



Statement submitted by IFUW to the 2011 High Level of ECOSOC

Breaking the Gendered Barriers to Secondary Education

1. Education is a human right that is fundamental to the achievement of so many other human rights, the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals and commitments. If we are to achieve the goals of equality between men and women, it is essential that boys and girls have equal access to education at all levels. While much has been achieved in providing access to universal primary education in the past decade, eliminating gender disparity in primary and especially secondary education is far from being achieved.
2. In too many developing countries, large numbers of girls are failing to access post-primary education, and in some countries the rates are actually dropping. If women and girls are to achieve their full potential, action and resources must be expanded to ensure that they remain in school through the secondary level.
3. Where secondary education is not free or schools are inaccessible, the preference will be for boys to be educated rather than girls. Girls are more often expected to remain at home looking after siblings and household chores or helping to augment family income. Negative school environments also contribute to dropout rates for girls, with a range of factors from gender bias in teaching, curricula that are not relevant to girls' lives, threats of sexual violence and harassment, to the lack of hygienic facilities.
4. Where girls do have access to quality secondary education on a par with boys, they often out-achieve their male counterparts. Without this access, their life options, access to higher education and access to employment are limited.
5. To ensure equal access to quality education for girls, particularly at the secondary level, strategies must be introduced to overcome the barriers. These include financial incentives, reducing distances to schools, recruiting qualified female teachers, eliminating gender bias from textbooks and teaching, creating safer school environments, providing better hygienic facilities, and organizing counseling and mentoring schemes.
6. Girls should be encouraged to study science, engineering and technology (SET) subjects, particularly mathematics which is a prerequisite to open doors to careers in economics and technology and to choose SET higher education tracks and careers, with successful role models identified as mentors.
7. Access to life skills and comprehensive sexuality education, in a manner consistent with their evolving capacities, should be provided for both boys and girls at all levels to enable them to deal positively and responsibly with their sexuality in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.
8. To ensure effective and ongoing evaluation, gender-disaggregated data must be available in every country to measure and promote progress.
9. With the growing consensus that secondary schooling for girls can accelerate development, it is an investment for the future we cannot afford to miss.