



GWI UPDATE – 10 September 2025



— Graduate Women International (GWI) News —

International Literacy Day Social Media Campaign

On 8 September, GWI proudly celebrated International Literacy Day under the 2025 theme, “Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era”. Literacy is more important than ever in today’s digital world. Knowing how to read and write, and how to use digital tools, helps people access information, find opportunities, and take part fully in society. GWI supports access to literacy and digital education for everyone, especially women and girls. We believe that digital skills should be available to all, no matter where they live or what their background is. Although the day has passed, it’s never too late to advocate for literacy and education. **GWI invites you to Like and Share our media post on social media, which is also available [HERE](#).**

— GWI Member News —

The GWI 35th Triennial General Assembly and Conference Begins Tomorrow!

The GWI 35th Triennial General Assembly and Conference will take place from 11–13 September 2025 at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre in Lusaka, Zambia. This milestone event will convene members and advocates from around the world to engage in critical dialogue on the future of education, women’s empowerment, and sustainability. The priority theme is: “Building the Future: Integrating Culture, Education, and Empowerment for Sustainability.”

With a focus on strengthening education systems through integrated cultural relevance, the public conference will explore key global issues across five interrelated sub-themes: education and empowerment for women in diverse contexts as pathways to a sustainable future; envisioning the future context in which education, culture, gender, and the economy will operate; gender-based cultural issues and barriers in education related to gender equity; the

role of relationships, including intergenerational and community ties, in enabling growth and sustainability; and the impact of technology, AI, and innovation on empowering women for the future. **We look forward to welcoming all registered participants in Lusaka!**

— GWI at the United Nations —

GWI attends First Session of the Open-ended Working Group on an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education

GWI attended the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on an Optional Protocol to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education*, held from 1 to 3 September 2025 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. This important gathering was convened following Human Rights Council Resolution 56/5 (10 July 2024), which called for the development of a draft Optional Protocol aimed at strengthening the right to education. The initiative seeks to explicitly recognise early childhood care and education as part of the right to education; mandate at least one year of free public pre-primary education and free public secondary education for all children; promote international cooperation in education, and integrate new reporting obligations into existing reports under Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The opening session included children’s voices from all continents, ensuring their active and meaningful participation in a safe and inclusive setting. Compelling presentations included the intervention of Nada Al-Nashif, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. She emphasized that millions of children are still denied their fundamental right to education. According to UNESCO’s 2024 report, 251 million children remain out of school, with the situation particularly severe in poorer, rural, and conflict-affected areas. Girls are disproportionately impacted: school closures affect them most, and globally 4 out of 10 never complete upper secondary education. Guerras Delgado, Coordinator of the Child and Youth Rights Unit at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), revealed that 168 submissions had been received in preparation. Data showed only 34% of countries guarantee free public education for 12 years; many children, especially those with disabilities, in rural areas, minority or displaced populations, continue to face discrimination and infrastructure barriers.

OHCHR will compile the session outcomes and the Working Group is mandated to submit its progress report to the Human Rights Council no later than its 62nd session. **GWI eagerly anticipates the draft Optional Protocol and remains committed to ensuring it reflects children’s lived realities and promotes equitable access to education for all, especially for girls**

and young women, who continue to face disproportionate barriers to education worldwide. This enduring commitment was echoed by Executive Director Stacy Dry Lara, who emphasised: *“As GWI marks 106 years and concludes another Triennium, our vision is unchanged: that 100 percent of girls and women worldwide achieve education beyond primary school.”*

— Give the Gift of Education —

Supporting the Next Generation of Advocates

At Graduate Women International, we believe that supporting young professionals is an essential part of advancing our mission. Through our internship programme, GWI offers students and recent graduates the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in international advocacy, education, and women’s rights.

We recently had the pleasure of welcoming Suzanne Nette as part of the GWI team. During her six-month internship, Suzanne contributed to communications, represented GWI at UN events in Geneva, supported advocacy efforts, and assisted in event organisation. Her dedication, professionalism, and fresh perspective made a meaningful impact on our work.



We extend our warmest thanks to Suzanne for all of her contributions, and we wish her the very best in her future endeavours.

— Did you know? —

A Historic Beginning

Did you know? In 1919, in the wake of the First World War, three pioneering women, Virginia Gildersleeve of the United States, Caroline Spurgeon and Rose Sidgwick of Britain, decided to create an international organisation of university women. Convinced that education and cross-border dialogue could reinforce peace, they convened the very first meeting in London that year, giving birth to the International Federation of University Women (IFUW), today known as Graduate Women International (GWI).

The true consolidation of this vision came the following year, in 1920, at the first major international conference at Bedford College, London. There, women graduates from across the globe gathered to formalise the Federation, establish its statutes, and agree on a shared mission. This milestone not only strengthened bonds among national associations, but also

affirmed the Federation’s role in advancing women’s access to higher education, promoting international cooperation, and supporting women in their academic and professional lives.

Born from the conviction that the devastation of war could be countered by education and mutual understanding, the early Federation reflected both urgency and hope. Its founders believed that knowledge and solidarity among women graduates would serve humanity and help shape a more just and peaceful world. **More than a century later, GWI continues to honour this legacy: uniting women graduates worldwide in the pursuit of equality, peace, and empowerment through education.**

— Dates and Events —

11-13 September	GWI 35th Triennial General Assembly, Lusaka, Zambia
21 September	International Day of Peace
5 October	World Teachers’ Day
11 October	International Day of the Girl
15 October	International Day of Rural Women
17 October	International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

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Empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace.

GWI, formerly IFUW, is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

Graduate Women International

7-9, Chemin de Balexert, CH-1291, Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland

E-mail: gwi@graduatewomen.org Website: www.graduatewomen.org

