International Women’s Day
Asia and Pacific UNGEI Statement
8 March 2010

Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All
“Women Speak Up: Voices from the Informal Sector”

Although the informal economy accounts for nearly 60 percent of the Asia Pacific region’s workforce and serves as a means of job creation and income generation, many people in this sector - particularly women – are denied equal rights and equal opportunities. The lack of decent working conditions and social protection is due in part to the sector’s nature, limited amount of data available, and very few platforms in which workers can speak up and out. Education can thus become a key tool to empower women and girls in the informal sector to realize and demand their rights – moving the region a step closer towards progress for all.

International Women’s Day celebrates the economic, social and political achievements of women across the world. To mark this occasion, the Asia and Pacific United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) urges the renewed commitment to uphold education as an inalienable human right. This has special significance for girls and women – particularly those working in the informal sector - where opportunities and access to education is limited and often times scarce.

Investing in the education of girls and 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. Educated women also recognize the importance of health care and access it for their entire family. This is vital to harness the productive capacity of young women, in addition to that of young men, towards long-term and sustainable dynamism and progress of the region. 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.

Continued access to education and training for all citizens is an investment in the future, a pre-condition for economic advance, democracy, social cohesion, and personal growth. However, millions of children remain out of school across the region. South Asia alone has 35 million children who are not in school, over half of whom are girls. 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 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.