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

Written statement* submitted by International Institute for Non-Aligned Studies, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

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

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



Girls' Education – a global strategic development priority

While talking of gender disparity, has anyone ever wondered what it looks like?¹ Well, it is women constituting a major lot of all illiterate people in the world, it is less women being the world leaders, also, it is women working long hours than men but being paid less, it is also being labelled with phrases like “get married and have children”, it is not being given a choice to choose their life partners and sometimes dying in childbirth. Stigmatizing the males of the society with phrases like “man up” and teaching them to not show any emotions or cry their heart out – this is gender inequality that the world needs to battle with. There’s still a long list to what gender disparity actually looks like. Giving one gender the control and power creates a big problem and unfortunately, this has become ‘normal’ to us and has been engraved in our mindset. On papers, gender inequality is a long list of similar evidences showing the major imbalance of power between the men and the women but in real terms, it is a major challenge at local, national and global levels.

The modern-day world gives everyone, irrespective of their class, creed or gender the right to vote. But would it be enough to build a world that is just and equitable for women of the society? Actually, no. Even though women enjoy their voting rights in this just and fair world, their most of the fundamental rights somehow remain a matter of concern. The modern-day world we live in, takes women and their contributions for granted, which is a matter of concern and needs a redressal at the lead. A lot has been achieved in recent history on the path to gender equality but there’s still a long way to go to ensure equal participation and voice for women.

Investment in education transforms personalities and when invested for all, it transforms communities, nations and the entire world. It is this education that carves out path of development for individuals to build better future for themselves and their families and strengthens economies as a whole.

While education has not been much of a challenge for the male members of the society, it, on the other hand, has been a major concern for the females. Getting girls into school is just the tip of the iceberg. Their education goes beyond it and needs much of the efforts. Women’s education is about ensuring that they learn in a healthy environment while feeling safe at school, ensuring that they have the opportunity to complete all levels of education, giving them the knowledge and skills to compete in the labour market and earn higher incomes, making them learn the socio-emotional and life skills to adapt to a changing world and contribute, based on their adaptations, to their communities and the world and make their own decisions about their own lives.

Educated women tend to be more informed about socio-economic challenges in the society. It makes them more informed about family planning and having fewer children, nutrition and healthcare, marrying at an age when mentally and physically prepared. Everything that education seeks to promote in women, leads to an upliftment in their households, communities and countries. Their education strengthens economies and contributes to more stable and resilient societies that give all, the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations to prove their potential. Today, more girls than ever go to school.² As we look back at decades of extraordinary efforts, we see the gender gap in education bridging and closing, we also see a majority of girls worldwide completing primary schools and staying in school for longer than ever before. In short, the school life expectancy of girls is on the rise. Despite such a growth and progress and these gains, girls continue to face multiple barriers based on their gender. Despite being a strategic development priority, the education of girls remains constrained due to poverty, poor infrastructure, violence and fragility and cultural norms and practices.

Even though the statistics have improved, nearly one in four girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are reported to be neither in education nor employed nor in training.³ This might be because of a variety of reasons including, safety, hygiene and sanitation needs or other barriers restricting them from regularly attending class. In early childhood, the gender

¹ <https://www.gvi.co.uk/blog/why-is-gender-equality-important/>.

² <https://www.right-to-education.org/girlswomen>.

³ <https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality>.

disparities start out small. Girls have higher survival rates and are just as likely to take part in preschool. Girls tend to outshine boys as they reach secondary school but with the onset of adolescence, there come heightened barriers to their well-being. Gender norms and discrimination fuel the risk of malnutrition, HIV and AIDS and unwanted pregnancy, which further increase the risk of gender-based violence and subjects them to child marriage and female genital mutilation - some of the internationally recognized human rights violations.

And now the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has further resulted in prolonged school closures with limited access to learning opportunities.⁴ The situation has for the deteriorate and putting many at a risk of not returning to schools once they reopen. Research shows that there is likely to be an increase in dropout rates of girl students while a large portion of girls are likely to not return to school. Today, around 129 million girls are out of school of which 32 million are primary school age, 30 million lower secondary school age and 67 million upper secondary school age.⁵ Their responsibilities in terms of household work have increased during the school closures, leaving them with minimal time for studying. Not only this, with the closure of the schools and quarantines enforced, has been increase in more sexual violence and exploitation.

To cut a long story short, women need to be educated to reduce the risk of infant mortality to save millions of lives⁶ to reduce maternal deaths to improve child nutrition to reduce child marriages and teen pregnancies to bridge the gap between men and women in the society. Looking at the current statistics, the world has grown to a progressed place but there is still a long way to go.⁷ Today, women constitute a larger share of healthcare and social workers across the globe. Women have embarked on path of self-realization and have contributed to advance the world. Thus, it becomes our responsibility to let her bloom, let her develop because she is here not to be pleasing but to changing the lives around. We should not lose the sight of our goal in achieving gender equality and the upliftment of women. We should make this a base of our overall effort to tackle this challenge and come out stronger in the face of adversities, then only can the world be a better place to live in.

⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>.

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>.

⁶ <https://www.concern.net/news/why-is-gender-equality-important>.

⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2020/04/13/gender-equality-why-it-matters-especially-in-a-time-of-crisis>.