



## **PREVENTING FORCED EARLY MARRIAGES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN NEW ZEALAND**

### **New law to prevent forced early marriages and relationships in New Zealand**

In August 2018, the government passed the Minors (Court Consent to Relationships) Legislation Act. Under this new law, any 16 and 17 year-olds who want to marry, to enter into a civil union, or to enter into a legally recognised de facto relationship, must first obtain the consent of a Family Court Judge. The aim of this legislation is to prevent forced early marriages and relationships.

When considering whether to consent to the early marriage or relationship, the Family Court Judge must first be satisfied that the applicant is applying free of undue influence or coercion. The Judge can obtain a cultural report to assist in considering an application.

### **Zonta D16 will work to ensure awareness of the new legislation**

Zonta D16 proposes to work with Shakti to ensure awareness of the new legislation. Shakti is an NGO which supports women, children and families of Asian, African and Middle eastern origin.

Forced marriage is a violation of human rights. Ending forced early marriage and relationships in New Zealand is consistent with Zonta's goal to promote and protect the human rights of all women and girls and reduce the incidences of violence against them.

### **Extent of forced marriage in New Zealand**

Prior to the passing of the new law, marriage of under 18 year-olds was allowed with parental consent. In the First Reading Debate of the new legislation, Joanne Hayes MP (the Bill's sponsor) stated that there were 80 such marriages a year and she was aware that some of those marriages were forced or coerced by parents. She also believed that there were many forced marriages in New Zealand that go undetected.

There is no systemic data collection on forced marriage in New Zealand. There has been some data collected by Shakti, but this data was limited and not necessarily reflective of the extent of the issue in New Zealand.

Before the passing of the new legislation, there was a growing body of anecdotal evidence from women and girls who had experienced actual or threatened forced marriage. In some cases, young girls are pressured into marrying in order to sponsor their spouse for immigration purposes. In other cases, parents may force their daughter into early marriage in order to maintain their idea of "honour" by controlling her sexuality.

### **Zonta International initiative**

As one of its key biennium projects, Zonta International has committed US\$2,000,000 to UNICEF USA to support the UNICEF/UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage in 12 countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.