

# **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

## **Girls' and Women's Right to Education: Half-day general discussion**

**Geneva, 7 July 2014**

**Palais des Nations, Room XVI**

### **Presentation by Ms. Mariam Khalique**

Since centuries women are treated with injustice and inequality. Their human dignity has been denied by the clergy of different religions. Tribal and patriarchal societies treat them as property and modern capitalism has commodified them. Even great poets like Shakespeare couldn't help it when he says in Hamlet "Frailty thy name is woman!" Historically, women are thought physically weak, morally poor and mentally dull which is totally false and biased.

Due to gender discrimination, women are being deprived from many basic human rights. They don't have the right and freedom to be themselves. To pursue their dreams to play a role in economic, social and political life and most importantly, they don't have the basic right of education which unlocks the door of all other rights. Today 57 million children are out of school and majority of them are girls. In my own Swat valley, there are 1014 schools for boys and only 603 schools for girls while the number of women population is larger than men. That means half of girls don't have schools at all even if they wish to go to. Most of the Parents don't like coeducation and girls stay back at home if there is no girls school in the neighbourhood. A teenage girl must need a male escort to take her to school otherwise she has to go without any schooling knows how Zianab in my neighbour was stopped by her brothers after grade 5. She was extremely sad but could not protest in front of her brothers.

Global south and global north are really pole apart when it comes to the girls right and access to education. In the developed world it's socially unacceptable and unlawful if a child stays home in school hours without any reason. While in many developing countries, it is vice versa. We saw how The extremists bombed more than 2000 schools and banned girls to be going to schools. In 2009, girls used to hide their books under their shawls to pretend that they were not school students. The Taliban leader used to announce the names of the girls on his FM radio who we're quitting schools after listening his sermons against girls education. He used to publicly appreciate the parents and congratulate the girls for quitting western education.

It is quite interesting that Talibanisation is always successful in patriarchal societies as both share their suppressive treatment of women, both think women as inferior being and agree on confining them to the four walls of home.

Other barriers in girls' access to schools are poverty, child labour, early child marriages, social norms and traditions and unavailability of the basic facilities. Education becomes a distant dream for the girls of many families who live from hand to mouth a family who don't have enough food and proper shelter hardly think of educating their children. And if they can they only send their sons not daughters. A family having six daughters and one son will send the one son to school but they won't feel any shame or

sorrow if his six sisters don't go to school. The sisters will take care of their brother's shoes, bag and clothes and they themselves will be just wasting their precious talent inside the four walls of a house until parents find a husband and shift them to another house. Many girls are suffering from domestic child labour and they work in rich people homes. They look after other children of their age, clean dishes or washes clothes.

It deeply hurts me when I hear a rich woman asking others without an iota of guilt," search a girl for me to work in my home"

Similarly, child marriages are a great barrier in girls' pursuance of education. I remember how two beautiful girls in grade 9 of our school, all of a sudden, got married before their annual exams. We persuaded the parents to keep them in school but all in vain. Social norms and traditions also don't favour girls' education. Many think that modern education brings liberty and vulgarity in girls' behaviour. They love perfectly submissive and obedient girls. Education gives open thinking and confidence that men can't tolerate. So girls are kept aloof from the kind of learning that gives them emancipation.

Recommendations:

Development without women participation is an illusion and women participation in all kind of developments without education is a cry for the moon. Governments must make it a top priority if they are really serious in the peace and prosperity of their nations.

There are 66 million girls who don't have access to school. Majority of them belong to the countries that are suffering from wars and conflicts. Schools are bombed and pupils are not safe, the international community and the concerned governments must ensure the safety of the children who go to school. Governments must provide standard schools and all basic facilities for the girls across the board.

Governments and educational entrepreneurs should join hands to make education their top priority. Governments must do legislation to ensure every child's access to school. Education up to higher secondary school should be free and compulsory. Non-governmental organisation and philanthropists must make education as their passion.

School curriculums should be rich in contents that motivate students to believe in gender equality and human dignity. Role model fathers and brothers should be introduced in curriculum to encourage men to support women in their journey of emancipation and empowerment. Role model women should be included in the curriculum to motivate other girls to follow their steps.

Thank you.

---