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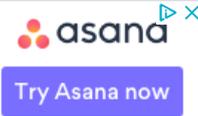
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Amal Clooney Scholarship winner aims to fight child marriage and rape

Heba Kanso

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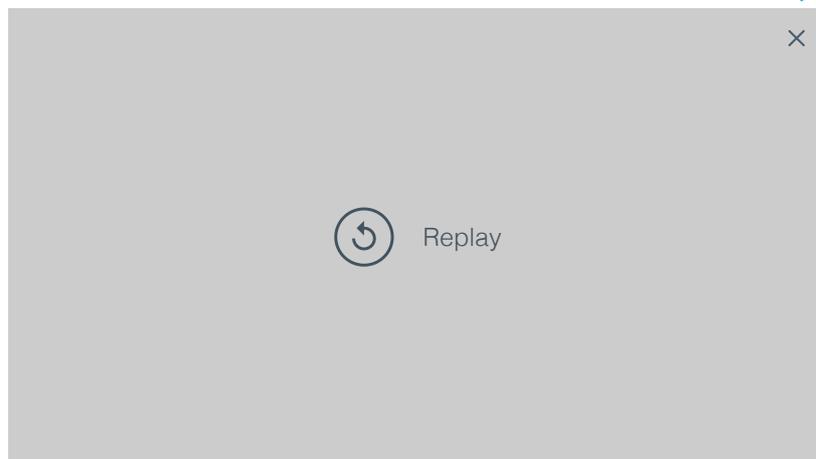


BEIRUT (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - The 16-year-old winner of the annual Amal Clooney Scholarship said on Tuesday that she wants to combat child marriage and marital rape in Lebanon, where there is no minimum age to wed.

Kamar Omary will head to Armenia's UWC Dilijan College in August to enroll in its two-year international baccalaureate program - the fourth Lebanese teenager to receive the award set up by the prominent Lebanese-British human rights lawyer.

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"We need a minimum age for marriage and marital rape should be criminalized," Omary told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Lebanon.

"Sexism and abuse of women and children is still widespread ... Women are stigmatized. They are generally seen as weaker than men and we need change."

Religious communities' personal status laws in Lebanon allow girls younger than 15 to marry, leading many Syrian refugee families, who cannot afford food or rent, to marry off their young daughters, rights groups say.

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Clooney, a London barrister, is known for representing Yazidi women who have been victims of sexual slavery, rape and genocide by Islamic State militants in Iraq, and for her marriage to Hollywood star George Clooney.

Omary said she hopes to follow in Clooney's footsteps of fighting for "people in need", such as some 1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, most of whom live in poverty.

"Every single person deserves education, health and security, and most refugees don't get that here. That is very unfair," Omary said.

"I want to connect with people and listen to them - that is how you trigger change and that is what Amal does. She listens to the people and defends them."

Amal Clooney Scholarship winners are chosen based on their academic performance and interest in the promotion of human rights and international issues.

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