



Graduate Women
International (GWI)

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Stacy Dry Lara, Executive Director
sdl@graduatewomen.org
Tel: +41 22 731 23 80

On World Water Day, GWI acknowledges women and girls' intrinsic connection to water

Geneva, Switzerland, 22 March 2018 – Access to water is a distant dream for millions of women and girls and on World Water Day Graduate Women International (GWI) raises awareness about the importance of access to water and sanitation for women and girls. In many parts of the world, they are regarded as gatherers of drinking water, growers of household food and caregivers. Yet, this intrinsic connection to water is often absent in conversations on all levels and, consequently, girls suffer loss from school, especially once they reach menstruation.

On World Water Day 2018, GWI calls attention to Menstrual Hygiene Insecurity (MHI) as a profound and far reaching breach of women's and girls' fundamental rights to water and sanitation and education, by recalling its Human Rights Council (HRC) [written statement](#) on MHI submitted to the 37th session of the HRC.

Today, over 1.2 billion girls and women across the world lack access to the basic sanitation necessary by the natural process of menstruation. Lack of Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) directly contributes to the school absenteeism of millions of girls and women and exposes them to shame, disease, harassment and attacks. In Kenya, girls miss an average of four school days each month, about 20% of the school year.

As advocates for the safe access of girls to secondary education, MHI is a crucial concern for GWI. GWI emphasizes that education is a prevailing means of empowerment for women and girls around the world. Therefore, the barriers preventing women and girls from fulfilling their right to education must be acknowledged and fully eliminated; this includes tackling MHI.

“Failure to address the issue of MHI is costly for entire communities”, says GWI President Geeta Desai. “MHI takes an intolerable toll on girls' education worldwide leading to lower performance, increased absenteeism and a higher dropout rate for girls and women who do not have access to basic sanitation”, she adds.

GWI remains staunch advocates for the access of water and sanitation for all women and girls and the elimination of MHI as a barrier to girls' and women's education. The time is now for States to recognise the right to water and sanitation and the right to adequate MHM as fundamental human rights and to step up their efforts in enabling girls and young women to stay in school by ensuring access to hygienic menstrual products, adequate sanitation facilities, water and disposal options.

Global respect for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is crucial for the achievement of the [2030 Agenda](#) and especially Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages; SDG 4 ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education; SDG 5 achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and SDG 6 ensuring access to clean water and sanitation for all.

Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 60 countries. Founded in 1919, 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 is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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Contributing to this press release is GWI Intern Clémence Mathiaud from Sciences Po Lyon, France