

Attack on Girls' Right to Education in Pakistan.

The right to education is a basic human right for all and we are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (<http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/index.htm>), yet women and girls continue to be deprived of education, often due to longstanding traditions and/or ignorance.

In the Beijing Platform for action Governments committed themselves to ensure universal and equal access to and completion of primary education by all children and eliminate the existing gap between girls and boys, as stipulated in article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a commitment reiterated and refined in Millennium Development Goal 2 (<http://www.undp.org/mdg/goal2.shtml>).

We now read with dismay (*The Times* 26/12/08 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5397901.ece>) that the Taliban is once again imposing its militant rule, ordering the closure of all girl's schools in the Swat district of Pakistan. Announcements in mosques and on radio have given a deadline of 15 January 2009 for the Taliban order to be obeyed, threatening to blow up school buildings and attack schoolgirls if the order is not carried out.

"Female education is against Islamic teachings and spreads vulgarity in society," Shah Dauran, leader of a group that has established control over a large part of Swat district in the North West Frontier Province, declared. It is also reported that more than 125 girls' schools have already been destroyed in the area during the past year. Further, women have been told not to move outside their houses without being fully covered.

- I. We call on the Pakistan Government, as state party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination against Women (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>) and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/keydocuments/english/theconventionont6.html>) to:
 - ensure to women and girls equal rights with men and boys in the field of education
 - recognise that it is the duty of States to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of political, economic and cultural systems (1993 *Vienna World Conference on Human Rights* [http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/A.CONF.157.23.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/A.CONF.157.23.En?OpenDocument))
 - to declare this type of edict by the Taliban a violation of human rights, and
 - to be brave enough to take strong action to protect the civil and human rights of its citizens, particularly women and girls.

The Pakistan Government should be alarmed that if this type of practice is allowed to continue in the Swat district, which was once a relatively liberal area and a popular tourist destination, there is the likelihood that the Taliban will be encouraged to spread its tentacles further.

- II. We call on the United Nations to condemn these actions by the Taliban and to give moral and active support to the Pakistan Government in its fight to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Rosy Weiss, IAW President

On behalf of the Alliance, President Rosy Weiss is taking the above letter to the NGO coordination caucus acting during the 53rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Meanwhile

action can be taken now by all IAW members – Affiliate and Associate organisations and Individual Members:

- Urge your government to add its voice to the public protest.
- Call on other NGOs that you have contact with to take similar action.
- Take this issue to the media.
- Check out websites to keep updated on this issue.

Please advise IAW Secretary-General Lene Pind (iawsec@womenalliance.org) of any action that you are taking.