
“Accelerating action on girls’ education”

**Statement by
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Distinguished participants,

It is with great pleasure that I participate in the Women’s Caucus here in Berlin. I wish to congratulate the organizers of the Women’s Caucus for all their efforts to ensure that the situation of women and girls in relation to education features high on the agenda of the Fifth Education International World Congress.

Since the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women recently considered the education of girls as one aspect of its priority theme: The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, I would like to focus my presentation on the education of girls.

Education represents one of the most strategic investments that governments can make in the children of their countries. Schools and other educational institutions have an immense potential to transmit knowledge, develop critical thinking and teach girls and boys essential life and livelihoods skills. Education promotes equal start in life for girls and boys - the chance to grow and develop according to their potential and to participate in, contribute to and access the benefits of development.

The right of all children to education that is free from discrimination and of a sufficient quality to enable their full participation in society is enshrined in major international human rights treaties. In particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), has made the promotion of free primary education and quality education for children and youth up to the age of 18 years an obligation for States.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW (1979) in its article 10, obliges States parties (185 as of July 2007) to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure their equal rights with men in the field of education. Article 10 (f) specifically calls for “[t]he reduction of female drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely”. In its concluding comments, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – which is the treaty body in charge of monitoring implementation of the Convention – regularly urges States

parties to eliminate discrimination against girls in education, including discrimination against minority girls and those living in rural areas.

Education is critical for empowering women and girls. Extensive evidence shows that educated women become more effective agents of change, able to improve both their own well-being and the welfare of their families. These empowering effects of education for women and girls are manifested in a variety of ways, including increased income-earning potential, ability to bargain for resources within the household, decision-making autonomy and participation in public life. It is also well documented that improvement in education of girls is a critical factor in ensuring positive health outcomes, lowering age at marriage, increasing control over fertility, preventing violence - including female genital mutilation/cutting, and reducing the risks of HIV infection.

Despite the recognition of education as a fundamental right for all children and the clear evidence of the benefits of education for women and girls, there remains significant discrimination against girls in education in many parts of the world. The statistics are clear. According to the Millennium Development Goals Report in 2007, 57 percent of the approximately 72 million children of primary school age not in school in 2005 were girls. It is estimated that 85 per cent of all girls out of school live in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific. In South Asia girls constitute two-thirds of all out of school children.

Global advocacy and policy efforts on the education of girls

The gender-based discrimination faced by girls in access to and benefits of education has received attention by the international community, particularly since the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand. At this conference - where representatives of the international community agreed to universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade - special attention was given to the gender gap in education. One of the six goals adopted called for an equal number of girls and boys to be enrolled in primary and secondary school by 2005, and for the achievement of gender equality in education by 2015.

During the 1990s, United Nations global conferences focused on developing international consensus on common goals in the areas of human rights, gender equality, social development and population and development. Each of these conferences focused on the importance of gender equality in education, in pursuing their specific objectives. Girls' education received special attention in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. It identified issues relating to the education of the girl child in two of the twelve critical areas of concern - on education and training, and on the girl-child. The Platform outlined a number of critical actions for governments, inter-governmental organizations and civil society actors to pursue to secure the rights of girls and women to education. The Platform called on Governments to provide universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school-age children by 2000; to close the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005; and to provide universal primary education in

all countries before 2015. Governments were called upon to reduce female illiteracy rates to at least half their 1990 level, with emphasis on rural women, migrants, refugees and internally displaced women and women with disabilities. The Platform also addressed vocational training; science and technology; and the development of non-discriminatory education and training.

The outcome of the five-year review of implementation of the Platform for Action in 2000, noted increased awareness of the importance of education for gender equality and identified achievements in education and training of girls at all levels. It highlighted, however, that progress was hampered by insufficient resources and political will to improve educational infrastructure; persistent gender stereotypes in educational material and in society at large; child labour and the heavy domestic responsibilities of girls; and inadequate nutrition and access to health services.

