



Joint Oral Statement by the International Federation of University Women and the International Planned Parenthood Federation to the Annual Ministerial Review of the United Nations Economic and Social Council

6 July 2011

I speak on behalf of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) with the full endorsement of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). We welcome the focus of this Annual Ministerial Review. A new agenda of investment in education, especially secondary education for girls, could be the catalyst for achieving the MDGs and sustainable social and economic development.

Recognition that education is crucial for the empowerment of young people, especially young women and girls, however, is not enough. We must also ensure that the necessary political will and financial resources are available to enable all to enjoy their fundamental human right to education and that the education they receive, prepares them for their future lives.

Investing in human potential advances many development goals including those of health and gender equality. Evidence shows that educated women have more options which gives them more control over their lives.

Poverty puts girls at a distinct disadvantage in terms of education. In the poorest households, approximately twice as many girls of secondary-school age are out of school compared to their wealthier peers.ⁱ Evidence suggests that girls not in formal education have their first sexual experience and first child early and are more likely to be poor and forced into early marriage, or coerced into sex. They are more likely to leave school early, to have little or no knowledge of sexuality, reproduction or HIV. They are, therefore, more likely to be at risk without access to contraception or health services, and to have too many children too close together.

Globally, too many adolescent girls will not complete secondary educationⁱⁱ as many leave school early to help support their families. Girls under the age of 16 make up more than 90 per cent of the global domestic work force, and out of 130 million out-of-school young people, 70 per cent are girlsⁱⁱⁱ. In 19 African countries, the secondary school completion rate for adolescent girls is below 5 per cent. A survey of governments' reports on human rights treaties showed that early marriage, pregnancy and unpaid work including care-giving were the greatest obstacles to girls' education.

Conversely, educated women usually have their first sexual experience later, their first child later and fewer children who as a result are often healthier and better educated. Each year of secondary schooling increases girl's future wages by 10 to 20 per cent^{iv}.

We believe that Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) involving human rights, HIV prevention, gender equality, sexuality and active citizenship is a crucial part of formal and informal education and that universal access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education is an essential component of any successful strategy for promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equity and development. Comprehensive Sexuality Education should not be focused solely on health outcomes but, should give young people life and critical thinking skills to become active, positive citizens in their communities and nations.



We urge governments, both from developing countries and also those countries that provide development assistance, to ensure that policies and programmes are put in place and that the necessary financial resources are provided to ensure that girls can enjoy full access to secondary education that incorporates as part of the curriculum, comprehensive sexuality education. Measures must, however, be taken to ensure that girls can go to school safely and not be subjected to sexual or other forms of violence.

Such access and retention in secondary education will help enable girls to go on to higher education or further training, to find gainful employment and to remove themselves from the poverty trap in which they will otherwise have to live.

ⁱ The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010, p21, UNDESA June 2010

ⁱⁱ United Nations Adolescent Girls Task Force – Adolescent Girls Hold the Key to the Future, March 2010

ⁱⁱⁱ. Human Rights Watch, “Promises Broken: An Assessment of Children’s Rights on the 10th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,” www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp/promises/education.html [December 1999].

^{iv} United Nations Adolescent Girls Task Force – Adolescent Girls Hold the Key to the Future, March 2010