

Human Rights Council – 29th Session (15th June – 3rd July 2015)

Panel discussion on realising the equal enjoyment of the right to education of every girl

Statement by Ireland

16 June 2015

Ireland would like to welcome and thank the panellists for their presentations and to commend UAE, as lead sponsor of resolution 27/6, for having brought this matter to the attention of the Council.

Ireland is a firm supporter of inclusive education for all, at home and abroad. The right to education acts as a multiplier, supporting the fuller realisation of a whole range of human rights as well as promoting equality between men and women. The right to education is therefore inextricably linked to all rights. Indeed at the most basic level, it is possible that education can help a child to survive - studies show that a child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past the age of five; and that each extra year of a mother's schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5% to 10%. Knowing this, it is particularly concerning that more than 20 percent of low- and middle-income countries are off-track to meet the MDG on gender parity in education. As the 2015 Global Monitoring Report notes, amongst out-of-school children, girls continue to be significantly more likely than boys never to enrol in school.

Reflecting our own experience of the transformative power of education, Ireland's Policy for International Development "One World One Future" has prioritised girl's access to quality education, particularly beyond the primary level, and ensuring that school is a safe space for girls to learn. A particular focus is placed on girls who are vulnerable to exclusion from the school system for example in Zambia and Mozambique. Ireland also provides scholarships for girls to attend secondary school for example in Uganda where, in partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationalists, we have supported a bursary programme which has financed more than 1,100 girls to attend school.

Recognising the importance of role models for girls in education, Irish Aid supports the recruitment of women teachers, particularly in rural areas, where school attendance of girls is low.

And who could be more inspiring than brave and extraordinary girls like Hannah Godefa, Unicef's Goodwill Ambassador to Ethiopia, who use innovative approaches, challenge traditional practices and speak out so articulately on behalf of their sisters and their right to education.

In this context, Ireland would like to ask Ms Godefa to elaborate on the biggest challenges she has faced in spreading her message in rural Ethiopia; and also on what practical steps we in the international community can take to assist her and others like her.