

GIRLS' RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

Action for Girls

Newsletter of the NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on Girls (WGG) and its International Network for Girls (INFG).

Girls Stand Up!



Girls Stand Up! will be an exciting opportunity for girls who are attending the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in February. This orientation day, on February 20, at Pace University in Manhattan, is designed to introduce the girls to the workings of the CSW, and give them an opportunity to become familiar with the themes of the meeting this year and to develop advocacy skills to bring to the work of the CSW.



In addition, we are pleased to welcome our keynote speaker, Madame Michelle Bachelet, the head of UN Women, the new entity that will oversee all of the UN programs that promote women's rights and full participation in global affairs. Bachelet is the former president of Chile.



After a series of workshops, the participants will also hear Leymah Roberta Gbowee, the Executive Director of Women, Peace and Security Network in Ghana, Africa. Ms Gbowee is the subject of the award-winning documentary, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, which chronicles the successful efforts

of the women in Liberia to end their country's civil war through non-violent protest at the stalled peace negotiations.

More information is available at http://www.girlsrights.org/Girls_Stand_Up.html

Eileen Reilly



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The WGG Recommendations

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- 2 Education is the right of every girl and the key to transforming her life and the life of her community.
- 3 Without access to quality education, women will continue to be denied equal access to decent work and
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Ensuring Safe Migration for Girls



The feminization of migration is being increasingly recognized and discussed. Many proposed strategies to help migrating women in vulnerable situations urge the adoption of a gender perspective in the creation of migration policies to protect women and to advance their status (*Integrating Migration Policies into development strategies for the benefit of all; Report of the Athens GFMD 2009*). But in the literature little attention is paid to the situation of girls in migration. If they are discussed at all, there is general agreement that girls are among the most vulnerable of migrants, but there is little reliable information about the size of the migrant girl population, few data and statistics to go on and very few gender and age specific solutions being proposed.

Migrant girls under the age of eighteen generally fall into four categories, defined by the primary purpose of travel: a) in search of opportunities, whether educational or employment related; b) for family reunion, to join family members who have already migrated; c) for survival, to escape family abuse, persecution, war, abject poverty; d) in the context of exploitation, including trafficking (*International Migration and Human Rights, Global Migration Group 2008, p.7*). Girls in the first two categories may have had some choice in the matter of migration, but those in the last two categories often have been forced to migrate against their will or have found themselves in a situation brutally different from the one they imagined they were choosing. Clearly, migration in forced situations is more difficult and

fraught with problems than migration undertaken by choice, and migrating with one's family is a far safer proposition than migrating alone.

In all situations, however, girls are especially vulnerable to the stresses and dangers of migration. Not knowing the language or the cultural norms of the receiving countries, they can become the victims of bullying, ridicule, open prejudice, hostility and exploitation, both economic and sexual. They may feel the loss of familiar surroundings, cultural ease and a supportive social and familial network. More dangerously, girls fleeing intolerable conditions like war, climate change and ecological disaster may be assaulted and trafficked along the way or find themselves in camps for displaced persons where they are often victimized by their so-called protectors (police, aid workers, other camp personnel and inmates) or vulnerable to attack when they leave the camp to search for firewood, water, or employment.

In all situations in which girls under the age of eighteen migrate, education and training are essential to ensure a good, healthy and productive outcome. Girls should learn the language of their receiving countries, acquire intellectual discipline, flexibility and social skills, know their rights and learn to advocate for themselves. They must know about and have access to appropriate health and counseling services. And they must be supported by intelligent public policies with clear gender perspectives based on sex- and age-aggregated data. These policies must avoid restrictive measures, apply to all migrants regardless of their immigration status, and zealously safeguard their human rights, in accordance with all relevant conventions regulating migrant treatment: CEDAW, the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the relevant ILO conventions, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To be safe and productive, migration should always be a free, unforced choice.

Eva Richter
- Main UN Representative, International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW International)

Learn more about the WGG at CSW 55 at:
http://www.girlsrights.org/CSW_55.html

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VGIF Promotes STEM



Being instructed by two engineering students

The Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund (VGIF), a member of the Working Group on Girls/NGO Committee on UNICEF, has funded projects for women and girls for 40 years. Many of these projects have supported education for girls in a variety of ways.

A number of projects have specifically dealt with empowering girls in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), including a project in the Philippines to create awareness of science and technology in island and barrio areas and another in Ghana to fund a platform for the Diagnostic Women's Movement for Science Development to break the perception that girls are not interested or well-suited to pursue science and mathematics.

But better you hear directly from the directors of the two projects in Fiji (Akanisi Kedrayayate) and India (Marcellina Sangina) funded by VGIF.

Fiji Association of Women Graduates (FAWG) Science Workshop Projects

In Fiji, the goal of the project was to make science more understandable and popular with girls living in Fiji's islands and remote country areas. Most of the girls living in these places come from Fijian villages where their parents are primarily subsistent farmers. Remote secondary schools have few laboratory facilities and are often without running water, electricity or gas that make it difficult to teach practical science.

