



Fighting for Rights – Resisting Forced Marriage in South Sudan



Forced girl child marriage is a major issue in sub-Saharan Africa in general, and specifically in South Sudan. Locally over 52% of girls are married prior to their 18th birthdays, as many as 17% report being married before turning 15. This traditional practice often further limits already vulnerable girls' choices in the future – for most, it means no more school.

In January 2019, a proposed marriage was agreed upon, and the betrothed of a Loreto Girls Secondary School student's family received 85 cows of a total of 260 cows promised. Once a family receives cattle, this is often the beginning of the end and delaying tactics are the best hope for being able to stay in school – until now. With the advocacy of the school administration, community leaders, Diocese of Rumbek officials and, ultimately, the Deputy Governor of Western Lakes State, the forced marriage was rejected. This is a first for the Loreto Girls Secondary School and a new source of hope for many girls facing similar situations.

Mr. Yuga, the head teacher, explained to local officials the school's agreement with all families. The families sign a 4-year agreement allowing their girls to study at Loreto. This agreement and the girls' status as a full-time boarders allow the school to protect them during this time. In 2018 alone, Loreto Girls Secondary School registered 9 active forced marriage cases. Read more about this story at [Eye Radio – Juba](#).

Supporting their Fight – Psychosocial Support for At-Risk Girls

Girls facing forced marriage can often feel very alone and hopeless in their situation, which puts their emotional health at risk. To help them through this rough period, Loreto provides a broad network of support. The secondary school's School Family system is a surrogate family for these girls, with 'mothers' and 'grandmothers' who encourage them to resist forced marriages and to complete their studies. In many cases, these mentors serve as a 'first response team,' advocating for the girls from the beginning of their studies. The school also provides a trained counselor for group and individual support, as well as female teachers and students who are trained as peer counselors. Students also receive several classes each term that focus on emotional health and well-being and are provided with opportunities to talk about the issue through weekly debates. Altogether, this comprehensive support network helps girls to stand strong when threatened with forced marriage – to resist. Read more about these stories and the supports we offer – [here](#).



A special Thank You to all the donors, advocates, and supporters of the Loreto Programs in Rumbek. Without your hard work or support none of this would be possible. For more news and info about the programs, our students, and how you can help, please visit loretorumbek.ie. If you would like to unsubscribe please email principal@loretorumbek.ie