

Action for Girls

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

Girls Speak Out on International Day of the Girl

To mark the second International Day of the Girl on 11 October 2014, thirty stories of girls from all over the world were acted out by ten girl actors in the UN ECOSOC Chamber. The stories were of family and relationships, education, sexual violence, beauty and body image, poverty and child marriage, and empowerment. Although many of the stories were painful to listen to, there were also inspiring stories of girls standing up for their rights and redefining what it means to be a girl. For example, an 11-year-old girl with a disability from the U.S. told us her dream of what the world in the future should look like in order to embrace girls with disabilities. The 600 people in the audience stood up and clapped for several minutes.

“Malala”, a joyful music video with girls and boys of many nationalities singing and dancing from Girls Write Now, had the audience humming and swaying to the music. A number of the girls whose stories were told were from Plan International, Girls Write Now, Girls Learn International, SPARK, Jacaranda Foundation, BEADS (Kenya), Girl Scouts of the USA and Girl Guides of Hong Kong.



WGG Girl Advocates

credit: Beth Adamson

The Speak Out opened with comments from Ambassador Michael Grant, Deputy Representative of Canada to the UN; Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women; and Adwoa Aidoo and Emily Bent, Co-Chairs, Working Group on Girls. Each of the six sections was introduced by one of the WGG Girl Advocates: Rebecca, Ameesha, Diana or Isabella. Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA; Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka; Ambassador Yasar Halit Cevik, Permanent Representative of Turkey to the UN; Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Permanent Representative of Peru to the UN; Ambassador Michael Grant; Greeta Rao Gupta, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF; Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative to the UN Secretary General on Violence Against Children; or Daniel Seymour, Deputy Director Programme, UN Women responded to each section.

At one point when Greeta Rao Gupta responded, tears came to her eyes as she thought back to her childhood and how she dealt with many of the same things that girls are dealing with today. She said that she would never have been able to speak openly about the controversial topics presented in the stories told by the Speak Out girls.

By telling their stories the girls in the Speak Out were refusing future unfair treatment and demonstrating that things are changing for girls. Girls are speaking up, taking a stand and slowly reshaping their world.

Rebecca Gudzy, Girl Advocate



WGG Girl Advocates with Actors

credit: Beth Adamson



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WGG Visits UN Missions

The Advocacy Task Force is meeting with as many UN Missions as possible this year, especially those that are members of the Commission on the Status of Women. WGG Girl Advocates will participate in these visits to highlight the unique needs of girls in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and to encourage missions to include girls in their delegations to CSW 59.

WGG delegations will, also, discuss each mission's country report on how they have or have not implemented Section L on the Girl Child in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). These reports are posted on the UN Women's website. An assessment of challenges in implementing the BPfA is the topic for CSW 59 in March 2015.

During the Mission visits the Advocacy Task Force will focus on:

Education: including equal access to primary and secondary education for girls; ensuring safety from violence to, from and within schools; the provision of sanitary facilities; the reduction of household and unpaid work burdens that preclude girls from attending school; equal access to tertiary programs particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

Elimination of Child Marriage: including a minimum age of 18 for legal marriage and enforcement of that legal requirement; universal birth registration for age verification; support and protection for girls fleeing forced marriage and efforts to address the root causes of this practice.

Ending Violence against Girls: including law enforcement in cases of rape and domestic violence; support for violence prevention programs; protection against and prosecution for trafficking; and the abolishment of female genital mutilation, sex selection abortions and honor killings or femicide.

Eileen Reilly
School Sisters of Notre Dame



Shuang-Shuang Keng, Eleanor Schlesinger, Jasmine Bai

PPSEAWA Holds Seminar on Human Trafficking

Pan Pacific South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA), partnering with the Center for the Human Rights of Children at Loyola University in Chicago and the International Women's Associates, Inc. (IWA), held a seminar on "Human Trafficking of Women and Girls - Global Strategies" at its Midterm Conference in Chicago in September.