Each of the three workshops brought one female science teacher

and one female student (14-16 years old) from 10 secondary schools to Suva, the capital city, for 5 days. The science and technology departments of the University of the South Pacific provided laboratories, where the participants carried out simple biology, chemistry and physics experiments and observed more complicated experiments demonstrated by female postgraduate students.

FAWG wanted to show that science can be taught using everyday examples and materials and to expose participants to the more complicated equipment used at the university. The participants were also guided around other scientific institutions in the University where they observed young men and women training and working in interesting scientific and technological jobs. We hope that this exposure to science and technology will inspire some of the girls to continue their science studies.

Auxilium Girls School (India)

Established in 2003, the Auxilium Girls School-Agartala is the first girls-only English medium school in Tripura, a northeastern state of India bordering Bangladesh. Auxilium educates girls irrespective of creed, culture and economic background.

Knowing the importance science experiments play in the learning of science, Auxilium Girls School felt the need to provide a well-equipped science laboratory for the girls. VGIF helped the school by funding the project.

The teaching of science with an experimental enquiry approach has already produced results. Last August, two of our students represented the school at a Science Exhibition organized by the Municipal Council and presented two models on "A scientific way of preserving ponds" and "The development of an alternative source of energy." Among 58 models representing 26 schools of the city, the model "A scientific way of preserving ponds," was judged the best and the chosen girl is being given the opportunity to compete at a higher level in the state.

Scientific experiments will nurture the capacity for inquiry and promote learning based on curiosity to know why things happen guiding the students to find the answers themselves. This method will help them develop important skills such as careful observation, reasoning, critical thinking, and the ability to justify existing knowledge. We greatly desire that our school be able to give good grounding in the scientific and technological education of girls. We believe that they have huge potential to contribute and make a positive impact in the sustainable development of our society.

Fay Kittelson
- Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund

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Doris Schapira, Founding Member of WGG, Retires



Doris Schapira, one of the founding members of the Working Group on Girls (WGG) in 1993 and the Main Observer at the UN for the U.S. League of Women Voters of the United States since 2000, has retired.

In the 1990s Schapira's career began at the UN where she met Bella Abzug. "I have taken my inspiration from Bella Abzug, who was a U.S. Congresswoman and never was afraid to speak out," she asserted. "Bella managed to get a place at the table for the NGOs, taught us how

to lobby and even from her wheelchair, right before her death, mentored young NGO'S and lobbied delegates. Through Bella Abzug's perseverance, things have changed."

Doris Schapira's involvement with the WGG came about because of the League of Women Voter's work for Children at Risk. Schapira and her close friend and colleague Margery Cohen felt that WGG answered those needs. Doris knew Mary Purcell, the first chair of WGG with Kate Katzki, through her activities at the UN.

Since then, Schapira has been a participant at many conferences and preparatory meetings. Finding a place for Girls on the International Agenda has been the most satisfying goal that she has seen implemented in her years of work at the United Nations. Her philosophy is "don't be afraid; things take time. Even if you think you might fail, you should try. Keep at it and there is no telling what the results will be." Her mentorship of many young people and new NGO representatives has been greatly appreciated.

This past year at the Commission on the Status of Women 54, Schapira co-chaired the side event on commercial sexual exploitation for the WGG

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Please address questions about the articles to the authors at

wggsgirlsrights.org Reprinting of articles is encouraged with credit given to *Action for Girls*. We welcome articles by NGOs.

Task Force to Protect Girls From Violence, a well-attended and important event. In addition, Schapira designed the WGG website and maintained it for many years.

WGG appreciates and thanks Doris Schapira for her invaluable work and dedication to increasing girls' visibility in the international arena.

Eleanor Schlesinger

- Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association

WGG Recommendationst cont.

full employment in all career fields.

By supporting the MDGs, the international community is committed to gender equality at all levels of education by 2015. We urge United Nations Member States to:

- **Undertake systematic reform of education** at all levels.
- **Enhance the scientific literacy** of girls by removing all barriers to science and technology education.
- **Invest in training** qualified teachers in gender-sensitive teaching methods so that they have high expectations for both girls and boys.
- **Empower women by increasing the participation of girls** in quality education, training, science, and technology.
- **Create educational environments that support girls' education** and training, especially in non-traditional fields such as science and technology.
- **Remove all barriers to education for girls** including school fees, discriminatory attitudes and curricula and ensure their safety both in travel to and from school as well as in the classroom.
- **Develop comprehensive national education strategies** that include dependable long term funding that ensures adequate education infrastructure and prioritizes girls' education.
- **Collect, analyze and disseminate data** disaggregated by sex, age, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity to create an inclusive gender perspective for planning, implementation and monitoring of government programs.
- **Launch public campaigns** to eliminate discrimination in the public and private spheres based on the notion of girls' inferiority and support positive attitudes and behaviors that encourage girls' full partnership in all areas of life.