

UN event highlights girls' right to education

Our correspondent

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To highlight 'Girls' Right to Education,' the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) in collaboration with other UN agencies including United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) organised a special event on Tuesday.

The event was attributed to Malala Yousafzai. Speaking on this occasion, United Nations Resident Coordinator for Pakistan Timo Pakkala emphasised that the girls' education is a must, in order to meet development targets in the country. The event also encompassed findings of Unesco's flagship document, "Education For All, Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2012", which was officially launched in Islamabad on October 18.

According to the report, youth (between age 15-24) female literacy rate in Pakistan is 61 per cent against 79 per cent for males. However, youth female literacy rate is projected to be 72 per cent (against 82 per cent for males) by year 2015, whereas adult female literacy rate of older age group (15+) is projected to be 47 per cent. This indicates that young Pakistani females are more educated than their mothers.

The gender-based ratio (female - male) of illiterate youth between ages 15 - 24 is, 64 per cent - 36 per cent. This shows that gender gap still exists. Nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of the 5.1 million out-of-school children of primary school age

group are girls. There are more female adolescents (3.9 million) than male adolescence (3.3 million) who are out-of-school, as stated in the Global Monitoring Report.

Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, Director, Unesco Pakistan, in her opening remarks quoted from the global speech of the Director-General of Unesco Irina Bokova and said, "I would like to dedicate this ceremony to Malala Yousafzai, a young brave activist for the right of girl's education in Pakistan, assaulted last week, because she wanted to go school". Also, Dr. Nagata added, "Gender equality in education constitutes a basic human right as well as an important means of improving economic outcomes."

Unesco Director in her speech said, "Although gender gap in Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) in primary and secondary schools is getting reduced in major urban centers such as Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi, the gender gap is still high in Balochistan, Federally Administered Tribal Area (Fata), rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, interior Sindh, and other conservative communities."

The civil society, NGOs and UN agencies actively participated in the event to exchange views and urged for coordinated actions to promote girls' education in Pakistan.

This event was planned in lieu of Unesco's Director-General, Irina Bokova's attribution to Malala Yousufzai during the international launch of Global Monitoring Report 2012 in Paris on 16th October, calling for global attention to the right of girls and women to education.