

International Day of the Girl Child

Age Range: 12 – 17 years

What is it?

The United Nations declared October 11, 2012 as the world's first **International Day of the Girl Child**.

Canada spearheaded the international community in adopting this day. They inspired School Girls Unite, an organization of students and young women leaders in Washington DC to mobilize support in the US to advance the UN Millennium Development Goals related to gender equality, universal basic education and other human rights issues.

This day will make a difference in the lives of girls and young women as citizens and as powerful voices of change in their families, their communities and their nations.

Why is it important?

Equal opportunity for girls is good for all of us.

Girls throughout the world face higher rates of violence, poverty and discrimination. There is a growing recognition around the world that support for girls and their basic human rights is the key to healthy communities. Improving girls' lives has a ripple effect. What is good for them is good for everyone.

The International Day of the Girl Child will promote equal treatment and opportunities for girls around the world in areas such as law, nutrition, health care, education, training, and freedom from violence and abuse.

What are some of the issues?

In Canada:

- 46% of school girls in Ontario report being the target of unwanted sexual comments or gestures in the last three months;
- Young women aged 15 to 19 experience ten times the rate of dating violence than young men;
- Almost one in ten First Nations and Inuit teenage girls are parents.

In Australia:

- One in four Year 10 students and just over half of all Year 12 students reported having engaged in sexual intercourse.
- Approximately one in three young people who had engaged in sexual intercourse reported that they had had unwanted sex at some time in their lives.
- Young people are more likely to become victims of some violent crimes (including sexual offences and assaults) and are less likely than older victims to report a violent crime
- There is increasing evidence that communications technology is being used to isolate young people, with increased in reported 'cyber bullying'.

Around the world:

- Preferential feeding of boys leads to malnutrition for girls, which has lasting physical and mental effects;
- Each year roughly two million girls between the ages of 5 and 15 are trafficked, sold or coerced into the sex trade.

Leaders today and tomorrow

When girls understand their human rights, they are more likely to exercise them. They are also more likely to become leaders and to join others in raising their voices and calling for change.

History shows that it hasn't ever been easy to be a girl, and, despite awesome changes in the status and perception of women and girls, *herstory* is still a complicated and challenging one.

There are a billion reasons why we need the Day of the Girl, but let's start with just a few facts:

- **ILLITERACY** – By 2015, females will make up 64% of the world's (adult) population who cannot read.
- **SCHOOL DROPOUT** – Only 30% of girls in the world are enrolled in secondary school. In America, the dropout rate is worse for boys but one in four girls does not finish high school, and the dropout rate is even higher for minorities.
- **FORCED MARRIAGE** – One in seven girls in developing countries is married off before age 15.
- **VIOLENCE** – In the US more than half (54%) of all rapes of females happen before age 18. One in 5 high school girls has been physically or sexually abused by a dating partner. Worldwide children as young as age 11 are forced to work as prostitutes. Some estimates have as many as 1.2 million children being trafficked every year.
- **BODY IMAGE** – More than half (54%) of 3rd-5th grade girls worry about their appearance and 37% worry about their weight. More than half (57%) of music videos feature a female portrayed exclusively as a decorative, sexual object.

Few Female Role Models

- Fortune 500 Companies Chief Executive Officers – Only 3% are women.
- Top Positions in Media (entertainment, advertising, telecommunications) – Only 3%
- Hollywood Top Filmmakers – Only 5%
- US Senate – Out of 100 Senators, only 17 are women
- US House of Representatives – Out of 435 lawmakers, only 90 are women (13 African American, 7 Latinas and 4 Asian Congresswomen)
- Governors – Only 6 states are run by women

- State Lawmakers – 1,740 women out of 7,382 legislators nationwide
- County Council & Executives – Barely 14% of about 18,000 officials
- School Superintendents – Only 24%, even though most teachers are female
- Mayors – Only 8 women run the largest 100 cities

Issues

In order to tackle the issues that directly impact girl's lives, we have to identify them as barriers to our full participation in the world.

Watch these videos

Kakenya's Story: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CR66wYYJrpM>

Kakenya Ntaiya has been a member of the Vital Voices Global Leadership Network since 2007. She is an active participant in multiple programs run by the organisation across Africa and around the world. Her story has inspired countless others with its messages of determination and hope.

Ask yourself: Would you have been as determined as Kakenya? Was she brave to keep "pushing" to get an education and not have an arranged marriage at a very young age?

Killing Us Softly: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bk9JHsrwnM>

Jean Kilbourne has produced this series for 30 years and found that women's sexualisation within the media has only become "worse."

Ask yourself: Why is this is the case?

Beauty Pressure: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ei6JvK0W60I>

Dove's message is effective in showing the barrage of media messages directed toward girls but keep in mind that Dove is like all companies that do good things partly to get you to buy their products.

Ask yourself: Does continually bombarding girls and young women with this type of advertising change the way girls and young women view the value of their role in the world?

To raise your vital voice, go to: <http://vitalvoices.org>