

Action for Girls

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

The UN Community Celebrates International Day of the Girl



October 11, 2012 was the first UN International Day of the Girl since the day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly last December. The Working Group on Girls marked this special occasion with a number of events highlighting the importance

of girls: a breakfast at the Turkish Mission on October 4, the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) briefing, a panel discussion co-sponsored by the Mission of Brazil, and a twelve-day Virtual Summit involving girls in 26 countries.

Breakfast Launch

Ambassadors Apakan from Turkey and Rishchynski from Canada, representing two Member States who sponsored the UN Resolution for the Day of the Girl, spoke about the need for educating girls and preventing early marriage. Mr. John Hendra, Assistant Secretary-General, UN Women, stressed the strategic importance of the Day of the Girl Child coming at a time when the advancements for women are being rolled back worldwide and when we must advocate that women and girls be at the heart of the post-2015 agenda. Girl Advocate Christina Selby spoke for the WGG when she said that girls' right must become worldwide. Rima Salah, past Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, concluded the breakfast emphasizing all girls must be protected from gender-based violence.

DPI Briefing

The DPI Briefing, "The Girl Child: Protection from Harmful Practices, Violence, Exploitation and Abuse," brought attention

to the need to improve education for girls. After screening an excerpt from the film "To Educate a Girl," the Minister for the Status of Women in Canada, the Honorable Rona Ambrose noted that the sooner girls know their rights, the stronger they will become. In Canada the government has appointed a Youth Representative for the day's celebration and created the slogan: Strong Girls, Strong Canada.

Representing UNICEF, Ms. Changu Mannathoko, reminded us that it takes the world community to educate girls. Education grounded in gender equity gives girls the opportunity to talk about what they want, thus helping to end practices such as forced child marriage. UNICEF's programs, such as child-friendly schools, are based on girls having the right to be included in decision-making about their own lives.

Carol Smolenski, Executive Director of ECPAT-USA, said child marriage is often a camouflage for sexual exploitation of children. Too often traditional practices are allowed by governments, especially if children are seen as property. She mentioned the limitations of Article 1 of The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that does not make clear that a married child is not a woman. She stressed that, unfortunately, commercial sexual exploitation of children is common in the United States, too.

Ms. Raquel Evita Saraswati, an American Muslim activist who works with the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, focused on ending honor-based violence in Muslim countries. She urged both women and men to think how gender, body, sex and power impact our normal day.

The briefing ended with a spirited performance of "Trafficked" by Project Girl Performance Collective, comprised of young girls who use theater "to create a fearless space for girls 8 to 21 to write and perform their own work."

Panel Discussion

The WGG co-sponsored a panel discussion on "BEST PRACTICES: Preventing Child Exploitation at Major Events." Speakers provided insight on how businesses, governments, UN agencies and NGOs can work together to stop sexual trafficking of girls.

Joost Kooijmans, Special Assistant to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against

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Day of the Girl cont.

Children, discussed the work that they have done with Member States in developing legislation dealing with children's rights and safety, and implementing and measuring the effectiveness of these plans.

Abby Kuzma, Director & Chief Counsel of the Indiana Attorney General's Office, spoke about how they have coordinated with NGOs to identify trafficking crimes during Super Bowl 2012. Police, medical personnel and the judiciary were brought in to make arrests, present criminal evidence, prosecute the johns and traffickers and provide aid to the victims.

David Arkless, President of Corporate and Government Affairs of Manpower Inc., discussed his work with businesses and heads of state to abolish sexual trafficking. He stressed the importance of working to eliminate demand by having governments pass laws that criminalize anyone buying or enabling trafficking. Arkless talked also about the need to confront CEOs of businesses when such exploitation occurs.

Adrianna Telles, Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the UN, spoke about the efforts that Brazil has already undertaken to prevent child exploitation at the World Cup 2014. These build upon Brazil's existing legislation and experiences that they have had in hosting other major events, including Carnival.

