

29th session of the Human Rights Council

Panel discussion on realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl

16 June 2015, 3 - 6 p.m.
Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Concept note (as of 16 June 2015)

I. Focus and objective

In its resolution 27/6, the Human Rights Council decided to convene a panel discussion on realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl at its 29th session.

The right to education has been acknowledged in international law and policy as a ‘multiplier right’, that when fully realized, enables right holders to realize or exercise a wide range of human rights. It is also widely recognized that good quality education has a catalytic role in promoting substantive equality between men and women and as a means to improve health, economic, political, cultural and social development outcomes throughout the world.

In practice, however, there are several obstacles to the realization of the right to education globally. While some of these barriers can apply to all children, there are specific obstacles including legal barriers, socio-cultural barriers, economic barriers, that girls face in *exercising* their right to education. In addition, both in peacetime and times of conflict, parents may choose not to educate their daughters due to concerns for their security and their subsequent marriageability. This can be linked to other human rights violations such as child, early and forced marriage, domestic violence, exposure to other harmful practices, trafficking, violations of reproductive health and rights and labour exploitation. Gender-related violence and other forms of discrimination within schools also contribute to a high rate of school abandonment by girls and even the absence of separate bathrooms for boys and girls could deter girls from attending schools.

Alongside the socio-cultural factors, attacks on girls in education settings in situations of conflict, unrest or political strife can have a ripple effect - not only do they impact on the lives of the girls and communities who are directly concerned, they also send a signal to parents and guardians that schools are not safe places for girls. Even in peacetimes, sexual abuse/exploitation within schools can be a reason why girls leave school or parents withdraw them.

Girls are not a monolithic group and their experiences of violence will vary depending on their personal characteristics and geographical location. Intersectional or compounded forms of discrimination create additional barriers to education for specific groups of girls such as girls with disabilities, girls belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, girls living in rural or remote areas, pregnant girls and girls who are internally displaced or non-citizens.

States have legal obligations to ensure that everyone has free access to inclusive and different types of education, both formal and informal, including early childhood education, primary, secondary, vocational, tertiary and continuing education, on the basis of substantive equality. These obligations apply in times of peace and in situations of crisis or conflict.

II. Objectives

The panel will offer an opportunity for States to discuss remaining obstacles and share good practices in ensuring the human right of girls to good quality education on the basis of substantive equality. Discussions will focus on a broad spectrum of situations and obstacles that girls face when accessing education and the actions and response of States. Furthermore, the panel will also discuss the promotion and protection of human rights through good quality education by focusing on the

linkages between education and a range of other civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

III. Composition of the panel

Chair: **H.E. Mr. Joachim Ruecker**, President of the Human Rights Council

Opening statement: **Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Moderator: **Ms. Marilena Viviani**, Associate Director, Programme Partnerships, Division of Programmes, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Panellists:

- **H.E. Ms. Reem Al Hashemi**, Minister of State, United Arab Emirates
- **Ms. Barbara Bailey**, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Chair of the CEDAW Working Group on the right of girls and women to education
- **Mr. Kishore Singh**, Special Rapporteur on the right to education
- **Ms. Hannah Godefa**, UNICEF Ethiopia Goodwill Ambassador
- **Mr. Adama Coulibaly**, Regional Director for the West African Region, Plan International

IV. Format of the panel

The panel discussion will begin with the opening statement by a senior official from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, followed by the introduction of the issue and the panellists by the moderator.

The panellists will then be given five to seven minutes each to make their initial statements answering questions raised by the moderator. The ensuing interactive discussion will comprise two rounds of interventions (45 minutes per round) for comments and questions from the floor (two minutes per intervention), followed by 15 minutes for comments and replies by panellists. The interventions of Member States and other observers may comprise questions and sharing of concrete examples and experiences on the issues identified above.

At the end, panellists will be given three minutes each to make their concluding remarks, followed by short final remarks to be made by the moderator.

V. Accessibility

In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to allow them to participate in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the panel will be made accessible to persons with disabilities. During the debate, international sign interpretation and real time captioning will be provided and webcasted. Physical accessibility will be promoted by making room facilities wheelchair friendly. As per established guidelines, braille printing will be available on demand. The "Accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities" is available for further reference at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/AboutCouncil.aspx>

VI. Outcome

A summary report on the outcome of the panel discussion will be prepared and submitted to the Council at its 30th session.

VII. Background documents

- [Human Rights Council resolution 27/6 of 25 September 2014](#)
- [OHCHR report "Attacks against girls seeking access to education"](#)