



Prime Minister of Australia

The Hon Julia Gillard MP

# The Inaugural International Day of the Girl Child

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WED 10 OCTOBER 2012

**Prime Minister**

**Canberra**

I am delighted to launch the International Day of the Girl Child in Australia.

I'm especially delighted to do so as this country's first female Prime Minister.

But also as the Adelaide girl who grew up safe, valued and loved, and received that standard of education I

For most young girls, growing up in a country like Australia is a time of remarkable opportunity.

To be encouraged to think for ourselves.

To have choices and the freedom to exercise them.

To manage our careers, our relationships and our health as we see fit.

But for many girls and young women – here at home and especially in the developing world – the experienc

Like the girl forced to work at home and watch her brother go off to school.

The girl forcibly married to someone she doesn't know before she has even come of age.

Or the young woman who dwells in daily fear of violence from those closest to her.

In many cases, they live lives unchanged from the days of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers.

Their shoulders weighed down by authority and unthinking tradition.

Arduous, limited, even dangerous lives.

Robbing them of a future.

And robbing us of their potential.

Many of us heard overnight of the shocking news that Malala Yousafzai, a teenage schoolgirl and renowned Pakistani, has been shot by the Taliban.

Malala was on a bus home from school when a man who asked for her by name shot her, seriously wounding her in the attack. Today she is in intensive care with bullet wounds to the head and chest.

This attack was no accident. Malala was targeted because she is a campaigner for girls' right to education.

The Pakistani Taliban have claimed responsibility, describing her as a Western-minded girl, known for speaking who had harmed their cause.

Malala's inspiring words have been widely reported and repeated today:

*I will serve my people, I will speak up for my right of education and I speak for the girls. If I lost my life in girls, it is not a big deal for me.*

Today we think of her and her family – we desperately hope she does not have to pay that price.

And we resolve to join in her work.

As Malala's life shows, widening the horizons of women and girls is a job for the whole world.

If girls live lesser lives anywhere, we are diminished everywhere.

When this country helped found the United Nations, we made a commitment to be good global citizens and all times and in all places.

Australia is a nation that keeps its commitments.

So we must all we can to alleviate the suffering of women and increase their rights and opportunities global region.

Nothing is more important than education.

I don't want to see young girls working in sweatshops.

I want to see them in the classroom - well fed and clothed, immunised, safe from harm and free to learn.

Education is the key.

Education is aid that works.

Teaching girls and women is one of the most important investments in the development of a nation.

Education makes an enormous difference to the health of women and their children, to their job opportunities.

Educated girls tend to marry later, which increases their employment prospects.

Education plays an important role in giving women more control over how many children they have.

An extra year of secondary schooling can boost a girl's future wages by 10 to 20 per cent.

And because women typically reinvest 90 per cent of their income in their family, compared with 30 or 40 per cent for men, their children can lead better lives as well.

Friends, In my role as co-chair of the Millennium Development Goal Advocacy Group, I recently announced that quality education and achieving gender equality were my personal priorities.

That's why in recent years, we've put our foot on the accelerator.

Yes, \$320 million is the sum for our Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative, and there's more to do in the Pacific.

Australian aid means half a million children receiving support to go to school in Papua New Guinea.

It means 165,000 school places for girls in Indonesia.

It means 140,000 girls being able to attend middle and secondary school in Pakistan.

And in Afghanistan, we have made a significant contribution to an international effort which has increased from 5 million in 2001 to more than seven million today – including more than 2.7 million girls.

But for all the opportunities being opened up, there are plenty of girls being left behind – abroad and here at home.

That's why the United Nations has created this day of observance - the International Day of the Girl Child.

This is the first, and it's been a long time coming.

It's a day for symbolism - and symbols are important because where our heart and ideals go, our actions will follow.

Friends, Gender equality is one of the great goals of our time.

The first-wave feminists started the last century with such high hopes yet we reached the year 2000 with the same hopes.

Let this century be different and let us be the ones who make it different.

May this be the century when every girl is born wanted.

Where she grows up free from want and fear.

And lives out her years nurtured in dignity and abounding in opportunity.

That is our commitment to the women and girls of today and those of future generations.

That is the hope in which I declare the first international Day of the Girl Child officially launched.