UN Issues Two Reports Concerning Violence against Girls

The UN took advantage of the first ever International Day of the Girl, 11 October 2012, to raise concern about continued violence against girls worldwide. One report, "Protecting Children from Harmful Practices in Plural Legal Systems," was released by Marta Santos Pais, the Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence against Children, and Nurul, Plan International's Girl Ambassador from Indonesia, at a panel chaired by Ambassador Martins, Permanent Mission of Angola at the UN. The Report builds upon the 2006 World Report on Violence against Children, the International Expert Consultation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June 2012, and the work of the African Union and African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Throughout the world, countless numbers of girls and boys fall victim to harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, degrading initiation rites, breast ironing, son preference, acid attacks, stoning, honour killings, forced feeding and witchcraft rituals. Often violent in nature, these practices compromise the development and education of the child, leave serious and long lasting health and psychological consequences and may result in disability or death.

Virtual Summit

When the United Nations declared October 11 the first International Day of the Girl, Girl Advocate Christina Selby said "girls everywhere felt a sense of excitement and hope. WGG wanted to make certain that girls everywhere would be included, in addition to making girls' issues visible to delegates and Member States. To do this the Day of the Girl Virtual Summit (www.dayofthegirlsummit.com) was established." The website allowed girls to post directly onto the homepage why the Day of the Girl was important to them and what they hoped it would achieve. Starting October 1, on each night leading up to the official day, there was a discussion on the website which started a conversation about girls' rights and issues that extended beyond individual communities. The impact of the website was demonstrated in over 7500 posts from 26 different countries. The event map on the website showed events in countries across the globe from Morocco to Canada to the Philippines to Bolivia. Another way girls were reached was by tweeting updates about events and reminding everyone about the day.

Ms. Selby concluded, "To me, the Day of the Girl was about connecting girls with each other and creating awareness about the needs and potential of girls; what has been done and what needs to be done. But the most exciting part of the day was bringing the celebration to my school."

The Report reaffirms the importance of national legislation as a deterrent to acts of violence against children and also addresses countries in which national legislation conflicts with customary and religious law. To be effective, legislation needs to be supported by community discussions, and public information and awareness campaigns. The Report concludes with 13 recommendations including empowering children to support the prevention and abandonment of harmful practices and engaging strategic shareholders, including community and religious leaders.

The full Report may be accessed at srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/story/2012-10-11_559

Marrying Too Young End Child Marriage

In an afternoon panel UNFPA released its report, "Marrying Too Young End Child Marriage." This meeting included UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, UN Women's Executive Director Michelle Bachelet, Chair of the Elders Archbishop Tutu, UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Geeta Rao, Bangladesh Secretary of Women's and Children's Affairs, Shirin Chaudhury, and Salamatou Aghali Issoufa, a midwife from Niger, the country with the highest rate of early marriage.

Archbishop Tutu stated, "I feel about this [early marriage] as

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I felt about apartheid.” Executive Director Osotimehin called child marriage “a human tragedy.” Ms Issoufa said, “When I was 14, I was pressured into getting married, but I knew this was not good for my health or future. The girls in my village who got married young stopped going to school and some even died giving birth.”

According to the Report, “In the next decade 14.2 million girls under 18 will be married every year” if present trends continue. “Ending child marriage will help countries reach the Millennium Development Goals, and should be a high priority in the post-2015 development agenda.”

The Report argues that Child Marriage is a violation of human rights and a deterrent to girls’ development. It presents research

in 41 countries where child marriage represents 30% or more of the population and analyzes the factors that contribute to child marriage looking at education, economic background, availability of contraceptives and urban/rural background.

The Report concludes with Lessons Learned From Efforts to Address Child Marriage such as “Empower girls by building their skills and enhancing their social assets,” “Improve girls’ access to quality formal education,” and “Enhance the economic situation of girls and their families” It also describes UNFPA practices to reduce child marriage in several countries.

The Report may be accessed at www.unfpa.org/.../documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf

We are Agents of Change: India’s Neighbourhood Children’s Parliaments



Rekha of Chennai

Rekha, a teenage girl from Chennai, India, explains: “We belong to the Neighbourhood Parliament of Children of Marialaya. We used to experience violence by drunkards on our way to our tuition centre. The evenings became embarrassing and hurting experiences as they wouldn’t let us pass by. They started throwing water packets, bottles and wastes on us, calling out abusive and filthy words. We were scared that things would get worse if we questioned them back. We were tired of having to face such unhappy experiences daily. We sought the help of our teacher. When the teacher went to speak to the men, they verbally abused the teacher too.