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report on the ten-year review of the Platform for Action in 2005, consistent efforts are needed to close the gender gap in both primary and secondary education. In particular, steps are needed to increase resources; create opportunities for girls to pursue non-traditional fields, remove gender bias from educational materials; and accommodate the needs of specific groups of women and girls. The report also pointed out that the gap between access to education, academic performance and access to employment opportunities must be explicitly addressed.

Ten years after the Jomtien conference, with many countries far from having reached the internationally-agreed goals on education, the international community met again at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, and affirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015. The Forum recognized that specific actions were needed to accelerate progress, including expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes; and improving all aspects of the quality of education so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills are achieved by all.

The importance of girls' education was highlighted at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, when world leaders emphasized their commitment to achieve universal primary education for all girls and boys by the year 2015 and to provide girls and boys with equal access to all levels of education. As a follow-up to the Summit, eight time-bound and measurable Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were defined to focus the world's development efforts on achieving a selected number of strategic objectives by 2015. One MDG was established to explicitly achieve universal primary education for all girls and boys. The MDG3 on gender equality and empowerment of women calls for the elimination of gender disparity for all levels of education (by the year 2015). The 2005 target for both primary and secondary education has already been missed.

In the 2005 World Summit, Member States indicated that progress for women is progress for all, and resolved to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination by, among other things, eliminating gender inequalities in primary and secondary education by the earliest possible dates and at all educational levels by 2015.

Strategies to address gender-based discrimination in education

Considerable efforts have been made in the United Nations context to increase the access to and benefits of education for girls. Member States have also undertaken many measures at different levels to improve girls' access to education, such as legislation, policy development, gender-sensitive curriculum development and teacher training and infrastructure provision. Despite these efforts, many serious challenges remain. The remaining obstacles to equality in education need to be identified and addressed as a matter of priority.

Experience shows that despite successful efforts to enroll more girls in primary school, girls in many settings are more likely than boys to repeat classes or drop out of school altogether. The data on access does not provide information on which children attend school regularly. The focus on enrollment in schools must be expanded to give more attention to the quality and content of education, and the social structures that reinforce positive attitudes towards education for girls.

It is very clear that access to education is not automatically empowering for girls. The quality of education, its relevance to the individual and to society at large, the appropriateness of educational content and materials, and gender sensitive attitudes by teachers are critical factors ensuring that education contributes positively to the empowerment of girls.

Curricula, textbooks and other educational materials and teaching methods which are not gender-sensitive can significantly reduce the empowering potential of schools. Obsolete and gender-insensitive textbooks and teaching materials reproduce and exacerbate existing gender stereotypes. A gender-sensitive revision of educational curriculum would require, among other things, eliminating requirements that prevent girls and boys from choosing all available subjects and specializations and reviewing course plans, textbooks and other educational materials to eliminate messages that reproduce sexist stereotypes or do not provide a balanced portrayal of the skills and functions of men and women, deleting discriminatory language and images, and providing positive illustrations of gender equality and the role and contributions of women as well as men.

Even when school enrollment is free of charge, education carries hidden costs, which may lead families to take the decision to reduce education options for girls. These hidden costs, which include school uniforms, textbooks, and transportation to and from school, are often substantial and can prevent poor families from sending their girls to school.

Security is a key issue in relation to access and retention of girls in school. Many girls experience harassment and violence on their way to and from school, as well as in

the school environment itself. Policies of zero tolerance for violence against girls, provision of appropriate sanitation and recreational facilities, and securing of safe routes to and from school are critical. The threat of harassment violates girls' human rights. In creating a girl friendly environment in schools, it is important to engage boys (as students) and men (as fathers and teachers) in questioning traditional gender norms and holding men and boys accountable for discrimination and violence against girls in the school setting.

The lack of sanitation facilities in the school is an important factor in the hesitancy of some parents to send their girls to school, especially once they reach adolescence. Unfortunately this serious constraint is not always given adequate attention. Many schools have no separate facilities at all for girls or very poor or unsafe facilities. This contributes to absenteeism and the high drop-out rates of girls in some countries.

