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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,**

**Director-General of UNESCO,**

**on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child**

**11 October 2020**

On this International Day, we celebrate and honour the millions of girls around the world who surmount the barriers of inequality and manage to break free from the prejudices to which they have too often been confined.

In order to become a reality, the aspiration for equality, which is at the heart of this Day, is developed and acquired first at school.

Mobilizing for girls' education means ensuring that millions of girls can define, not endure, their future. It means standing up for a fundamental right. It also means working for what former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, considered to be the most effective tool for the development of our societies.

This fundamental right, however, may be jeopardized by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the 767 million girls confined to their homes at the peak of the crisis, deprived of the meals and support offered by their schools, found themselves at greater risk of forced marriage, domestic violence and early pregnancy. In several countries, gender-based sexual violence, for example, increased by as much as 30 per cent.

At a time when 11 million girls may never return to the emancipatory path of education – when 130 million girls were already out of school before the pandemic – we need to mobilize more than ever.

That is why, at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition, bringing together nearly 150 partners and acting in 70 countries.

This enabled us to launch, for example, a global communication campaign to support the return of girls to school.

Such mobilization is essential in order not to lose the ground gained over the past 25 years, since the 1995 Beijing Declaration.

Indeed, as shown in the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report focusing on gender equality, which we are releasing on this International Day, 180 million girls have accessed primary or secondary education since 1995; and in higher education, the number of female students has even tripled in the last 25 years.

Our latest report does not, however, ignore the many gender inequalities that remain – for example, in rural areas of the least developed countries, only two percent of girls manage to complete a full secondary education.

That is why UNESCO, for many years, has poured all its energy into this fight for equality.

In this context, our initiative “Her education, our future” continues to produce its effects. By promoting better data and better public policies, and sharing best educational practices, it aims to defeat gender inequalities at the roots.

In order to build a more just and prosperous world, UNESCO would therefore like to call on everyone – States, regional organizations and civil society – to make gender equality a daily commitment and a requirement.