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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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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
the International Day of the Girl Child

11 October 2018

This year's International Day of the Girl Child is focusing on empowerment through education. Girls' education is a fundamental right; it is also a powerful lever for development.

Girls' education is at the intersection of two of the most important challenges of our time: education and gender equality. A collective consciousness is rising to ensure that the right to quality education for all girls becomes a reality. Strong signals of high-level political commitment were apparent at the United Nations General Assembly in New York a fortnight ago, as well as at the first G-20 meeting dedicated to education, held in Argentina last month. The recent Commonwealth initiative to establish a high-level Platform for Girls' Education is an additional sign of this new global awareness.

The challenges are still immense. Worldwide, today, more than 130 million girls of school age are out of school. In addition, of the 600 million adolescent girls who will enter the labour market in the next decade, more than 90% live in developing countries and will work in an informal economy where unpaid work, abuse and exploitation are more prevalent.

That is why UNESCO, the United Nations lead agency for education in the context of the 2030 Agenda, is working with the international community so that girls can benefit from 12 years of basic education free of charge. It is committed to ensuring that States include in school curricula issues relating to gender equality, health and sexuality, so as to break with the social habits and collective representations that impede girls' freedom and constitute barriers to their intellectual formation and social and professional integration.

The integration of girls in the changing world of work includes in particular improved access to science and technology careers, where they are too often underrepresented.

In order to encourage innovative teaching that helps girls to acquire the self-confidence they need and that will reduce gender inequalities, UNESCO established in 2015, with the support of the Government of China, a Prize for Girls' and Women's Education. This year, the Prize is awarded to the Misr El Kheir Foundation (Egypt), for supporting girls' education in poor villages, and the Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation (Jamaica), so that it may continue its support for pregnant teenagers and young mothers in Jamaica, giving them a second chance to continue their education.

These initiatives should inspire us. Girls' education must be one of our priorities, because to a great extent the peace and prosperity of our world depend upon it.