

Graduate Women International (GWI) United Nation Representative Report 2019

High Level Panel on “Futures of Education” during the 74th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN)

Organized by United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
and Portugal

New York, 25 September 2019

Attended by GWI UN representatives Sophie Zaretsky, Maryella Hannum and Maureen Byrne

Inequalities, violence and exclusion are bringing many societies to a point of crisis. The fragility of our planet and its ecosystems is becoming more and more apparent. Advances in digital communication, artificial intelligence and biotechnology have great potential for moving humanity forward. In response, the UNESCO launched the “**Futures of Education**” project in the attempt to generate debate on how education needs to be re-thought. Hereby, UNESCO is establishing a **High-Level International Commission** of eminent thought leaders of diverse expertise and perspectives from the world of politics, academia, the arts, science and business. Through a consultative process involving governments, policymakers, civil society, youth, educators and other stakeholders the International Commission will prepare a report for 2021 that will provide an agenda for policy debate and resulting action. Although the primary Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) addressed is SDG 4 on achieving inclusive access to quality education for all, this project intersects with all other SDGs as well.

Present at the panel were among others Audrey Azoulay, Head of UNESCO; Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General; Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of Ethiopia and Chair of the International Commission on the Futures of Education; Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of Portugal as well as several heads of state, educators, civil society and private sector representatives. They discussed issues such as the need for quality education, keeping girls in school, including science in the curriculum, using technology for education particularly in underserved communities, and teaching critical and creative thinking. It was emphasized that lessons from the past as well as UNESCO’s resources will be very valuable for this project. Furthermore, it was mentioned that 22 university chair sent contributions towards the future of education.

Yong activists from Ghana and Malta stressed the need for tools to deal with future needs as well as need for inclusivity (e.g. pregnant teens, persons with disabilities), equity, diversity and sustainability. Because of the rapid pace of change and the rise of new professions, future-oriented tools must be developed and taught, and adequate resources must be allocated for this.

The most significant statements were made by Erna Solberg, the Prime Minister of Norway who stated that “the world is not on track to meet SDG 4 by 2030”, and by Roumen Radev, President of Bulgaria, who emphasized that “education leads to progress for peace.”

With regard to GWI, it is noteworthy to recall GWI's advocacy goals. Firstly, 100% of UN member states shall commit to policy, legislation, budget and infrastructure to facilitate the transition of girls from primary to secondary school and ensure gender parity and gender equality throughout secondary education by 2030. Secondly, by 2030, 100% of UN low income Member States have increased the access to tertiary education for girls and women by 50%. Thirdly, 100% of UN Member States shall commit to and implement policies for continuing education to empower women throughout the life course, within the formal and informal economies. Fourthly, GWI commits to influencing the implementation of SDG 4. And lastly, all 17 SDGs will include girls' education targets. Hereby, the GWI National Federations and Associations (NFAs) should demand that their educators and community and national leaders work with UNESCO in ensuring that their population is prepared to face the future.

Submitted by Sophie Turner Zaretsky
GWI UN Representative
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