Joint Statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

25 November 2013

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a fundamental violation of human rights. It is one of the worst manifestations of gender-based discrimination, disproportionately affecting girls and women, and a major obstacle to achieving gender equality. This is a global phenomenon that knows no boundaries geographical, cultural, ethnic, economic or other.

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) affects millions if not billions of children worldwide each year. SRGBV is defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in or around schools and educational settings as a result of gender norms and unequal power dynamics between genders. It includes acts of bullying, sexual or verbal harassment, non-consensual touching, rape and assault. Although both girls and boys can be targets of SRGBV, girls are the most vulnerable.

SRGBV is a critical barrier to girls’ right to education, not only because of its serious physical and psychological health implications, but also because it leads to the deterioration of the learning environment as a whole. The experience or even the threat of SRGBV often results in irregular attendance, dropout, truancy, poor school performance, and low self-esteem. Importantly, SRGBV is often aggravated in conflict-affected countries and during emergencies. Too often, SRGBV remains undetected, unreported, and even overlooked in school, the very social institution where children are expected to be safe, protected and empowered. Yet, teachers, schools and education systems are also fundamental in transforming practices, attitudes and values. Quality education for all can only be realized in safe and supportive learning environments.

SRGBV is a serious obstacle to reaching the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to achieving gender equality. As we accelerate our efforts towards meeting the EFA goals and elevate our educational ambitions for girls and boys in the post-2015 development agenda, it is critical that we maintain our commitment to gender equality in and through quality education.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, in support of the UN Secretary-General’s Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), the partners of the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) and Education International, representing the voices of more than 30 million teachers across the world, are joining efforts to end violence against women and girls as well as all forms of gender-based violence, especially within and around schools.

We call on the international community, governments, teachers unions and organizations, civil society, researchers, teachers and practitioners, donors and other partners to recognize and take action against SRGBV. This requires promoting gender equality and girls’ empowerment, adopting a gender responsive lens in school curricula, teacher training and student learning materials, forging multi-stakeholders partnerships, supporting country-owned integrated, comprehensive and multi-sectorial approaches, including robust reporting and monitoring and evaluation systems, and integrating of adequately resourced strategies in national education sector plans, to eliminate SRGBV. Moreover, girls, boys, male and female teachers must also be recognized as key participants in any intervention.

We call on everyone to act by joining the 16 days of Activism against GBV and to place SRGBV high on the development agenda so as to ensure that schools are safe places where all children can learn without fear. All of us can contribute to these efforts and help trigger a large multiplier effect. The present and next generations of girls and women deserve no less.