



Based at the Public Health Institute

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Malawi Parliament Votes to End Child Marriage

*Let Girls Lead alumni at the forefront of advocacy efforts to outlaw child marriage*

Oakland, CA – [Let Girls Lead](#) (LGL), based at the Public Health Institute, is excited to join Malawian girls in celebrating the Malawian Parliament voting to pass the National Marriage Law, which raises the legal age of marriage from 15 to 18 years. After five plus years of advocacy by LGL partners and other key organizations, this unprecedented victory guarantees a Malawian girl's right to be a girl for the first time in history.

In Malawi, approximately 50% of girls are married by the age of 18, often as young as 10 or 11. Child marriage is a culturally-sanctioned way for families and caregivers to lessen economic burdens and settle debts. The ramifications of early and forced marriage for girls and young women include sexual exploitation, adolescent pregnancy, maternal death, infant mortality, malnutrition, and HIV and STIs. Child brides and their children experience lifelong poverty resulting from lack of access to education, employment, and economic and financial resources.

Working in Malawi since 2009, LGL provides leadership development, capacity building, and seed grant funding to individuals and organizations working to improve girls' lives. LGL engages marginalized girls to find their own voices, and advocate for themselves and other girls in their country. This strategy represents a significant shift in a culture where young people – especially girls – are not empowered to speak for their own interests or against established cultural norms, including harmful traditional practices such as child marriage.

Earlier efforts to end child marriage include LGL's 2011 partnership with the [Girls Empowerment Network](#) (GENET) to launch the "Stop Child Marriage" project in the Chiradzulo District in southern Malawi. With support from LGL, GENET engaged more than 200 girls from the district and trained them to advocate for their rights at district and national levels. Since the launch of the "Stop Child Marriage" project, girls have successfully advocated with 60 village

chiefs to ratify and enact by-laws that protect thousands of adolescents from early marriage. With voices amplified, these girls turned small victories into large-scale change in the form of the 2015 National Marriage Bill.

“While the hard work of implementation is just beginning, Let Girls Lead is thrilled that girls' right to say no to early marriage is now legally recognized in Malawi,” said Denise Dunning, LGL executive director. “In a country where more than half of girls are married before age 18, the future for Malawian girls has just gotten a whole lot brighter.”

#### About Let Girls Lead

Let Girls Lead is building a global movement of champions to change systems and empower girls to attend school, stay healthy, escape poverty, and overcome violence. Since 2009, Let Girls Lead's model – endorsed, validated and funded by leading benchmarking organizations – has contributed to better health, education, livelihoods, and rights for more than 7 million girls globally. For more information, please visit [www.letgirlslead.org](http://www.letgirlslead.org).

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