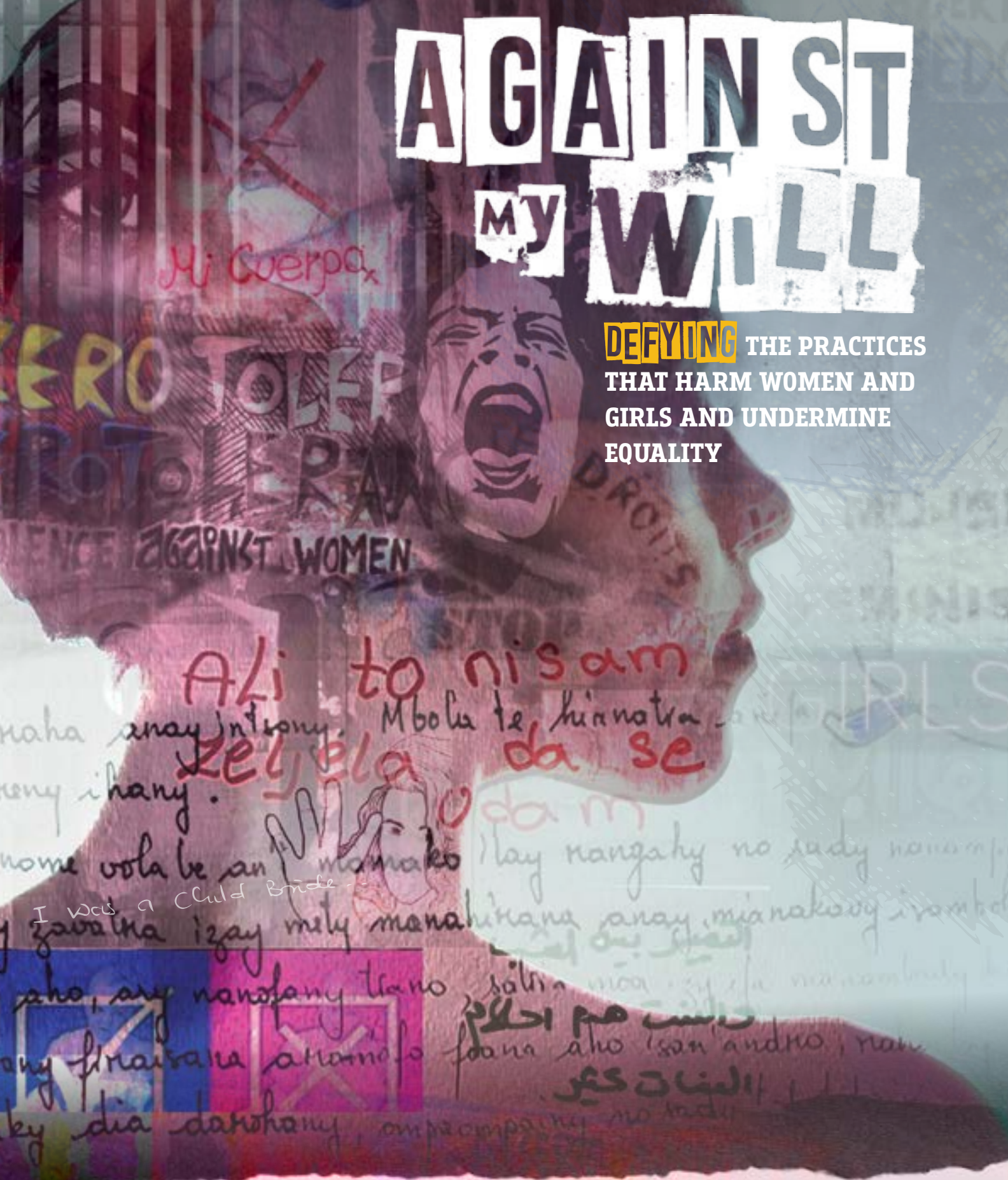


AGAINST MY WILL

DEFYING THE PRACTICES
THAT HARM WOMEN AND
GIRLS AND UNDERMINE
EQUALITY



State of World Population 2020

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MAPS AND DESIGNATIONS

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ENSURING RIGHTS AND CHOICES FOR ALL



STATE OF WORLD POPULATION 2020

AGAINST MY WILL

DEFYING THE PRACTICES
THAT HARM WOMEN AND
GIRLS AND UNDERMINE
EQUALITY

While **HARMFUL**
PRACTICES may
vary widely, they
are **ALL VIOLATIONS**
of the **RIGHTS** of
women and girls.

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TAKE ACTION

END the Harm

Every day, tens of thousands of girls have their health, rights and futures stolen. Some are subjected to female genital mutilation. Some are forced into “marriages” as children, and still others are neglected or starved, simply because they are female.

In many instances, parents who subject their daughters to harmful practices may do so with good intentions. They wrongly accept that female genital mutilation must factor into acceptance by peers in communities where this practice is widespread. They mistakenly believe that marrying off a child will secure her future. Some are unaware of the physical and psychological health risks.

Good intentions, however, mean little to the girl who must abandon school and her friends to be forcibly wed, or to the girl who faces a lifetime of health problems because of mutilation from a harmful rite of passage.

In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development, ICPD, world governments called for universal sexual and reproductive health and decisively demanded an end to harmful practices. One year later, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, governments again declared that harmful practices must stop.

Progress in slowing the rate of some adverse practices has been achieved, yet because of population growth, the number of girls subjected to harm is actually growing. Clearly, pledges and resolutions have not been sufficient to end harmful practices once and for all. What we need now are real change and real results.

Last year, at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, representatives from governments, grassroots organizations, development agencies and the private sector moved beyond pledges and resolutions and committed to ending the unmet need for contraceptives, ending preventable maternal death, and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices.

This year begins a “decade of action” to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, including target 5.3 on ending harmful practices. To meet our objective and protect the millions of women and girls whose bodily integrity is threatened, now is the time to push harder. The pace of our progress must be faster.

Governments must meet their obligation to protect girls and women from harm. Human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, direct governments to “take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of the children”.

Getting to zero may prove difficult, yet I have no doubt it is achievable. After all, some harmful practices have persisted over centuries. Yet change will—and must—come. The first step in changing attitudes and social norms is educating parents about the consequences harmful practices have for their daughters and about the benefits that accrue to families and communities when girls are healthy and empowered, and their rights are respected. We know that actions that put women, men, girls and boys on an equal footing in all spheres in life can help transform long-standing traditions of harm. We know that dismantling patrilineal property and inheritance systems can also help dismantle the institution of child marriage. We know what works.

And we now also know what it would cost to end the two most common harmful practices, female genital mutilation and child marriage: a well-spent \$3.4 billion a year, on average, from 2020 through 2030, to end the suffering of an estimated 84 million girls.

Armed with knowledge, backed by international human rights agreements, and buoyed by new commitments by governments and civil society, we have the power to defy the forces that perpetuate harm and to realize a world where every woman and girl is free to chart her own future.

As of early 2020, the world faces an unprecedented pandemic, with COVID-19 raging across the globe, taking lives and wreaking havoc on societies and economies. At this time of adversity, UNFPA will continue to protect the health and rights of women and girls in the countries and communities where we work.

Dr. Natalia Kanem
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
and Executive Director of UNFPA,
the United Nations Population Fund

**FORCED
REJECTED**

REJECTED

**THE silent and
endemic CRISIS OF
harmful practices**

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