The audience, united by the fact that the trafficking of women and girls has no borders and the desire to end this form of slavery, included PPSEAWA members from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Hawaii and the U.S. and IWA members from 60 countries.

According to the 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report, Taiwan is a destination for men, women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Jasmine Chih-fang Bai, Director of Human Trafficking, and Shuang-Shuang Keng, International Affairs Specialist, both from the Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (TWRP), an organization that provides counseling to women and victims of prostitution or domestic violence, told the audience that TWRP has raised the awareness of Taipei law enforcement to the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act (U.S. 2000) so traffickers will be prosecuted and the victims will not be considered criminals. They believe that civil society can collaborate on international advocacy so that "we can all be part of the change."

Eleanor Schlesinger
PPSEAWA

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A Maasai Young Woman Returns to the UN to Advocate for Education



credit: Beth Adamson

Faith speaking at High Level Panel

At the UN General Assembly High Level Panel, “Ending Child, Early and Forced Marriage A World Where All Girls Can Reach Their Full Potential” on 22 September 2014, Faith, a Girl Delegate at CSW 51 in 2007 on the priority theme Ending Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child, advocated eloquently on the importance of education in her life. Women in her tribe do not have a voice in decision-making, but education has given her “the right to speak and to say yes and no.”

At age 9 Faith ran away from home to a Safe House 10 kilometers away because she did not want to get married to an older man and undergo FGM. The second youngest of 6 girls and one boy, she had seen her older sisters get married at the age of 9 to 13 and give birth as early as age twelve. A girl in her tribe is considered a “waste” because she leaves home to join her husband’s family. A girl’s family arranges her marriage, often to an older man as a second or third wife, for a bride price. For Faith, the man was her father’s closest friend so his bride price for Faith was two cows. FGM is, according to Faith’s tribe, an honor for a girl; unless a girl undergoes FGM she will not be considered a woman her entire life and cannot get married in her tribe. Even though one woman in her tribe is a representative to a government council, she is not considered a woman because she is not cut. The pressure to undergo FGM, Faith says, is intense.

At the Safe House, sponsored by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), Faith completed her primary education and found her voice. Safe House supports Let Us Speak Out, a program that helps girls learn to speak through singing and poetry. In Faith’s tribe there are now very few primary schools. After gathering firewood and water in the early morning, children must walk 10 to 20 kilometers to school. There are expenses for uniforms and books and often tuition costs even though primary schools are supposed to be free. Once a girl begins her period, almost 90% drop out of school because of the lack of separate toilets. In grade 4 half of the students are girls; by grade 8 there are often no girls.

Faith completed high school with the help of the Nairobi Girls Education Fund and is graduating from the University of Kenya, Nairobi, with a BA in International Studies with the support of the Anglican’s Global Women’s Fund. She has been hired by the NGO that sponsored her high school education where she will work before pursuing an M.A. in International Studies.

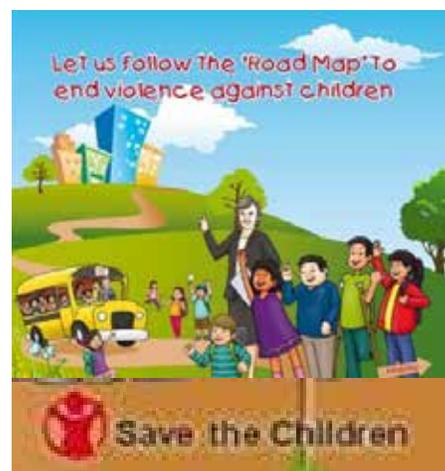
Faith says that “education transforms thinking” because “it brings up ideas” about nutrition, family planning, entrepreneurship, disability, sanitation, ending violence, and the property rights of women. When her father died, her brother-in-law demanded the land that he had given to her family as a bride price in the marriage of her older sister and on which Faith’s mother and family lived. He stated that widows were not allowed to own property. Through her education Faith knew about the changes in the law, adjudicated under CEDAW, that allowed widows to own land and so she was able to help her mother to keep her land legally. Previously, her brother who is disabled was kept hidden from the public in her parents’ home. Faith says the UN also taught her that the disabled have human rights. Now her brother does chores outside with his hands and feels appreciated.

