



## GWI UPDATE – 08 April 2026



*GWI marks International Day of Sport for Development and Peace*

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### — Graduate Women International (GWI) News —

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#### **GWI marks International Day of Sport for Development and Peace 2026 with a focus on women, education, and global understanding**

*Submitted by GWI Vice President of Education, Dr Shirley Gillett*

International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (IDSDP) is observed annually on 6 April. The 2026 theme is Sport: Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers. The benefits of sport for women have been noted and written about widely. Sport and games provide a context for developing leadership skills, confidence, social and physical skills, agility, and physical fitness. For a long time, men and masculine personal qualities were mostly associated with sport however education has helped to enlighten and develop attributes through sport, such as working together in a team, self-improvement, and goal setting. “It’s not just the running, it’s also being together, talking things through, maybe getting some things off your chest.

Once things get moving, women start to look for other possibilities as well. I decided to find myself a job, and now I am trained in education. Sport really gets you going,” said Zainab Moukloub, Director of Be InterACTIVE, The Netherlands. It also teaches girls and women that “competition” is ok. However, although sport by nature is competitive, it builds bridges nationally and internationally where getting to know and understand another culture happens “on the field”. One example is how, in many sports, the teams shake hands after the game. Organizations like the

International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the United Nations actively use sport to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. Sport promotes peace by acting as a universal language that transcends cultural, religious, and national divides, fostering dialogue, empathy, and social cohesion. Sports, such as those highlighted in the [UNESCO Sports Pathway to Peace program](#), strengthen skills in youth, like resilience and mutual respect. The "White Card" Campaign led by the Peace and Sport initiative encourages individuals to show a white card on April 6th as a gesture of commitment to peace efforts. Ostad Fazlu, through his Hockey Academy in Bangladesh, has proved that sport can be a powerful force for change. "Through inclusion, opportunity, and unwavering dedication, it continues to build a healthier, stronger, and more peaceful society—one player at a time".

My own life in sport and learning and as a female reflects the above features, in particular I was a "tomboy" as a child and teenager and fortunately was able to continue and incorporate into my life sports especially field hockey where currently along with many others I compete in the rapidly growing World masters sports with an international organisation Alliance Hockey Club the membership of which includes people from 38 countries. Here we have developed friendships and learned about each other's cultures and countries, thereby incorporating values such as collaboration and peace.

### **GWI publishes IDSDP social media campaign**

On 6 April 2026, GWI joined the global movement recognizing sport as a powerful tool to promote peace, equality, and sustainable development. The annual celebration reminds us that sport goes beyond competition. It empowers women and girls, strengthens communities, and causes respect among teams. For women and girls, participation in sport opens access to teamwork, inclusion, and confidence that can be applied beyond the field of sport. As we, at GWI, are committed to advancing women's and girls' rights through education, we highlight the connection between learning and sport. That combination can serve as a foundation for empowerment and self-determination. GWI underscores that it is never too late to advocate for your priorities. The social media campaign remains accessible and provides critical entry points to raise awareness and to take action. Click [HERE](#) to access the campaign for the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace 2026 and [HERE](#) to read the infographic.

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## — GWI Member News —

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### **Applications for the GWI Hegg Hoffet Fund for Displaced Women Graduates are open**

GWI is pleased to announce that application process for the Hegg Hoffet Fund for Displaced Women Graduates is open until 30 April 2026. The fund offers short-term grants to support

women graduates with refresher courses, language training, and other learning opportunities that support them to re-enter their professional field or integrate into a new country. By supporting access to education and professional development, this initiative reflects GWI's ongoing commitment to empowering women and girls, especially those rebuilding their lives after displacement. Targeting support can help women continue their education, strengthen their skills, and pursue new opportunities with confidence. If you are a refugee meeting the Hegg Hoffet Fund qualifications, click [HERE](#) for further information.

### **Three GWI National Federations and Associations (NFA) to host “Climate Mitigation: Peatlands of the World” Conversation**

Co-hosted by Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) North Delta/Surrey, Graduate Women Scotland (GWS), and the Paraguay Federation of University Women, this online conversation titled “Climate Mitigation: Peatlands of the World” will take place virtually on 23 April 12:00 pm Eastern Standard Time (EST). The discussion will feature speakers Eliza Olsen, Peatlands Protection Society, CFUW North Delta/Surrey, B.Ed. Simon Fraser University; Hon. Doctorate, KPU, and Catriona Sutherland (GWS), Past Chair of GWI Policy Resolutions. Together, they will explore the critical role of peatlands in global climate mitigation and the urgent need to protect these unique ecosystems. This conversation will bring together members and supporters from across different regions to raise awareness of the environmental importance of peatlands and encourage dialogue on sustainable climate solutions. Participants will have the opportunity to engage with the speakers and learn about international efforts to safeguard these vulnerable landscapes. Interested GWI members and guests are encouraged to register in advance to attend the webinar. Register [HERE](#). Please see the flyer at the bottom of the Update for more information.