I was the Child Minister for Law in our Children’s Parliament. Our Child Parliament took up the issue. Finally we went to the P3 Police Station. The Police immediately came to the spot, interrogated the men and warned them of severe action if they continued the same way. They also advised the people around not to allow



State Parliament of Children in session

things that would spoil the future of the children and programmes like Children’s Parliaments which bring about so many positive changes in children. Now we are free of the menace. Our students of the tuition centre have improved in their education getting better results.”

In another instance, Tamilnadu, a girl in 6th standard (11 years old) in Muthampatti village in Salem district, wept bitterly the day before her engagement as she was against getting married on February 2, 2012. The Child Minister for Defence, defender of child rights from Malaisami of Mulai Neighbourhood Children’s Parliament, approached the appropriate authorities and ensured that the marriage was stopped.

Such Child Ministers for various concerns like child rights, human rights, and gender equality exist in thousands of Neighbourhood Parliaments of Children being organized in India including those children with disabilities. The Parliaments



Neighbourhood Children’s Parliament in session

that include children up to 18 years are small-sized ensuring that almost every child gets attention and the scope to participate and grow. They take charge of the neighbourhood and keep an alert eye on the violation of rights. Our State level federation of the Parliaments of Children won the global UNICEF-San Marino Award for the best child-led action for child rights.

One of the original sponsors, Neighbourhood Community Network, an NGO, came into existence in the 1970s organizing adults in neighbourhood communities. In the 1990s, the NGO promoted parliaments of children. Organizing such inclusive parliaments and federating them at various levels initiates a culture of sustained organized power for children to ensure a world without violence. Please visit: www.childrenparliament.in

--Fatima Rodrigo
International Presentation Association

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Looking at the issue of preventing violence against girls is not simple as many violations of girls' rights are imbedded in the attitudes and discriminatory practices of a particular society. Prevention requires multiple and intersecting interventions that address attitudes, provide resources, change laws and policies and involve men, boys and community participation.

Some forms of violence against girls such as child/sex trafficking, female genital mutilation and abuse of girls in armed conflict receive much attention while the hidden violence in the family often goes unreported because of fear and stigma. Participants in the CSW must strive to bring all forms of violence against women and girls to the attention of the world community.

CSW 57: WGG Advocates To Prevent Violence Against Girls Globally

Since 1947 the United Nations has convened a special Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as its principal global policy-making body on gender equality and advancing the status of women. Each year thousands of women and now girls, too, converge on UN Headquarters in New York to advocate for Member States, the UN and NGOs to increase their commitment to issues of major concern for women and girls.

The 57th session of the CSW will take place from March 4 to March 15, 2013, with the priority theme, "Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls." Violence against girls and women is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world; it is important, however, to distinguish violence against girls from violence against women. Developing action-oriented recommendations to end all forms of violence against girls is central to girls not only achieving human rights but also attaining gender equality.

WGG Submits Statement for CSW 57

The WGG Statement for CSW 57 on Elimination and Prevention of all Forms of Violence against Women and Girls is posted on the WGG website, wgg@girlsrights.org. Prepared by WGG member Dr. Yvonne Rafferty, Chair of the Task Force on Research and Writing, the Statement focuses on the impact of the harmful practices of forced early marriage, son preference, female genital mutilation, honor killings and trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation on girls' physical, reproductive and mental health. Seven Recommendations are made including criminalizing offenses and closing gaps in law enforcement and promoting the participation, visibility and empowerment of girls.

Mozambique Youth Group

"Celebrating the Day of the Girl shows that the intensive debate and campaign on issues related to girls were finally heard by those who think that they are looking after us. They know now that violence and discrimination against girls is not a neighbour's issues but mine as well."
Carmen Siteo

"Celebrating the Day of the Girl is a recognition of the Girl. It celebrates a movement without borders by recognising girls' rights, especially education. It's an opportunity for boys to also fight against all forms of violence and discrimination against girls."
Emerson Zunguze

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