

For too many girls, violence—deliberate attacks on body, mind, freedoms, and opportunities, is an inescapable part of life. We, the girls of this, the UN's 57th Commission on the Status of Women, propose that these girls, so many of them taught that they are powerless, be given the chance to defend themselves. We, the authors of this document, are privileged with education. We are not among the 100 million children worldwide who are denied their right to go to school, and we are not the additional millions of girls who begin primary school and are not able to finish it. But as we are educated, we understand the myriad of benefits that schooling can bring girls around the world on the personal and the political scale: an escape from the cycle of poverty, and the ability to make her own decisions. Through education, girls can become role models for their entire communities.

We of the CSW57 demand equal education for boys and girls above all else, including universal equal education and access to resources such as school lunches, daycare, and sanitary products.

An educated girl can disprove the widespread cultural belief that sons are more valuable and more useful than daughters. If girls could transition more fully into their brothers' roles as economic providers, perhaps we could see the end of practices like sex-selective abortion and son preference, human trafficking, and child marriage. Educated parents could better understand that their daughters can be just as capable as their sons, and are equally deserving of a full and productive life. The girl child's gender should make her no more likely to suffer violence at the hands of her community. Whether this violence comes in the form of child marriage or honor killing, gender should not be a determinant of violence. Honor killing deprives the girl child of the most basic human right: the right to live. If girls receive proper education they will recognize their self worth, dignity, and vital role in the world. Education also helps lower the incidence of other cultural practices such as child marriage or female genital mutilation and cutting.

Outside factors such as poverty, lack of education, and lack of support for single girls sustain the practice of child marriage. It is because of financial instability that the girl child is an object in a trade between her parents and her adult husband. Traditional leaders can only educate their communities on the negative impact of child marriage if they themselves are educated. The positive messages of education teach girls that they have choices other than early marriage.

Through education, girls will realize that they have the right to protect and control their bodies. We need to educate girls, mothers, and religious and traditional leaders about the adverse health affects of FGM/C and encourage them to find alternate rites of passage for girls within their communities.

If a girl is educated, she might escape the cruel cycle of human trafficking. Indeed, many victims of human trafficking experience physical and sexual violence, but many of their cases fall through the cracks. As well as being fought with education, human trafficking should also be combatted with legislation worldwide that is not only written, but enforced by national government.

We of this 57th Commission on the Status of Women demand that girls around the world be given the tools that we too often take for granted. We want them to know their rights, and be given the platform to use their voices. Knowledge, not violence, should be the international currency of power, and education of girls is a step that must be taken in order to make that a reality.