

CEDAW Supports Education for Women and Girls

- ***CEDAW promotes equal educational opportunity.***

Nearly two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women, and two-thirds of its unschooled children are girls.¹ When women and girls are educated, it benefits not only them, but also their families and communities. For example, “[g]lobally, about half the reduction in child mortality during the past four decades can be attributed to improvements in educational attainment in young women.”² Women’s education leads to healthier, more prosperous societies.

CEDAW seeks to end discrimination against women and girls in education.³ It promotes equal educational opportunity and access to learning resources for women and girls at all levels, from preschool to professional and vocational training, from scholarship receipt to sports participation.⁴ It urges countries that traditionally barred or discouraged girls from attending school to open the door to their education. For example, in making recommendations regarding CEDAW implementation, the CEDAW Committee has expressed concern over the high illiteracy rate among women and girls in Saudi Arabia, and has recommended that awareness be raised regarding the importance of access to education for them.⁵

CEDAW’s commitment to girls’ education is in part based on the importance of girls’ education to ending poverty. For example, the CEDAW Committee has noted that poverty is more widespread in families “headed by women who had received limited education,” and has applauded commitments to providing free secondary education for all, including pilot projects to train women in non-traditional areas.⁶ It has urged Bolivia to implement “nationwide effective educational programmes...as a means of poverty alleviation.”⁷ CEDAW’s focus on education is consistent with the high value Americans place on learning, as well as our recognition of the key role played by public education in allowing all young people to achieve the American dream. Here in the U.S., long-standing federal and state laws require equal access to educational institutions and opportunities for boys and girls alike.⁸

- ***CEDAW helps girls stay in school.***

CEDAW specifically calls upon ratifying countries to reduce female students’ drop-out rates and to help girls and women who have left school prematurely to return and complete their education.⁹ Accordingly, the CEDAW Committee has recommended that countries take steps to improve girls’ school attendance, including addressing the poverty and social pressures that push too many girls out of school.¹⁰ For example, the Committee has encouraged Bolivia to adopt measures to address the lack of infrastructure, distance, cost of transportation and language barriers that keep indigenous women and girls from staying in school.¹¹ It has also

recommended providing information to parents on the importance of education for girls, to encourage parents to support their daughters in continuing their studies.¹² CEDAW's concern with keeping girls in school is fully in line with American goals and values. For example, U.S. laws and policies combating harassment and bullying seek to end pressures that push girls and others out of school and to create educational environments conducive to success¹³

- ***CEDAW encourages broad access to technical and other educational programs where girls and women are often underrepresented.***

CEDAW seeks to remove barriers that have historically kept female students from participating in many career and vocational programs. For example, the CEDAW Committee has recommended the development of policies and programs aimed at supporting girls and women who wish to study subjects that few girls and women have traditionally pursued.¹⁴ In addition, it has recommended that a diverse array of educational options be made available for both girls and boys.¹⁵

CEDAW's commitment to overcoming barriers to participation in fields of study previously closed to girls and women is squarely in line with U.S. goals and programs. There has long been an effort in the U.S. to find ways to support girls and women who wish to pursue higher paying, traditionally male occupations, such as work as electricians and automotive technicians. For example, the Women's Educational Equity Act authorizes grants for the improvement of vocational and career education and continuing education activities for women.¹⁶ The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which enables states to help people become productive members of the work force, identifies among its focus populations "individuals preparing for non-traditional fields."¹⁷ Various programs also seek to encourage girls and women to study the "STEM" subjects – science, technology, engineering and math.¹⁸

Ratifying CEDAW is fully in line with the United States' commitment to equal educational opportunity and to girls' educational success.

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality* (2003) 88, 129, available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132513e.pdf>.

² Gakidou, Emmanuela et al., *Increased Education Attainment and its Effect on Child Mortality in 175 Countries Between 1970 and 2009*, 376 *The Lancet* 959, 969 (2010), available at <http://download.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140673610612573.pdf?id=5bbe37e152166496:6f42376:12b352a6e16:7e491285095841870>.

³ CEDAW, Art. 10.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Saudia Arabia, ¶¶ 29-30, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/2 (2008). See also Lebanon, ¶ 94, U.N. Doc. A/60/38 (2005) ("[T]he Committee is alarmed at the still very high illiteracy rate of women, 40 per cent....The Committee is concerned that the initial plan to make primary education compulsory was postponed from 2000 to 2010.").

⁶ Trinidad and Tobago, ¶ 128, U.N. Doc. A/57/38 (2002).

⁷ Bolivia, ¶ 13, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/BOL/CO/4 (2008).

⁸ See e.g. U.S. Const. Amend. XIV (Equal Protection Clause); Title IX, 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a) ("No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance...").

⁹ CEDAW, Art. 10(f).

¹⁰ Mauritania, ¶¶ 35-36, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/MRT/CO/1 (CEDAW 2007); Mozambique, ¶ 31, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/MOZ/CO/2 (2007); Serbia, ¶ 30, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/SCG/CO/1 (2007); Sierra Leone, ¶¶ 30-31, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/SLE/CO/5 (2007); Vietnam, ¶ 21, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/VNM/CO/6 (2007).

¹¹ Bolivia, ¶ 32, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/BOL/CO/4 (2008).

¹² Tajikistan, ¶ 28, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/TJK/CO/3 (2007).

¹³ See U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, “Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties, Title IX” (2001), *available at* <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/shguide.html>.

¹⁴ France, ¶ 19, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/FRA/CO/6 (2008); Lithuania, ¶ 15, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/LTU/CO/4 (2008); Luxembourg, ¶¶ 25-26, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/LUX/CO/5 (CEDAW, 2008).

¹⁵ Austria, ¶ 18, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/6 (2007); Azerbaijan, ¶ 16, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/AZE/CO/3 (2007); Estonia, ¶ 13, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/EST/CO/4 (2007); Hungary, ¶ 17, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/HUN/CO/6 (2007); Kazakhstan, ¶ 14, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/KAZ/CO/2 (2007); Republic of Korea, ¶ 26, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/KOR/CO/6 (2007); Suriname, ¶ 18, U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/SUR/CO/3 (2007).

¹⁶ 20 U.S.C. §§ 5611 *et seq.*

¹⁷ 20 U.S.C. § 2302(29)(C).

¹⁸ See, e.g., National Academies of Science, *Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Sciences and Engineering: 2006*, National Academies Press (Washington, D.C., 2006).