



## Statement

### UPR Pre-session on Solomon Islands

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Delivered by: Save the Children Solomon Islands

This statement is presented on behalf of Save the Children Solomon Islands, which works to advance and protect children’s rights in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since 1986, Save the Children Solomon Islands has engaged closely with government, civil society, children and communities to strengthen child protection systems, support legislative reform and promote meaningful child participation.

**“At 15, I should be in school, not married.”** This is what 14-year-old Theresa told me during a child-friendly consultation on Solomon Islands’ Marriage Law.

21% of girls in the Solomon Islands marry before 18, and 6% before 15. Girls like Theresa face layered risks such as long-standing child protection gaps compounded by social change, including climate impacts and limited access to essential services.

Although children have a voice, cultural and traditional norms often silence them. This is the stark reality for children in my country.

In the development of their National Report for the fourth cycle, the Government of Solomon Islands led consultations through inter-ministerial processes. Save the Children Solomon Islands conducted parallel consultations between 2023 and 2025 with children, caregivers, community leaders, service providers and civil society across several provinces, including Guadalcanal, Malaita and Western Province.

These consultations informed our analysis of the progress and gaps in the implementation of child-related recommendations from the UPR Working Group from the previous cycle.

This statement addresses two key issues:

- The lack of legislative reform on child marriage, and
- The need for increased public investment in children.

A key recommendation from the last cycle was to increase the minimum age of marriage to 18 years by aligning national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite acceptance, legislative reform in this area remains incomplete, and the minimum age of marriage has not yet been raised from 15 to 18 years without exception.

Since the last review, the Government of Solomon Islands has initiated a review of the Islanders Marriage Act, with a stated intention to amend Section 10 to raise the minimum legal age of marriage.

This process has been supported by civil society, including Save the Children and the Ending Violence Against Children coalition, through national consultations and advocacy initiatives such as the “Make It 18” campaign.

However, the legal reform has not yet been enacted, and child marriage remains legally permissible under the Islanders Marriage Act, including through exceptions linked to parental consent and customary practices. Enforcement remains weak, particularly in rural and customary contexts, where one in four girls in rural areas are impacted. These early marriages contribute to wider social harms: two out of five girls are reported to drop out of school because of child marriage or early pregnancy, and only about 7% of girls complete secondary school, deepening cycles of poverty and limited life opportunities.

The combination of weak legal protections, entrenched gender inequality and limited enforcement continue to expose girls like Theresa to early marriage, school dropout, early pregnancy and heightened risks of violence and exploitation.

We urge that progress on eliminating child marriage is closely examined during the upcoming UPR.

We recommend these actions to Government of Solomon Islands:

- Amend the Islanders Marriage Act and all related legislation to establish 18 years as the minimum legal age of marriage, without exception, including for customary marriages, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Strengthen mechanisms to prevent child marriage. This would include strengthening birth registration to ensure that only individuals who meet the minimum age requirement can legally marry.

This is in line with:

the Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically:

Article 7 (birth registration)

Article 24 (protection from traditional practices prejudicial to health)

Article 34 (protection from sexual exploitation); and

Article 35 (protection from trafficking).

Under CEDAW birth registration obligations are addressed under:

Article 2 (policy measures)

Article 3 (gender equality)

Article 6 (trafficking and exploitation); and

Article 16 (marriage and family life), preventing child marriages and commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Additional measures include mandating official proof of age for all marriages (including customary marriages); and establishing clear accountability measures for registrars, chiefs, religious leaders, and other officials who facilitate or endorse marriages involving children; and,

Implementing a coordinated national approach to prevent child marriage, combining legal reform with community-based awareness programmes engaging parents, chiefs, faith leaders and young people and access to education for girls.

While previous UPR recommendations focused on legislative alignment and protection from violence, limited attention was given to the level and quality of public investment in children. Inadequate and inconsistent financing continues to constrain the effective implementation of child-related laws, policies and services.

Public investment in children remains insufficient and is not systematically tracked across sectors. Recent analysis estimates the economic cost of violence against children in Solomon Islands at approximately USD 137.39 million per year, which is 9.13% of GDP.

This demonstrates the significant social and economic burden of underinvestment in prevention, protection and response services.

Budget allocations for child protection, education, health and social services remain vulnerable to fiscal pressures and competing national priorities. This limits enforcement of child-related legislation and access to essential services, particularly for vulnerable children in rural and outer island communities.

This underinvestment not only violates children's rights, but also undermines Solomon Islands' future human capital, productivity, and sustainable development – perpetuating cycles of poverty, inequality and preventable harm.

To strengthen implementation of children's rights, we recommend that the Government of Solomon Islands:

- Increases budget allocations for child-focused sectors, including child protection, education and social services.
- Introduces child-responsive budgeting mechanisms to track, monitor and publicly report on public investment in children. This is critical for the government to understand what it is investing in to help make informed decisions, taking a 'treasure what you measure' approach; and
- Allocates adequate and sustained resources for the implementation of the Child and Family Welfare System Multi-Sectoral Implementation Plan, including prevention and response services for child survivors of violence.

We look forward to working with partners and agencies to support Solomon Islands to uphold its obligations and commitments to children. We welcome continued dialogue on how civil society and partners can continue its work to ensure children in Solomon Islands can survive, thrive and reach their full potential.

Tagio tumas, thank you very much.