

**International Youth Day**  
**East Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI Statement**  
**12 August 2010**  
**“Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”**

Young people are vibrant sources of energy and ideas and can serve as dynamic agents of change. This year’s International Youth Day celebrates and acknowledges the value of dialogue and mutual understanding among youth from different cultures as well as different generations. With over 700 million young people, the Asia Pacific region represents a face of hope and optimism for a brighter future. Less than five years are left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals – but by harnessing this energy and developing the skills of youth, the MDGs can become reality.

To mark this occasion, the East Asia and Pacific Regional United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (EAP UNGEI) urges the renewed commitment (of the regional community) to uphold education as an inalienable human right for every young person. The EAP UNGEI places special emphasis on MDGs 2 and 3 which aims to achieve universal primary education and gender equality by 2015. Achieving gender equality in and through education opens endless doors of opportunities for young people so that they can make a difference. This not only has special significance for girls and young women where opportunities and access to education (especially at the secondary education level) continue to be limited and often times scarce, but also for boys and young men who increasingly are dropping out of school prematurely in the region due to economic crisis, emergencies, or low quality of education.

Education lays the foundation for active dialogue and mutual understanding across cultures, generations and gender. Educating young women and men about human rights and gender equality will enable and empower youth to make lasting contributions to achieving the MDGs. Continued access to education and training for all citizens is thus a wise investment for in the future, a pre-condition for economic advancement, democracy, social cohesion, and personal growth. It is also crucial to pay attention to Goal 3 of EFA on providing relevant learning for youth, especially life skills, and that this needs to be costed and integrated in education sector plans.

In particular, investing in the education of girls and young women delivers high returns on many levels, not only for female educational attainment and lifelong learning opportunities, but also for maternal and children’s health, women’s empowerment, employment opportunities, democracy, income growth and productivity. Young educated women also recognize the importance of health care and access it for their entire family. Countries throughout Asia and the Pacific face the risk of perpetuating the cycle of poverty and disempowerment if we fail in our collective efforts to achieve Education for All.

However, millions of children and youth remain out of school across the region. In 2007, a total of 4.7 million children of primary school age were estimated to be out of school in the Asia-Pacific region. Between 2003 and 2008, only 63% of secondary school age children attended secondary school in the East Asia and Pacific Region. Millions more remain in the classroom but run the risk of not learning even the basic competencies. Therefore, concerted action on the part of Governments must be taken to ensure that education policies are inclusive and to make strides towards equal rights and equal opportunities for girls and young women. Such efforts must seek to address the multiplicity of factors and barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing education - cultural, institutional, economic - in order to ensure equal access and inclusion to foundational education and life long learning opportunities for girls and boys.

The Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI urges countries to ensure the provision of quality education for all regardless of their sex, ethnicity, caste, income level, disability or any other factor which might exclude them from their right to quality education. By including young people in the agenda for change - through dialogue and mutual understanding – the MDGs are achievable.

*The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) is the Education For All flagship for girls' education and the principal movement to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education, and to ensure that by 2015, all children everywhere will be able to complete primary schooling, and that by then, girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education.*

*UNGEI works through partnerships with organizations committed to these goals at global, regional, and country levels. To learn more about UNGEI, visit [www.ungei.org](http://www.ungei.org).*

*The Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI partners are: Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), Baha'i International Community, BRAC, Commonwealth Secretariat, CARE, Education Development Center (EDC), Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA), International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, International Planned Parenthood Foundation South Asia Region (IPPF SAR), Oxfam Great Britain, Plan Asia Regional Office, Room to Read, Save the Children, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Secretariat, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Regional Support Team, Asia Pacific United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and Regional Office for South Asia, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) East and South-East Asia Regional Office, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Vision Foundation of Thailand.*