Providing schools in local communities is an effective measure to reduce security concerns and increase girls' enrollment. In creating a girl friendly environment in schools it is also important to increase the recruitment of women teachers. With proper training and motivation, women teachers can serve as positive mentors for girls. However not all teachers – even women - are automatically good mentors. Both women and men teachers need special capacity building to develop understanding of the challenges girls face in the school setting and ways to support them.

The heavy burden of household work borne by girls has been highlighted as a serious obstacle to both access to and achievement levels in education. Various measures have been identified as critical in addressing these obstacles, including the establishment of day care centres and pre-schools for the children or younger siblings of students and improving the supply of accessible water or fuel. Other measures, such as flexible schedules, double sessions, and evening school hours have been introduced in some countries to enable girls to pursue an education while assuming household responsibilities. A largely unexplored solution is promoting a more equitable division of household tasks among girls and boys.

Education alone, without changes to values, attitudes, stereotypes in society, will not bring about positive change for girls. Societal attitudes, particularly those which question the value of education for girls, can significantly detract from the empowering potential of education. Advocacy efforts must be focused on families, communities and leadership at all levels, including in informal institutions. Both mothers and fathers should be actively engaged in supporting education for girls. There are positive examples of efforts to engage parents, community leaders, and religious leaders in support of girls' education. One critical group in this work is Parliamentarians. Greater efforts should be made to inform and engage them in work on girls' education, both at national level and globally through the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

There has been a tendency to see education as the panacea for improving the situation of girls. While increased access to education at all levels is critical, it is, however, also important to recognize that education is a necessary but insufficient condition for equality and empowerment. Education must translate into opportunities for

girls, in employment and other areas. This is not automatic. In some regions while considerable progress has been made, and girls both out-number and out-perform boys in different levels of education, similar progress has not been made in securing access to employment and participation in decision-making.

More concerted efforts are needed to break down the persistent sex-segregation in education, which is reflected in the horizontal segregation in employment, with certain professions and areas of work dominated by women and others by men. Creative means to ensure that girls access science and technology, mathematics and information and communication technologies are needed (as will be discussed in the following section). In a similar manner, greater efforts must also be made to encourage boys to choose social sciences, humanities and languages. This will require changes in curricula, educational materials, teacher training and training of career guidance counselors. The efforts made in the educational system must then be backed by measures in the labour market to motivate and back-up the shifts in subject specializations at school.

Priority areas of science and technology

In a number of areas special efforts are needed to ensure that girls do not lag behind boys in accessing quality education and miss critical opportunities for professional and career development. In an age of rapidly developing technology, it is important that girls have equal access to and benefits of education on science and technology. Evidence shows, however, that girls in all parts of the world are less motivated to pursue studies in science and technology and have lower achievement levels in these areas than boys, owing to low expectations and stereotypical attitudes. In some cases, this is partly a result of vocational guidance which builds on prevailing gender stereotypes on the roles of women and men. The limited participation of girls in science and technology education can have serious implications on the professional and career development of girls and young women.

Encouraging girls to pursue disciplines which have traditionally been dominated by men, such as engineering, is an important means to facilitate their empowerment. Training teachers in gender-sensitivity, revising textbooks to include women scientists as role models and mentors and setting up science camps and coaching are some of the measures developed to enhance girls' potential in science and technology. In some countries pro-active initiatives have been undertaken to increase girls' enrollment in technical courses at secondary or tertiary levels. For example, pre-science programmes have been provided for girls who may fall short of university admission criteria but who simply need a little extra tuition and support to take up the challenge of science at university level.

In the information society it is also critical that girls have equal access to opportunities to participate in and benefit from the new information and communication technologies. (ICT) Evidence shows, however, that fewer girls than boys access and use ICT, and girls continue to be underrepresented in ICT courses, computer clubs and ICT-based careers. Information and communication technologies provide unique opportunities

for girls' empowerment by improving access to information on health, nutrition, education, and other human development opportunities. They also create new opportunities for social interaction, including peer and bottom-up communication. Strategies and action plans are needed at all levels to ensure equal access to and benefits of ICT, starting from an early age.

