



HRC 32 GWI Human Rights Council Written Statement

Annual Full Day Discussion on the Rights of Women

The promotion of gender equality through equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities.

Graduate Women International

Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 80 countries. Founded in 1919, as the International Federation of University Women (IFUW), GWI 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. GWI promotes education across four key areas: secondary education; tertiary education; continuing education; and non-traditional education.

The background

Graduate Women International (GWI) welcomes the commitment of states to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as adopted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goals 4, *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*, and Goal 5, *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*, of the Sustainable Development Goals emphasise the vital role of women as agents of development. Education and gender equality have thus been recognised at the highest international levels as crucial to progress across all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their accompanying targets. GWI stresses that achievement of these ambitious targets and full human potential is only possible if women and girls can access the full realisation of their human rights and opportunities.

The realisation of the right to education contributes to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, human rights, sustainable development and economic fulfilment. Gender equality in education has been enshrined in human rights resolutions for a number of years; the Human Rights Council has repeatedly promoted the right to education, beginning with the 2008 Resolution 8/4, which *inter alia* emphasises the right to education for girls and persons belonging to vulnerable groups; UNGA resolution 64/290 (2010) upholds 'the right to education in emergency situations'. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) March 2016¹ further reiterated the need to establish education as a critical route to women's empowerment. In his report on the 15th anniversary of SCR 1325², the United Nations Secretary General stated: "the humanitarian community must do more to embrace gender equality as a central, organising principle of its work". The time has come for full implementation of existing resolutions."

¹ Agreed conclusions from the 60th Commission on the Status of Women, March 2016

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2016/27&Lang=E

² High Level Review on Women, Peace and Security UN Women 2015 <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-peace-security>

The issue

Gender-based discrimination in education is both a cause and a consequence of deep-rooted disparities in society. There are currently 34 million girls out of lower secondary school³. Poverty, geographical isolation, ethnic background, disability, traditionally limiting attitudes towards the status and role of girls and women all undermine their ability to exercise their rights. Discriminatory policy and practice still prevent millions of girls enrolling, completing and benefitting from education each year. Barriers to education for secondary school age girls include harmful practices such as early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence, and a lack of safe access to schools. Girls and women teachers are often targeted on their journeys to or from school. Female students and teachers are also subject to sexual violence by armed groups, soldiers or security forces, either as a tactic of war, or simply through disregard for the rights of girls and women. Gender equality must be integrated at all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education, and beyond that to continuing education and vocational training, whether in formal and non-formal settings. It must also be integrated early in planning infrastructure and throughout the training of teachers, pre-service and in-service.

Educating girls and women can provide economic empowerment and foster greater social justice. Education gives women the tools to overcome discrimination - girls and young women who are educated have greater awareness of their rights, and greater confidence and freedom to make decisions that affect their lives, improve their health, and boost their work prospects. Older women who missed out on these benefits of education have a right to access them later in life through continuing education programs.

GWI's position and recommendations

GWI emphasises the need for gender mainstreaming. Measurable, enforceable legislation and transformative actions for the promotion of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment must be implemented and monitored at all levels. Gender-mainstreaming in international mechanisms and national institutions should be conducted whether private or public, as well as in government and international organisations who have a stake in education.

GWI strongly supports the conclusions of the 60th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) from March 2016⁴ to *'promote and respect women's and girls' right to education throughout their life cycle at all levels, especially for those most left behind, by providing universal access to quality education, ensuring inclusive, equal and non-discriminatory quality education, and promoting learning opportunities for all, ensuring completion of primary and secondary education and eliminating gender disparities in access to all areas of secondary and tertiary education, promoting financial literacy, ensuring that women and girls have equal access to career development, training, scholarships and fellowships, and by adopting positive action to build women's and girls' leadership skills and influence;*

³ UNESCO- Girls Education- the Facts 2015 <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/girls-factsheet-en.pdf>

⁴ Agreed conclusions from the 60th Commission on the Status of Women, March 2016 http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2016/27&Lang=E

and adopt measures that promote, respect and guarantee the safety of women and girls in the school environment and that support women and girls with disabilities at all levels of education and training;

Recommendations

To strengthen gender equality in education combined with the right to education GWI recommends:

- Gender-responsive budgeting - financing for education should include adequate provision for gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis as an essential component of measuring existing inequality and progress towards gender equality and education targets of the SDGs.
- Empowering women's leadership in education so that they become represented in decision-making positions of authority at all levels – at primary, secondary and tertiary level.
- Financing of education to cover significant progress towards gender parity in teaching staff recruitment, training and deployment in countries and areas where women are inadequately represented in the teaching profession, including science and technology.
- Mainstreaming of a gender perspective into curricular from the earliest stages, actively promoting the training and career opportunities available to women in the areas of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Gender sensitivity taught in the curriculum should emphasise the positive contribution boys and men can make in addressing discriminatory stereotypes
- Making teacher-training, both pre-and in-service is context-relevant, gender-conscious so that teachers are equipped with the skills and knowledge to employ gender-sensitive teaching methods appropriate to different age-groups and to the existing degree of formal education.
- Safe access to education for girls and women includes unhindered passage to reach schools or other sites of educational programs, and a violence- and-harassment-free environment. This safety must extend to all girls and women, including the disabled, refugees and vulnerable groups.
- Providing non-formal education to reach both out of school, marginalised, over-aged girls and youth and older women previously denied educational opportunities.
- Measures to support women and girls with disability at all ages and in all levels of education and training;
- The recognition and prioritisation of education as a core component of first-phase response in emergencies, and the inclusivity of education and educational opportunity regardless of age or ability, including the provision of literacy and skills training for working-age adult women.