Policy Division and at Amnesty International, working on a range of different human rights campaigns. Zoe has an MA in International Relations from Kings College London.



**Nankali Maksud**- Senior child protection advisor at UNICEF and the coordinator of the UNICEF/UNFPA Global program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. Previously she served as the Chief of Child protection at UNICEF Malawi where she was responsible for leading a team that worked with the government of Malawi to establish and strengthen and operational national child protection system that protects children against abuse, exploitation neglect and violence whilst also mitigating the impact

of HIV and AIDS . She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Law and a Masters in International Law.



**Satvika Chalasani**- A technical specialist at the UN Population Fund Headquarters works at the United Nations Population Fund's headquarters in New York. At UNFPA, she focuses on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents and youth. She coordinates UNFPA's work on evidence-based programmes and policies for adolescent girls at risk of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. She also supports workstreams aimed at improving contraceptive services for young people and maternal health services for young mothers. Previously she worked at the Population Council conducting research on adolescents. She is trained as a demographer, economist and sociologist.



**Emily Spellman**- currently a student at a sixth form in Gloucestershire and an active member of FEMSOC, which is a student-led club which campaigns for gender equality. At the moment She studying for 3 A Levels- Spanish, Business Studies and Geography, along with an EPQ, Extended Project, which aims to answer the question: 'How can we increase the number of women in business leadership?'. Emily feels particularly passionate about the empowerment of women within business and would love to widen her knowledge and interest in equality and women's rights at CSW. From her experience at the UN she looks forward to gaining more confidence in public speaking and to expanding her knowledge on women's issues from the diverse range of people attending CSW.