Recent initiatives on girls' education

To accelerate the implementation of the internationally-agreed commitments on girls' education, the United Nations Secretary-General, launched the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) in 2000. UNGEI is a 10 year initiative involving collaboration between the United Nations system, governments, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and communities and families. It is aimed at raising awareness and generating support nationally, regionally and internationally for the education of girls. UNGEI is committed to accelerating action on girls' education by advocating for and promoting the broad social mobilization and high-level political action needed to ensure that all girls go to school.

UNGEI provides stakeholders with a platform for action and galvanizes their efforts to get girls into schools. Among other things, it works for the removal of barriers to girls' access, such as school fees and other education costs. It advocates for investment in education across the life cycle, addressing early childhood development and education for children of poor families, as well as literacy and empowerment. UNGEI has a strong focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged girls, for example through ensuring access of girls to education in emergency situations.

A Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, under the auspices of the United Nations Millennium Project, identified the key constraints to meeting the MDG on education by 2015 and presented recommendations for overcoming the obstacles. As well as highlighting the obstacles faced in promoting increased education of girls, the taskforce made some interesting findings and recommendations.

The taskforce noted that while much of the focus remains on girls' access to and achievements in primary education, there is increased concern on the situation of girls in secondary education. Enrollment ratios for girls in secondary education are low in most regions. For example, the Taskforce estimated female secondary enrollment rate as 47.1 percent in South Asia and 29.7 percent in Sub Saharan Africa. The taskforce came to the conclusion – viewed by some as somewhat contentious since the goal of universal primary education has yet to be achieved in many parts of the world - that post-primary education has the greatest pay-offs for the empowerment of women and girls. Higher levels of education makes it possible for women to access a wide range of opportunities. The labor-market return of post-primary education of women and girls is estimated to be higher than that of primary education, increasing their rate of participation in formal sectors. Secondary education was also found to have significant effects on the reduction of mortality and fertility rates, and on the protection of health and physical integrity of women and girls.

The taskforce also undertook the challenging task of estimating the costs of addressing gender inequality in different areas. Estimates indicated that the basic objective of universal primary education is not affordable at the current level of financial investment in education in developing countries. Since the bulk of the costs are for recurrent expenditure, the challenge goes far beyond the initial physical investment, which what is usually financed with the assistance of external aid. An important implication for Governments is that, apart from the need for increased financial resources for education of girls, there is also an urgent need for institutional reforms and increased efficiency in the educational system. From the point of view of the international community, there is a need for increased technical assistance, with more effective gender-sensitive implementation of such assistance, and a strengthened focus on regions where there are serious constraints to implementation of the MDG3, in particular Sub-Saharan Africa. There must also be a stronger focus on groups of girls at high risk of discrimination, such as girls from poor households, in early marriages, living in rural areas, in domestic service, belonging to an ethnic minority, having a disability or living in a region affected by or recovering from conflict.

Two studies submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session in 2006 - the report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children and the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women - drew attention to violence faced by girls in the educational context. Both studies pointed to the fact that girls are vulnerable to violence and harassment from both teachers and fellow students. The study on violence against women also drew attention to new and emerging forms of violence including "date rape", stalking, and internet and cell-phone violence which can occur in school settings.

Most recently, the Commission on the Status of Women, at its 51st session in March 2007, highlighted the steps to be taken to improve girls' education in its agreed conclusions on the "Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child". The Commission urged Governments to, inter alia, promote gender-sensitive and empowering processes and teaching materials; ensure safe, supportive and girl-friendly school environments; develop livelihood skills programmes to reach girls who are not enrolled in formal education programmes; ensure girls' access to training to develop their skills and capacities to exercise leadership; promote and support increased access of girls to ICT; and increase girls' ability to attend school and extra-curricular activities by investing in public infrastructure projects and services, such as transport, water, sanitation and sustainable energy, in order to reduce the domestic work burden for girls, while also working to change attitudes that reinforce the division of labour based on gender in order to promote shared family responsibility for work in the home and reduce.

