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联合国教育、
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Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child

11 October 2019

“GirlForce: Unscripted and Unstoppable”. This is the theme for this year’s celebration of International Day of the Girl Child.

Girls are indeed “unscripted and unstoppable” when they defy hatred and extremism, and when they are the voice of dignity. This is the fight of Malala Yousafzai, 2014 Nobel Peace Prize-winner, who stood up to extremists and campaigned against the ban on girls’ schooling. This is the fight of millions of anonymous girls, heroines of everyday life, who are pulling down borders and barriers, breaking down prejudices and stereotypes, saying no to forced marriage, no to exclusion and no to violence, who are, ultimately, initiating the changes of tomorrow.

A great deal of progress has been made over the past 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which marked a historic step forward in the recognition of women’s rights. Many girls have walked up the steps of a school and received a dignified education that respects their identity and their rights. Many girls have made their dreams come true; but far too many are still prevented from doing so.

The figures speak for themselves and unfortunately, they are worrying: 132 million girls are still out of school and 9 million of them – compared to 3 million boys – will never even enter a classroom. In the poorest countries, only 13% of girls who manage to enrol in secondary school complete their education. Inequalities between gender and States, two mutually reinforcing inequalities, persist. If we are not careful, these inequalities will worsen tomorrow, particularly as a result of the digital revolution that we cannot allow to leave girls out in the cold.

We need to redouble our efforts. The initiative “Her education, our future”, recently launched by UNESCO, will accelerate this mobilization for the education of girls and women. The initiative works in three directions: to collect better data, to improve normative and legislative frameworks and, finally, to enhance the exchange of good practices.

However, because we only learn well when we are healthy, UNESCO also acts for girls’ well-being. This year, UNESCO launched the “Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future” initiative to provide health education programmes to more than 30 million young people in more than 30 African countries.

The United Nations General Assembly session which opened recently in New York strengthened this momentum for girls’ education and dignity around the world. On this occasion, UNESCO initiated the drafting of the major foresight report “Futures of Education”, in which gender equality will play a key, crosscutting role.

Supporting all efforts for the emancipation and empowerment of girls must be a priority. That is why, on this International Day, UNESCO is proud to award the UNESCO Prize for Girls’ and Women’s Education to two educational projects, one Spanish and the other Costa Rican, which have distinguished themselves particularly well in girls’ education, particularly in the digital field.

“The extremists are afraid of books and pens, ... they are afraid of change and equality that we will bring to our society” said Malala Yousafzai. On this Day, let us take as role models these girls who inspire us and who are building a better future.