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# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

[11th October 2018]

**With Her: A Skilled Girl Force**

Today, the 11th October, is the International Day of the Girl Child.

The International Day of the Girl Child is celebrated annually on October 11 to highlight issues of gender inequality and the challenges facing young girls.

## This Year's Theme

This year's theme is "**With Her A Skilled Girl Force**".

The theme this year seeks to draw attention to the need for girls to be adequately equipped with training and skills suitable to today's rapidly changing job market and the needs of the fourth industrial revolution in which we find ourselves. Of paramount importance is ensuring girls are given equal access to education to put them on the same footing as their male counterparts as required by section 27(2) of our Constitution. In order to achieve this objective the obstacles that encumber the girl child must be addressed and dealt with.

## Child Marriage

Child marriage is both a symptom of poverty and a conduit through which it is perpetuated, as some families that struggle to provide for their children view early marriage as a way out of their difficulties. However, girls who are married early are deprived of the opportunity to further their education which is an essential tool in changing one's economic status. Most pertinent to this year's theme is the role child marriage plays in preventing girls from attaining necessary skills that would empower them in future by allowing them to enter the job market and fend for themselves.

In January 2016, the Constitutional Court delivered a landmark judgment on the issue of child marriage in a case brought by Veritas [*Mudzuru & Another v Minister of Justice & Others*]; the judgment is available on the Veritas website [[link](#)]. The Court declared that provisions of our law which permitted children under the age of 18 to marry violated the Constitution. As stated in previous bulletins, however, the judgment is only a start. Much work still needs to be done to implement the judgment:

### **Amendment of Marriage Laws**

While the judgment made it illegal for a minor – i.e. a person under the age of 18 – to enter into marriage, we have yet to see a requisite response from Parliament in the form of an amendment to section 22(1) of the Marriage Act, which still sets the minimum age for girls to marry at 16 years – and even younger with ministerial approval. There is an urgent need to amend section 22 to prevent girls from having their education cut short through marriage.

### **Economic and social changes**

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It must be recognised that legislation alone cannot eliminate child marriage: the underlying causes of child marriage such as poverty need to be remedied. The cost of schooling is one such area which the Government should examine in order to extend the reach of free education as far as possible. Another contributing factor is that of cultural and religious practices. The Government and civil society organizations need to work together spread awareness of the adverse impact child marriage has on girls.

### **Teen Pregnancy**

Pregnant girls are also subjected to prejudicial treatment in schools, often being forced to leave as a result of their falling pregnant. The Constitution in section 27(2) provides that:

“The State must take measures to ensure that girls are afforded the same opportunities as boys to obtain education at all levels.”

The unequal treatment of pregnant girls in schools runs contrary to section 27(2) of the Constitution and this injustice must be publicized and redressed.

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