

Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child  
Review of Mauritius  
91<sup>st</sup> Pre-session  
June 2022

This submission relates to the review of Mauritius under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This submission focuses on teenage pregnancy and child marriage and protecting education from attack during armed conflict.

***Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage: Barriers to the Right to Education (articles 2, 19, 28, 29)***

The Republic of Mauritius continues to face high rates of teenage pregnancy according to UN Population Fund data: 23 per 1000 girls and women ages 15-19 gave birth from 2004-2020.<sup>1</sup> While Mauritius has achieved gender parity in school enrollment and attendance, challenges remain as enrollment numbers begin to decrease between the primary and secondary level for both girls and boys.<sup>2</sup> Education for many girls suffers as a result of pregnancy.<sup>3</sup>

Mauritius is among a number of African Union countries that have a policy or strategy that protects pregnant girls' right to stay in school or resume education after birth.<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology adheres to a policy that legally allows students who are pregnant to attend school.<sup>5</sup> The government reports that

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<sup>1</sup> United National Population Fund, "Republic of Mauritius: World Population Dashboard," <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/MU> (accessed June 21, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> World Bank Group, "Databank: Mauritius," <https://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritius> (accessed June 21, 2022); UNESCO, "UNESCO Institute for Statistics: Mauritius" <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/mu> (accessed June 21, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Anishta Bhodo, "A Qualitative Analysis of Teenage Pregnancy in the Mauritian Society" *OSSREA Journal of Social Policies and Development*, Special Issue Vol. 2 (2013), pp. 78-79; see also "[Leave No Girl behind in Africa: Discrimination in Education against Pregnant Girls and Adolescent Mothers.](#)" Human Rights Watch, June 14, 2018. [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/auo618\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/auo618_web.pdf); The World Bank Group, "Girls' Education" <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation#1> (last updated February 10, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Government of Mauritius, Combined Sixth and Seventh Periodic Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/MUS/6-7, October 2021, para. 310.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid; Communication From Mauritius UNESCO National Commission, June 07, 2022 (copy on file with Human Rights Watch).

teenage mothers are allowed to return to school after delivery, and that counselling and other support is provided by educational psychologists.<sup>6</sup>

Human rights-compliant education policies adopted by governments should not only include provisions that ensure that students who are pregnant or parenting are allowed to remain in school for as long as they choose, but additionally ensure that students are able to resume their education free from complex processes for withdrawal and re-entry, can complete their education in school environments free from stigma and discrimination, and receive adequate social and financial support.<sup>7</sup> Further, a lack of awareness about continuation policies among community members, girls, teachers, and school offices can contribute to thousands of students not continuing formal education.<sup>8</sup> Governments should invest in implementation, monitoring and enforcement of continuation policies at the school level.

*Human Rights Watch recommends that the Committee asks the government of Mauritius:*

- What steps is the government taking to ensure girls at risk of dropping out are socially and financially supported?
- What steps is the government taking to tackle barriers that impede the retention of pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in school, including school fees and indirect costs?
- What policy or regulatory measures will the government adopt to fully support pregnant students and adolescent parents to return and remain in school, and ensure school compliance with government policies?
- What special accommodations are provided for young mothers at school, such as time for breast-feeding or flexibility when babies are ill?
- What programs are in place to ensure access to nurseries or early childhood centers close to schools?
- What measures is the government taking to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services for youth?

*Human Rights Watch encourages the Committee to make the following recommendations:*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Leave No Girl behind in Africa," pp. 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> In the course of research, Human Rights Watch found that teachers and students were not aware of the policy that permits pregnant students and adolescent mothers to continue their education; *ibid.*, p. 11.

- Ensure that continuation or re-entry policies are compliant with international human rights standards that protect the right to primary and secondary education for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers; and monitor schools' compliance with the policy;
- Guarantee that students who are pregnant, mothers and/or married students are able to continue their education after giving birth, without impediment or burdensome procedures, and ensure schools are free from stigma and discrimination;
- Address financial, procedural, and systemic barriers that inhibit adolescent mothers from continuing their education;
- Ensure that adolescents have confidential access to modern forms of contraceptives and information on sexual and reproductive health rights.

### ***Protection of Education During Armed Conflict (article 28)***

The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment that provides countries the opportunity to express political support for the protection of students, teachers, and schools during times of armed conflict; the importance of the continuation of education during armed conflict; and the implementation of the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.<sup>9</sup>

The African Union's Peace and Security Council has repeatedly called on all African Union members to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, and as of June 2022, the Safe Schools Declaration has been endorsed by 114 states, including 33 of Mauritius' fellow African states, and 10 fellow Southern African Development Community states.

Mauritius is yet to endorse this important declaration. As Mauritius has no standing army, it would be presented with little or no implementation challenges, but by endorsing the declaration it would express solidarity with students and teachers around the world, and help bring the African Union and the Southern African Development Community closer to universal endorsement.

*Human Rights Watch encourages the Committee to:*

- Call on Mauritius to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

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<sup>9</sup> Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, March 18, 2014, [http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf) (accessed November 6, 2018).