



Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.

PO Box 90, Nedlands, WA, 6909

www.afgw.org.au

Submission from the Australian Federation of Graduate Women on the Australian Government's priorities for the 58th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2014

AFGW endorses the statement to the Commission on the Status of Women by the International Federation of University Women (IFUW). This statement has been adapted from the IFUW statement.

The Right to Education

The Australian Federation of Graduate Women is committed to girls' and women's access to and retention in all levels of education up to post-secondary and tertiary education especially and including the retention of girls and women from the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

The right to education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Girls and women need education about their rights and responsibilities. If they are to take their place in society and to achieve their fullest potential it is essential that they have access to all levels of education including tertiary education and enable them to make the fullest possible contributions to society in return.

Access to Quality Secondary Education for Girls – beyond the Millennium Goals

Access to quality secondary and tertiary education for women and girls is a basic human right and one of the most effective strategies for the achievement of equality for women and girls. While significant progress has been made towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 – education at the primary level, barriers remain to the achievement of the elimination of gender discrimination in secondary education (MDG3).

At its 31st Triennial Conference in Istanbul, Turkey (August 2013), IFUW delegates, including representatives of AFGW, reaffirmed support for the 'Right to safe access to education for all girls and women' and voiced particular concern for areas of the world which required immediate focus and attention. A further resolution urged governments to collaborate with Indigenous leaders to provide designated educational funding to create a system of affordable, quality education.

Science and Technology

AFGW also strongly supports greater participation by women and girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) throughout the educational pathways. In many countries the doors to STEM education remain firmly shut to women and girls. Yet these areas of study represent the key components of today's technological society. AFGW calls on the Australian Government to encourage all governments represented the 58th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women to ensure that girls and women are supported to undertake STEM subjects for the benefit their own career development, and for the benefit of their communities and national economies.

Attracting girls to STEM subjects is a first step, but it must not be the last. The elimination of gender-based discrimination including sexual harassment of women in STEM employment must be a priority if women are to be attracted to, and remain engaged in, STEM careers. AFGW calls on the Australian Government to address this issue as a matter of urgency.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGS)

Progress on MDG 2 - 'Achieve universal primary education' slowed from 2007 as a result of the global economic downturn; it is unlikely that access to universal primary education will be achieved by 2015. The goal - 'Promote gender equality and empower women' (MDG 3) is even less likely to be achieved as a result of global fiscal

constraints. AFGW calls on the Australian Government to extend their initiatives for the education of girls and women beyond 2015, and to urge all UN member states to do likewise.

Quality Secondary Education for Girls

The World Forum on Education (Dakar, 2000) established six education goals and included an explicit reference to achieving secondary education for girls. In 2013, demand for secondary education is soaring thanks to the higher primary education completion rates. However, the 2012 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Global Monitoring Report estimated that 71 million adolescents should be in secondary school.

Of the estimated 130 million young people who do not attend school, 70 per cent are girls. In 19 African countries the secondary school completion rate for adolescent girls is below 5 per cent. During the economic downturn girls have been the first to be withdrawn from school. Girls have other barriers to school attendance including unsafe school access and hostile school environments that do not take into account their specific needs as girls and women, as well as traditional and cultural practices that prevent their fullest participation. Gender-based violence is a major barrier to girl's and women's education. AFGW calls on the Australian Government to extend initiatives for the education of vulnerable girls and women; in particular, but not exclusively, Indigenous girls and women beyond 2015, and to urge all UN member states to do likewise.

What is at Stake?

Girls who enter adulthood without basic literacy and numeracy skills are more vulnerable to poverty, hunger, violence and abuse, exploitation and trafficking, HIV / AIDS and maternal mortality. Even when enrolled at school, many cannot learn because of unsuitable school buildings, unsanitary conditions or lack of educational resources such as textbooks and qualified female teachers. Disabled, ethnic, refugees and Indigenous women and girls, and those with language or significant cultural differences, may face significant barriers to learning and suffer disproportionately and dropout rates are high.

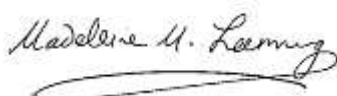
AFGW calls upon the Australian Government to encourage UN member states to develop alternative forms of education, for example those based on new technologies, which will allow women and girls displaced from the system to complete their education informally. In doing so, we draw the attention of the Australian Government to the advocacy handbook on girls' education produced by IFUW in 2010, *The Multi-faceted Right to Education*. The handbook is available from the IFUW website: <http://www.ifuw.org/resources/publications/ea-handbook/>

Measuring Achievement

Quality disaggregated data about women and girls and their involvement in the technologies of the future is essential to measure progress more accurately in the post 2015 world and to assist policy makers in making intelligent decisions about the allocation of educational resources.

Current data from most countries focuses primarily on numbers of students enrolled.

There is an urgent need to assess the quality of the learning environment and what is being taught and learned in classrooms, while to be useful in assessing the effectiveness of programmes for women and girls, this data must be in a sex disaggregated form. This will give a more accurate picture of the situation as a whole. While governments should consult the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as to the most useful data to collect for international comparison purposes, key headings will include school enrolment and attendance, learning and achievement, literacy and numeracy, course completion rates and transitioning to the next education level. Information on the numbers and distribution of teachers and their salaries will be useful. AFGW calls on the Australian Government to report relevant, disaggregated data to the ILO, to encourage the governments of all UN member nations to do likewise, and to make this data readily available.



Dr Madeleine Laming President