

Religious Leaders Denounce Child Marriage in Joint Video

Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim leaders are denouncing child marriage in a new audio-video broadcast for radio, TV and Internet in Hindu-majority Nepal.

The broadcast, launched this week in the Nepali language with English subtitles, was created by three United Nations groups.

“Let’s end child marriage,” said Hindu priest Chintamani Yogi, standing amid Hindu pagoda shrines in the two-minute video.

In Nepal, 11 percent of girls under the age of 14 and 29 percent of girls aged 15-19 are married. Seven percent of boys are married before they turn 18, according to Hanaa Singer, Nepal’s representative for the United Nations Children’s Fund.

During the production’s launch on Sept. 15, the spiritual leaders attended a discussion at a hotel in Kathmandu, Nepal’s capital. Norway’s ambassador to Nepal, Alf Arne Ramslien, was the main guest and introduced the production and discussion.

“This goes against all the conventions of human rights and international treaties, which directly or indirectly forbid the degrading and mistreatment of girls inherent in child marriage,” Singer said.

In a June report titled “Child Marriage and Violations of Girls’ Rights,” the New York-based Human Rights Watch recommended that the minimum age of marriage be set at 18, which it suggested is the emerging consensus of international human rights conventions.

Tiny, impoverished, land-locked Nepal is among the world’s worst “top 20 ‘hot spots’ of child marriage,” Human Rights Watch said.

Child marriage “affects girls more frequently and often coincides with other rights violations, including but not limited to domestic violence and impeded access to reproductive health care and education,” the organization’s report said.

Girls who marry “struggle with the health effects of getting pregnant too young and too often, their lack of education and economic independence, domestic violence, and marital rape.”

They also suffer a high death rate during childbirth “due largely to girls’ physical immaturity where the pelvis and birth canal are not fully developed,” the organization said.

In the video, Buddhist Bhikkhu Dharma Murti, wearing a maroon robe, says couples should be “developed physically and mentally” and “become mature” before their wedding.

Inside a church, pastor K.B. Rokaya said: “Child marriage is never mentioned in the Bible. All religions should work together to end child marriage.”