The importance of gender mainstreaming

In discussing the need to accelerate implementation of the many commitments made on girls' education, I would like to raise the importance of more effectively utilizing the gender mainstreaming strategy. Gender mainstreaming is often forgotten,

misunderstood, misused and underestimated. It can be an extremely powerful tool if used strategically. It can facilitate the holding of critical actors accountable for the commitments made - governments, the United Nations, bilateral donors and NGOs.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified the need for a dual strategy in promoting equality between women and men, including in education – gender mainstreaming and activities specifically targeted at women and girls. Gender mainstreaming means systematically identifying and addressing gender perspectives – i.e. the situation of women and men, boys and girls, in terms of their needs, priorities, constraints and contributions - in order to influence plans, budgets, programmes and activities and ensure equitable involvement and benefits.

Gender mainstreaming aims to place gender equality issues at the centre of attention rather than on the sidelines. Targeted or separate specific activities are still needed to address the serious inequalities that exist. However targeted actions will never be sufficient. It is important to keep a focus on the mainstream discussion, as this is usually where the power and resources are concentrated. For example, in the context of this 5th Education International World Congress, the Women’s Caucus is critical for providing a space to identify gender equality issues. However, the gender mainstreaming strategy would require that the issues identified in this Caucus are then taken to the Congress itself in an effort to influence the overall outcomes. The gender mainstreaming strategy would similarly require the other caucuses and meetings on the sidelines of the main Congress, for example those on Indigenous Peoples and on Higher Education, should also raise relevant gender equality issues.

I raise the importance of the gender mainstreaming strategy because of the continued tendency to see attention to women and girls in many areas as a “special interest” issue rather than as a central concern. Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is not about “special interests” but is a matter of ensuring human rights and eliminating discrimination. Women and girls, in education as in all other areas, do not want special attention but want assured rights and non-discrimination - equality in access, quality and appropriateness of content, and both short- and long-term benefits.

Future opportunities for accelerating change

Action is needed at national level to ensure equality in access to and benefits from education for girls. However, work at national level can be supported by processes at global level. It is important to be aware of the key processes of relevance and importance for girls’ education and to use these strategically. To keep girls’ education visible on the global agenda, it is necessary to ensure that your organization is represented at important meetings, to prepare brief overviews of the issues you want to push for, to lobby key

organizations and individual delegates, and to organize panels or workshops as parallel events. Keeping abreast of and working to influence global processes can make a difference at national level, not least in terms of knowing exactly what specific commitments governments have made at national level and working to hold them accountable.

There are a number of forthcoming key opportunities for advocating for acceleration of change in the area of girls' education. These include the follow-up processes to the outcomes of the Commission on the Status of Women, Security Council resolution 1325, the UN studies on violence against women and violence against children and the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The fact that the Commission on the Status of Women focused on girls' education in its consideration of the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls at its last session provides new entry-points for action. The Commission increasingly highlights the importance of implementation of its recommendations at national level and the sharing of experiences, lessons learned and good practices. Under its new working methods, adopted in 2006, the Commission will come back to review implementation of its agreed conclusions two to three years after their adoption. As a result, around 2010 the Commission will again consider the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls. It will therefore be important that all stakeholders have made concerted efforts to implement the recommendations of the Commission in all areas covered in the agreed conclusions, including girls' education, and can report back on achievements as well as gaps and challenges. NGOs and other stakeholders could play a key role by preparing statistics and materials for this review to keep the issue of girls' education high on the agenda of the Commission. In addition, it would be extremely useful to highlight the issue of girls' education at the forthcoming Commissions rather than waiting for the specific review by, for example, holding parallel events on girls' education at the Commission in 2008 and 2009. UNICEF has been encouraged to do the same and it may be possible for UNICEF and NGOs and other stakeholders, such as Education International, to collaboratively organize highly visible events on girls' education at forthcoming sessions of the Commission.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also provides important opportunities to bring strategic attention to girls' education. Members of Educational International could use the opportunity of States parties reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to raise critical issues. NGOs prepare shadow report to ensure critical issues are adequately covered in the constructive dialogue the Committee holds with the reporting States party. Collaboration with NGOs in this work could provide an entry-point for getting information on girls' education to the Committee.