Faith’s mother now tells her sisters to “be more like Faith”. Because of her education, Faith’s voice is listened to within her Maasai tribe.

Susan O’Malley, IFBPW

Children’s Priorities for the Post-2015 Agenda

More than 800,000 children around the world have participated in consultations on the future sustainable development goals. According to a new report issued by Marta Santos Pais, the UN Special Representative on Violence against



Children, in partnership with Plan International and Save the Children International, education and children’s protection from violence were the two greatest concerns in all regions and social groups (<http://srsgviolenceagainstchildren.org>).

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Education was cited as helping to strengthen life skills which prevent violence, improve health, reduce poverty and promote gender equality. The elimination of violence is a critical cross-cutting issue in each of these areas.

Jackie Shapiro, ECPAT - USA

China to Ban Sex Selective Abortions

China announced a severe crack down on identifying the sex of a fetus and limiting sex-selective abortions, with exceptions for certain medical reasons, according to the Legislative Affairs Office of the Chinese State Council and reported by China News. In order to promote an equal ratio of males to females among the Chinese population, the Provisions on the Ban of Sex Appraisal for Fetuses for Non-Medical Reasons and Selective Abortion (Draft), was jointly drawn up by the National Health and Family Planning Commission, the Ministry of Public Security, the State Administration for Industry and Commerce and the China Food and Drug Administration.

The Draft stipulates that when a medical situation arises in which it is necessary to determine the sex of a fetus, at least three professionally qualified doctors should be consulted to carry out a group review. If an artificial termination is needed, the authentication institution should provide a medical diagnosis report to the pregnant woman and at the same time report to the local health and family planning departments.

The WGG Son Preference Advocacy Sheet, prepared for CSW 57, notes that the Chinese Academy of Science predicted that by 2020 China would have 30 – 40 million more boys than girls under the age of 20 unless action is taken. (For more information go to <http://www.girlsrights.org>).

Susan O'Malley, IFBPW

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UN Photo

Champions of Girls' Rights Win 2014 Nobel Peace Prize

This year's award of the Nobel Peace Prize honors Malala Youssafzai and Kailash Satyarthi, two individuals who have risked their lives and dedicated themselves to enabling all children to have the opportunity of a quality and meaningful education. These awards are, also, an enormous inspiration to all of us who believe that education is the key to poverty eradication, gender equality and ending violations of child rights.

Malala, at 17, is the youngest Nobel laureate in history. Her story of being shot in the head by the Taliban for refusing to back down from advocating for the right of girls to go to school in Pakistan resulted in two million people joining the Right to Education Campaign and the adoption by Pakistan of its first right to education bill. She started the Malala Fund "to bring awareness to the social and economic impact of girls' education and to empower girls to raise their voices, to unlock their potential and demand change." Said Malala, "One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world."

Satyarthi has been a global leader in the movement to end child slavery and exploitive child labor since 1980 when he abandoned a career as a civil engineer to help the millions of children forced to work in horrible conditions in India. He is a grassroots activist who has led the rescue of over 78,500 child slaves and pioneered programs for their education and rehabilitation. Holding prominent positions in many advocacy groups, Satyarthi is Chair of the Global March against Child Labor, a conglomerate of 2000 social-purpose organizations and trade unions in 140 countries, and co-founder of the Global Campaign for Education.

Of his receiving the Nobel Prize, Satyarthi said, "It is a great honor for all those children who are deprived of their childhood globally." Malala, too, said her award was for the children: "It gives them courage".

Jackie Shapiro, ECPAT - USA