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**GIRLS NOT BRIDES: ORAL INTERVENTION**

56th session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council

Annual discussion on the human rights of women, focusing on economic violence as a form of gender-based violence against women and girls

28<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Madam Chair,

*Girls Not Brides*, GAMCOTRAP, and Equality Now welcome this opportunity to contribute to the discussion on economic violence as a form of gender-based violence against women and girls.

Child marriage is both a driver and a consequence of gender-based economic violence. Annually, 12 million girls are married worldwide. Poverty and a lack of income-generating opportunities for girls and young women drive child marriage in many contexts.

Keeping girls in school is one of the most effective ways of preventing child marriage. Yet, gender inequality and a lack of universal free education often result in families with limited resources prioritising their sons' education over their daughters'. This loss of education hinders girls' labour force participation, which contributes to an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Ending child marriage also requires addressing harmful practices associated with a girl's marriageability such as female genital mutilation/ cutting. This is increasingly important in the context of rising backlash to girls' rights, including, for example, the proposed bill in The Gambia to repeal the legal prohibition on female genital mutilation/ cutting.

To accelerate efforts to end child marriage and other forms of gender-based economic violence, we urge member states to:

1. Support the establishment of a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would expand the right to education to include at least one year of free pre-primary education, and free secondary education;
2. Adopt policy measures that increase adolescent girls' autonomy in the household, making work a viable option; coupled with facilitating employment opportunities as an alternative to marriage; and
3. Adopt and protect, where these exist, legislative measures that outlaw child marriage and other harmful practices, including FGM/C, including by supporting efforts to maintain the current law against FGM/C in The Gambia.

Thank you, Madam Chair.