The concluding comments of the Committee - where they give specific attention to gaps and challenges in relation to girls' education - also provide an important entry-point. The concluding comments are a tailored set of recommendations for the countries

reporting to the Committee which highlight the specific priority actions required to ensure the implementation of both the Convention and the Platform for Action. All stakeholders are encouraged to use these concluding comments much more effectively in work at national level. NGOs and other stakeholders can also play a critical role in following up and calling for accountability in this regard.

Other follow-up processes focused on national level which can afford opportunities for bringing increased attention to girls' education include the MDG national reporting process and the follow-up to Poverty Reduction Strategies. Two elements are important in these processes – ensuring greater focus on the inequality in education as an obstacle to achieving the MDGs and eliminating poverty and highlighting the importance of consultation with and participation of women in these processes as decision-makers and as stakeholders.

In addition, the focus on reconstruction and rehabilitation in post-conflict countries in the follow-up to Security Council resolution 1325 provides an important entry-point for girls' education. The enhanced attention to violence against women and violence against children in the follow-up to the studies prepared by the Secretary-General and the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly also afford enhanced opportunities to address the problem of sexual harassment and abuse in school environments and the security risks that reduce the interest of parents in some parts of the world in sending their girls to school.

Let me also mention briefly the importance of the priority theme of the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2008: “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women”. The Commission will consider the extent to which, and the ways in which, Governments, international organizations and other actors have matched policy commitments on gender equality with resource allocations. This will cover a wide range of issues – public finance management, including gender-responsive budgets; ODA from multilateral and bilateral sources; and new and innovative sources of funding, including funds and foundations, and particularly women's funds for women. The discussion will also focus on gaps and challenges in relation to funding the work in international organizations, in national machineries for the advancement of women at national level, as well as through the women's movement. The consideration of this theme will actively engage a wide range of stakeholders – Member States, the UN, bilateral organizations, regional banks, the private sector, the funds and foundations, and women's groups and networks. It will be important to consider how the critical issues relating to financing for girls' education, particularly in the context of achievement of the MDGS, can be raised strategically at this important meeting next February/March.

I will also take the opportunity to inform you of the priority theme for the 53rd session of the Commission in 2009, as this is also extremely relevant for your work. The theme will be: “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.” The Beijing Platform for Action explicitly recognized that equality between women and men and the empowerment of women is significantly constrained by the unequal sharing of responsibilities in the home, including

caring roles. Women's access to education and employment, their potential for involvement in decision-making positions in the public sphere, and their opportunities for recreation and sport are hindered by persistent stereotypical attitudes and practices regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men. It will be critical for Education International to be actively involved in these discussions.

Conclusion: Accelerating closure of the gap between policy and implementation.

In conclusion, we certainly know enough today about the seriousness of the situation and the long-term negative consequences of the continued discrimination against girls in education for themselves, their families, their communities and for societies overall. As long as girls continue to comprise the majority of out-of-school children at all levels, and their needs for quality education remain unmet, the MDGs and the Education for All Goals are at risk. And unless the constraints to girls fully utilizing the benefits of education they do receive in accessing employment and other opportunities at all levels, the achievement of sustainable human development will not be not possible.

We also know very well what needs to be done to move forward. New policies and normative standards on girls' education are not what is most needed; what is urgently needed is implementation of the commitments already made and reiterated many times over the past few decades. As was noted in the ten-year review of implementation of the Platform for Action in 2005, implementation must be accelerated to close the gap between global commitments and national realities.

Perhaps what has been missing most in the past has been the explicit acknowledgement that the inequalities girls face in education are human rights violations and unacceptable discrimination as well as the real political commitment to change, reflected in clear strategies and action plans backed by adequate resources and accountability mechanisms. The role of all stakeholders is critical in monitoring progress in implementation of global commitments to girls' education at national level and advocating for accelerated change processes.

As noted in *We the Peoples*, the groundbreaking report to the Millennium Assembly in 2000, there can be no significant or sustainable transformation in societies – and no lasting reduction in global poverty – until girls receive the basic quality education they deserve and take their rightful place as equal partners in development.
