BY NEW BUSINESS ETHIOPIA REPORTER
The United Nations and the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA) call upon everyone to join hands with them to eliminate child marriage in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has one of the highest child marriage prevalence rates in the world. According to the 2011 Demographic and Health Survey, sixty-three per cent of women are married by age 18.

The call is made during the first-ever International Day of the Girl Child was observed October 11, 2012. The date was designated by the UN General Assembly as the International Day of the Girl Child to be observed every year beginning in 2012. The theme of this first year commemoration of the International Day of the Girl Child is 'Child Marriage', which is a fundamental human rights violation impacting all aspects of a girl's life.

If the current trends continue, the number of girl child marriages will increase dramatically over the next 10 years, according to Marrying too Young: End Child Marriage, a new report released today by the United Nations. The report warns that 142 million girls could be married before they reach 18 in the next decade. The report also finds that, despite laws to prevent its practice, child marriage has remained mostly constant in developing countries over the past decade.

The Report launched today also indicates that Ethiopia is one of the developing countries where progress has been made in reducing the incidence of child marriage.
In the past five years, child marriage has shown a slight decline where the median age of marriage has risen from 16.1 to 16.5 years. Statistics shows that age at first marriage greatly increases with education; girls with more than secondary education get married almost eight years later than those with no education.

Child marriage is a harmful traditional practice denying a girl of her childhood, disrupting her education, limiting her opportunities, increasing her risk of violence and abuse, and jeopardizing

her health.

Preventing child marriage will protect girls' rights and help reduce their risks of violence, early pregnancy, HIV infection, and maternal death and disability, including obstetric fistula. When girls are able to stay in school and avoid being married early, they can build a foundation for a better life for themselves and their families. Government of Ethiopia together with stakeholders including the United Nations in Ethiopia has put in place Constitutional provision, legal instruments and policy measures as well as strategies for ending child marriage and realizing girls' empowerment to bring about change in social and cultural norms.

The legal age of marriage in Ethiopia is 18 years. Various efforts are being undertaken by stakeholders to address child marriage, which is highly prevalent and deeply entrenched practice. These efforts need to be intensified through a more coordinated framework in order to overcome the challenges in terms of pursue policies that are in place in a sustainable manner and at a larger scale. Although these strategies are commendable At local level, many kebele councils have teamed up with CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) committees to eliminate child marriage in Ethiopia. In terms of awareness raising, community based interventions are found to be key to the abandonment of child marriages.