



# Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**On International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Graduate Women International urges governments to take decisive action for the well-being and education of Indigenous women and girls**

**Geneva, Switzerland, 09 August 2023**— International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is celebrated annually on 9 August, with 2023 marking the 28<sup>th</sup> year since its creation by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1994. The UN estimates that 476 million Indigenous individuals reside in 90 countries, constitute less than 5% of the world population, speak most of the world's 7,000 languages, and represent 5,000 different cultures. Maoris and Aborigines are examples of Indigenous peoples, but many Indigenous self-identify. However, the somber reality is that 19% of the world's poorest are part of Indigenous communities (World Bank). Embracing the significance of fostering youth as positive changemakers within Indigenous communities worldwide, Graduate Women International (GWI) supports this year's theme, *Indigenous Youth as Agents of Change for Self-Determination*.

Globally, the education disparity faced by Indigenous peoples is a stark reality, with 47% of all Indigenous peoples in employment not having an education opportunity, in sharp contrast to the 17% of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Distressing is that the gap is even wider for Indigenous women (UN), whose access to education is disproportionately limited. Indigenous girls are particularly affected by this educational imbalance and often find themselves overlooked within educational systems where they face disrespect and a lack of vital resources. Consequently, GWI, through its global advocacy, is urgently trying to close this gap as per its [Policy Position on Education for Indigenous Peoples](#).

GWI President, Patrice Wellesley-Cole, references GWI's work covering the disparities that Indigenous girls and women face, specifically highlighting a GWI 2023 [World Book and Copyright Day](#) publication with an inherent focus on the importance of Indigenous languages. She states, "Indigenous languages must be preserved. Indigeneity is an aspect of these youth that deserves to be celebrated and valued, and this can be done by providing more educational resources and opportunities for them", says Wellesley-Cole. "Their human rights should be protected, and their cultures and identities preserved", she adds.

Indigenous youth's challenges are complex and entrenched in systemic issues that hinder their access to quality education and their potential to drive positive change within their communities. These challenges particularly affect Indigenous girls, who often experience complex problems related to unfriendly school environments, gender discrimination, and sexual abuse, all contributing to high dropout rates (UN).

GWI urges educational systems and governments to acknowledge these injustices and take decisive action to ensure the well-being of the Indigenous youth while working collaboratively with Indigenous communities to address their unique needs, enabling them to become agents of change for self-determination. Embracing cultural heritage empowers Indigenous youth to find their voice and become agents of change.

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.

*Contributing to this press release is Spring 2023 intern, Alexis Chelle, Dartmouth College*

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