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## — GWI at the United Nations (UN) —

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### **GWI President Pat Patton addresses education at 61<sup>st</sup> session of the Human Rights Council**

GWI contributed to the general segment of the high-level segment of the 61st session of the Human Rights Council (HRC61), where GWI President Pat Patton delivered a powerful statement reaffirming education as a fundamental human right and a necessary condition for the realization of all other rights for women and girls. The statement highlighted that persistent barriers to education, particularly in contexts of conflict, poverty, and discrimination, continue to limit women's access to justice, economic participation, and decision-making. Patton stressed that evidence shows that disruptions to education increase exposure to early and forced marriage, gender-based violence, and long-term exclusion from public life. In her statement, GWI called on States to prioritize sustained investment in education systems, with particular attention to

secondary and tertiary education, and to integrate education into human rights, justice, and recovery frameworks. The intervention also underscored the importance of coordinated, long-term approaches that ensure inclusive access to lifelong learning. GWI continues to engage in United Nations processes to advocate for education as a central component in advancing gender equality and strengthening the protection of human rights worldwide. Patton's full statement can be accessed [HERE](#).

### **Child rights in armed conflict annual discussion at HRC61**

On 9 March, the HRC61, held its annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child and addressed the impact of armed conflict on children's rights, noting that an estimated 520 million children are currently living in conflict-affected settings. The discussion brought together Member States, United Nations entities, and civil society to examine prevention, protection, accountability, and reintegration. Interventions by Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights; Vanessa Frazier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Cordula Droege, Chief Legal Officer at the International Committee of the Red Cross; Hazel De Wet, Deputy Director of the Office of Emergency Programmes at UNICEF; and Clara Sandoval, Director of Programmes at the Global Survivors Fund, emphasized the need for strengthened implementation of international legal obligations and improved coordination among stakeholders. Evidence consistently demonstrates that access to education is a critical component of protection and recovery frameworks. Disruptions to education in conflict settings are associated with increased risks for girls, including early and forced marriage, exploitation, and long-term exclusion from economic participation. GWI continues to leverage its Special Consultative Status to the United Nations to advocate for the integration of education into responses addressing children affected by armed conflict, with particular attention to girls' access to lifelong learning.

### **GWI marks 25 Years of the Durban Declaration**

GWI welcomes renewed attention to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) at the HRC61, marking the Declaration's twenty-fifth anniversary. The DDPA, adopted in 2001, is a comprehensive United Nations framework that sets out commitments by States to prevent and eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, while addressing their historical roots and present-day impacts. The high-level panel discussion held on 24 February emphasized the continued global relevance of coordinated, multi-stakeholder action to advance these commitments. GWI notes that education remains a critical component in confronting systemic discrimination and advancing equality. Evidence demonstrates that unequal access to education perpetuates social exclusion and limits participation in economic and civic life. In line with its advocacy, GWI supports the DDPA's call for practical measures that translate commitments into measurable outcomes, including strengthened access to education in all its forms to address both historical and contemporary inequalities.

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## — Give the Gift of Education —

Girls Education for Brighter Futures is a GWI program that funds global education, gender equality, and women’s empowerment projects. Donations to this program impact women and girls’ lives by offering education and income-generating education. One of the latest initiatives, “Training Adolescents, Teachers, and Parents in Luuka District in Making Reusable Sanitary Pads”, funded by the Bina Roy Partners in Development project, is helping to improve the personal health of women and girls, teaching them skills that provide new sources of income, and increasing school retention rates for girls in the Luuka District, in Eastern Uganda. GWI invites readers to click [HERE](#) to learn more about this project and is grateful for the generous support of the Girls Education for Brighter Futures program. GWI appreciates all contributions towards these projects. Please click [HERE](#). **Thank you for making such a difference!**

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## — Did you know? —

Did you know that the Hegg Hoffet Fund has been instrumental in providing help to refugee and displaced graduate women for 90 years? The Hegg Hoffet Fund was established in 1936 as the International Federation of University Women (now Graduate Women International) Emergency Fund to help women at the graduate level and above who had been deprived of the right to work, and in many cases, the right to live in their native countries. Arriving in a new country, most face complex challenges to integration, among them language difficulties, unemployment, rejection of foreign qualifications, and the need for retraining. Later called the Relief Fund, it took the name of Madame Blanche Hegg Hoffet (1894-1978) in 1968 to honour her many years of service during and after the Second World War. Mme Hegg Hoffet, from Switzerland, was particularly responsible for raising money and distributing assistance in that difficult period and accomplished her mission with great passion and commitment, travelling regularly to Germany to meet with refugees as soon as the war ended.

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## — Dates and Events —

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| 21-22 April | Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE region |
| 23 April    | Climate Mitigation: Peatlands of the World                   |
| 23 April    | World Book & Copyright Day                                   |

26 April  
28 May

International Girls in ICT Day  
Menstrual Hygiene Day

**Follow us on social media!**



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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

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**Graduate Women International**  
*Empowering women & girls through lifelong education*

## Climate Mitigation: Peatlands of the World

On Thursday, April 23rd, at 12:00 EST, join us for a conversation co-hosted by CFUW N.Delta/Surrey, Graduate Women Scotland and the Paraguay Federation of University Women about our imperiled peatlands



**Eliza Olson**  
B.Ed Simon Fraser U  
Hon. Doctorate KPU  
CFUW North Delta/  
Surrey  
Peatlands Protection  
Society



**Cats Sutherland**  
GW Scotland  
Past Chair of GWI Policy  
Resolutions



Please click here to register.

