



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
25 August 2021

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

### Forty-eighth session

13 September–1 October 2021

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Beijing NGO Association for International Exchanges, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2021]

---

\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## Improving Education for Women to Promote Social development

As one of the activities to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the awarding ceremony of the “July 1 Medal” was held on June 29th in Beijing to honor the outstanding members who had made remarkable contributions to the country. One of the medal recipients was Ms. Zhang Guimei, principal of Huaping Girls Senior High School in Lijiang, Yunnan Province. She has devoted herself to promoting female education in the poverty-stricken rural area of Yunnan for 46 years. She is also the founder of the first senior high school to provide free education for rural girls in China. Thanks to her efforts, nearly 2,000 girls have been admitted to universities or colleges and have their life trajectories changed.

In her speech at the awarding ceremony, Ms. Zhang explained why she decided to found the girls’ high school. “I visited numerous needy families and it was heartbreaking to see so many girls dropped out of school because of poverty.” She realized that the root cause to poverty and backwardness in poor areas is lack of education, in particular, education for girls. She then determined to devote her life to educating girls. Over the past 12 years, she has visited more than 1,600 households in the impoverished mountainous areas and tried her best to make a difference in the life of these girls. In China, there are many teachers like Zhang Guimei who have dedicated themselves to improving female education.

Women’s education is a yardstick for measuring the progress of society. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, our government valued women’s education highly by taking it as an important task to protect women’s rights and promote women’s all-round development. The past 72 years have witnessed the tremendous progress in women’s education. The illiteracy rate of women in China has dropped from over 90% in the 1950s to 7.3% in 2017.

The achievements made in the past three decades on the education for women are particularly shown in the number of women attending universities. In 1949, female accounted for only 19.7% of college students in China. By 1980, this number was 23.4%. But by 2019, 51.7% of college students were women, surpassing the proportion of male students. Also in 2019, the proportion of female graduate students increased by 33 percentage points, compared to that of 1985. I am from the University of Science and Technology Beijing, famous for Materials Science and Metallurgy. When I joined the University in 1993, there were very few girls in such engineering majors as Materials Science. Sometimes there were only one or two girls in a class. However, now, the proportion of girls majoring in Materials Science reached 30%, and there are many women faculty members in the Schools of Materials Science in our University.

Sound education boosted women’s overall literacy in China, and knowledge brings them the opportunity and ability to make their due contribution to social development. When talking about the girls’ senior high school, Zhang Guimei said: “An educated woman can break the cycle of generational poverty.” As a teacher and also a beneficiary of China’s efforts on female education, I totally agree with her. I came from a family in a small county of Henan Province, which is in the central part of China. My father received only primary education and my mother went to elementary school and junior high school with government support. It is this precious experience of education that gave her remarkable vision about how to raise her children. She and my father gave their full support for the education of me and my siblings. As the oldest daughter in the family, I was admitted to Guangzhou Institute of Foreign Languages for my bachelor’s degree. Afterwards, I received two master’s degrees and PhD degree from Beijing Foreign Studies University and Leeds University, respectively. I am currently working in the University of Science and Technology Beijing, being a professor and dean of the School of Foreign Studies, and the Chair of the Discipline of Foreign Language and Literature in my university. The education I received not only changed my fate, but also that of my children. I pay high attention to their education and support them fully to finish their higher education. One of them is working in fashion industry and the other is about to start his PhD program in law.

The high-quality education has given Chinese female intellectuals great opportunities to serve the country and fulfill their personal dreams. Dr. Tu Youyou, the first woman scientist of China to win the Nobel Prize of medicine, had led her team to discover artemisinin and made remarkable contributions to the health of mankind. Similarly, at the forefront of China's response to the Covid-19 epidemic, we have not only the male scientists like Dr. Zhong Nanshan, but also Dr. Li Lanjuan, a woman academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and a septuagenarian who is working on the frontline in the fight against the epidemic.

Throughout history, every step of the development of women has contributed to the progress of human civilization. There is a well-known quote from Chairman Mao Zedong, "women can hold up half the sky", which is more than a reality now through empowering women in China. 2021 has witnessed a lot of challenges, and in this globalized world, Chinese women are ready to work together with women from all over the world, and contribute our wisdom and strength to building a better world.

---

University of Science and Technology Beijing, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.