I saw a piece on these pages about a bill in Congress, H.R. 6087, aimed at "stemming the devastating effect of child marriage ... in developing countries".

Before I go further, let me say that I have not myself had an inclination to marry a child since my ninth birthday; and Zelda was a ravishing beauty. Also, I have two wonderful daughters of my own and I would have forbidden them to marry until after their college graduation. Of course, we live in a country that cannot be called underdeveloped, except maybe morally.

The question that occurs to me is who are we to think we should make laws about practices in other countries that predate our own Founding Fathers?

Back in the mid 1990s, I traveled to a youth conference in Nairobi, Kenya. There, it is not only common for girls to marry but to be "circumcised" as well. Clitoridectomy is a practice I consider barbaric and repugnant. Happily, it is not practiced in my culture.

I bring this up because I attended a workshop, at the conference, where the current appropriateness of this practice was the sole agenda item. The women at the workshop – all Kenyan – ranged from high school age to grandparents. I was amazed at the number and breadth of cogent arguments offered, generally by the adult women, for the continuation and usefulness of the practice. I, myself, was not swayed. But, I kept quiet since this was a "family" discussion. However, many young women offered well-constructed arguments for "choice."

I do not want to resurrect that discussion. I just want to marvel, for a moment, at how casually Americans assume that superimposing our (their) own cultural values and mores on "developing countries" is an important part of the "development" process. Other countries would develop a lot faster if we let them mine and market their own precious metals and minerals; but I digress. The Masai, renowned for killing lions with spears as a rite of passage, have been observing its own culture for millennia. They live in relative harmony with their environment. Any adult used to walking about alone where lions travel in groups must be in harmony with his or her environment. I found them to be a warm and generous people. Alert, too.

I wonder if there are laws on the books in other countries about which of our cultural practices

should be abandoned. Our love affair with the hand gun leaps to mind. In 1833 when the British abolished slavery throughout the Empire, it did not occur to them to try to abolish it in this newly sovereign nation. Pretty soon, our overbearing sense of self will have us sharing the superior dietary advantages of pork with the many Muslim countries around the world.

I think Congresswoman Betty McCollum and Congressman Aaron Schock ought to concentrate on what is terribly wrong right here at home rather than wasting legislative energy attacking mores around the world because they do not square with their and my sensibilities. Of course, it is not like the Congress was all that busy these last few years, anyway.