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Graduate Women International celebrates education - echoes digital divide concerns

Geneva, Switzerland, 24 January 2021— On this third International Day of Education Graduate Women International (GWI) and its members worldwide passionately celebrate education and the positive role education plays building peaceful societies. Today, GWI also voice deep concerns about the disturbing inequalities in education exacerbated globally by the COVID 19 pandemic, especially the digital divide affecting women and girls. The extraordinary and unprecedented education crisis caused by COVID-19 has led to more than 1.5 billion students learning being shacked due to school closures (UNESCO). Today, GWI underscores collaborative efforts to raise awareness about the crucial digital learning crisis continuing as pandemic fallout.

Appropriately, this year's International Day of Education undertakes the theme 'Recover and Revitalise Education for the COVID-19 Generation'. GWI hails the vitality of innovative and promising learning methods stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the organisations insists that if the education sector is to fully "recover and revitalise" inequalities in digital education must be addressed now rather than waiting for a post-COVID 19 world. To this end, GWI forges forward and calls for action worldwide by urging governments, the private and public sectors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and civil society to participate in efforts to reduce the digital divide. Such calls for action are evident in a recent GWI statement to the United Nations on the need to [address distance learning challenges](#). Also, to mark this Day, GWI is releasing an [advocacy and social media toolkit](#).

"As a century-old organisation committed to lifelong education, GWI acknowledges the promising possibilities of distance learning as a means towards equal and inclusive access to education that's critical for women and girls", says Terry Oudraad, GWI President. "At the same time, however, GWI is focussed on being part of the solution to overcome the digital divide in education", she adds.

The education culture shift demands the exponential growth of digital learning access. In a world where almost half of the population does not have access to the Internet, building back "recovered and revitalized" post-COVID-19 requires governments to place large-scale infrastructure. GWI insists on the crucial importance of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 on the power of partnerships. Governments are urged to partner with telecom industries, to collaborate with the Ministries of Education and Energy, NGOs, educational institutions and teachers to identify local requirements to reduce the digital divide. At the heart of partnerships must be the commitment to SDG 4 (education) and SDG 5 (gender equality), alongside SDG 10 (reduce inequalities such as pay.)

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 global organisation advocating for women's 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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