

The International Federation of University Women (IFUW) affirms and emphasises the right to education as a standalone international human right and an enabler of numerous other human rights, which must be promoted, protected and provided to all people without discrimination

Geneva, Switzerland 10 December 2014 – On the Occasion of [Human Rights Day](#), the International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) draws global attention to the fundamental human right to education, which directly enhances sustainable development and is a critical means to combat poverty. The right to education is unequivocally enshrined in core international agreements and treaties including the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), the [Convention against Discrimination in Education](#), the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), and the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#). Despite the widespread global recognition, the international community as a whole is not on track to meet the most fundamental education target of achieving universal primary education – as set out in the [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs). 58 million children are still out of school,¹ the majority of whom are girls.² IFUW urges all stakeholders and policy makers, especially within the fields of education and international development, to adopt, implement, accelerate, and adequately finance measurable plans of action to increase access to, and completion of, all levels of education for all people. IFUW calls for particular commitment and support for at-risk groups, especially girls and women with disabilities, those of rural, indigenous or migrant background, and those displaced by war.

While recognising the progress that has been made towards achieving the education goals set out in the MDGs, President of IFUW, Catherine Bell, stressed that: “the human right to education must extend beyond the provision of basic literacy and numeracy skills developed at primary level. To ensure continued progress in knowledge dissemination and innovation, and to bridge both gender and poverty gaps, states must recognise the lifelong nature of learning for girls and women, which critically includes secondary, tertiary, continuing and non-traditional education.” Elaborating on the nature of education as an enabler of other human rights, President Bell illustrated the concrete and direct correlation between the most fundamental human right of all – the right to life – and its intrinsic connection with the right to education: “By providing mothers with a primary level education, maternal death rates would fall by two-thirds – saving almost 100,000 lives. Extending this paradigm to include mothers with a secondary education, child deaths would be reduced by half, saving a further 3 million lives.³ Realising the right to education can quite literally be a matter of life and death.”

While emphasising the necessity to significantly increase access to lifelong education for girls and women, IFUW particularly urges all states and education sectors to prioritise the implementation of universal access to free, quality secondary education, including by providing financial incentives and support to keep girls from the poorest families in school. Access to, and completion of, quality secondary education is a critical means to empower girls and women by providing them with the skills and knowledge – academic, social and personal – that they will need to progress further in higher education, work and society.

The International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and has an international membership. Founded in 1919, IFUW is the leading girls’ and women’s global organisation advocating for women’s rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. IFUW is in special consultative status with ECOSOC and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO.

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Learn about our grants & fellowships and our advocacy work. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) (@IFUWomen).

¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014” http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/UNDP_MDGReport_EN_2014Final1.pdf

² UNESCO “Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14” <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2013/2013-report-epub-en#18>

³ UNESCO “Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Girls’ education – the facts” (October 2013) <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/GMR/images/2011/girls-factsheet-en.pdf>