



7 July 2014
58th CEDAW Session

General discussion on girls'/women's right to education:
Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Oral Statement

Madame Chair,

IWRAW Asia Pacific welcomes the initiative to draft a General Recommendation on Girls'/Women's Right to Education.

The right to education for girls and women is of great significance because their exclusion from education has a disproportionate and far reaching effect on the realisation of other fundamental human rights.

Girls and women denied the right to education are rendered more vulnerable to poverty and marginalisation, abuse and exploitation.

Non-discrimination and equal access to all levels of education is crucial to empower girls and women to become full and equal participants in society.

CEDAW reinforces that education is a universal human right, and is indivisible and interrelated to other fundamental human rights.

Quality education is therefore education that has at its core the promotion of non-discrimination, equality and human rights for all.

In the context of gender equality, it requires education curricula that do not perpetuate discriminatory stereotypes but instead reinforce women and girls as equal participants in the family, economy and society.

It is imperative that States parties be required to remove reservations to CEDAW based on culture and religion, and that they should be held accountable for norms that prevent the education of girls and women.

While the focus of global strategies has been on the means of education, and this has been simplified to mean that all girls should start and finish primary school; primary schooling is not enough.

We therefore emphasise quality education that opens up a full range of opportunities and choices.

Quality education should meet acceptable standards for competing in the job market and entering non-traditional jobs and occupations. A balanced and mutual relationship with the private sector should be encouraged so that corporate social investment can be channelled into addressing occupations and jobs where women are not equitably represented.

Quality education requires addressing the labour standards applicable to the teaching profession, which is dominated by women teachers in most countries and is still generally considered a low paid and low status occupation.

It requires ensuring that school curricula are designed to address and adapt to market needs so that education translates into increased capacity to fully realise human potential through accessing employment.

Education of girls should not just be geared towards roles in the formal economy but should be a process of empowerment. It should encourage entrepreneurship. Girls should be prepared for jobs and occupations that span the entire spectrum of available opportunities, including IT, medicine, science, engineering etc. They should not be trained for employment in jobs that are seen as traditional female industries such as nursing and other forms of care work.

We also highlight that a key facet of quality education is the need for academic freedom: that the right to education must be exercised with the freedom to express contrary views without repercussions. Further, access to information/communication must also be guaranteed.

We underline the need for comprehensive sexuality education. Comprehensive sexuality education should be understood as age-appropriate education about human rights, human sexuality, gender equality, relationships and sexual and reproductive health and rights through the provision of scientifically-accurate, non-judgmental information. This is essential for young people to promote values of tolerance, mutual respect and non-violence in relationships, and to plan their lives.

We also recognise that the main factors which nullify the right of girls and women to quality education are social, cultural and political spheres of influence.

The General Recommendation on Education needs to clearly address these political, cultural and social factors. For example, there are cultural practices that deny girls the right to education and have seen girls being harassed and abused merely for attending school.

This should be challenged by the State through awareness raising with communities; legislation which clearly protect girls right to education; criminalising the actions of non-state actors that restrict or limit these rights, as well as prioritising resources and security in schools and affected communities to effect these measures.

In closing, while the primary mechanism for enforcing State obligations is through the periodic reviews by the CEDAW Committee, the right to education is also subject to judicial and quasi-judicial scrutiny. It is thus critical that clear standards for its enforcement by girls and women exist.

Legislation should expand on the content of State obligations and jurisprudence should be developed to reinforce the nature and extent of the rights of girls and women to education.

Thank you.