

## **'WHY CAN'T I AFFORD TO GO TO SCHOOL?'**

### **SAFE SCHOOLS EVERY GIRL'S RIGHT**

Schools are places for children to learn and grow. But many girls all over the world go to school fearing for their safety, dreading humiliating and violent treatment, simply hoping to get through another day.

Schools reflect wider society. The same forms of violence which women suffer throughout their lives – physical, sexual and psychological – are present in the lives of many girls in and around their schools.

Every day, girls are assaulted on their way to school, pushed and hit in school grounds, teased and insulted by their classmates, humiliated by having rumours about them circulated through whisper campaigns, mobile phones or the Internet. Some are threatened with sexual assault by older students, offered higher marks by teachers in exchange for sexual favours, even raped in the staff room. Some are caned or beaten in school in the name of discipline.

### **VIOLENCE STOPS GIRLS GOING TO SCHOOL**

Violence against girls takes place in and around many educational institutions all over the world. It is inflicted not only by teachers, but also by other school employees, fellow students and outsiders. The result is that countless girls are kept out of school, drop out of school, or do not fully participate in school.

### **EVERY GIRL HAS A RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

The damage done by violence against girls is devastating. It causes not only fear and pain, but also lowered self-esteem, poor performance at school, infection with sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, depression and lost opportunities for employment and independence. Violence against girls in school also has the effect of reinforcing gender stereotypes and entrenching gender discrimination in the next generation. It teaches that violence against girls and women is inevitable, and that quality, safe education for girls is not a priority.

Education is held up as the key strategy to empower girls and break the cycles of poverty, to propel social and economic development in poor countries, and to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. Education is both a right in itself and also a pathway to the enjoyment of other rights. Interrupting the education of large numbers of girls therefore has devastating ramifications not only for those students but for society more broadly.

#### *Caption*

The child of a road construction worker holds a spade as school children pass by in New Delhi, India.  
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### **SCHOOL FEES**

Many girls from poor families have little or no access to even a primary education, because the costs are simply beyond their families' means.

Under international law, primary education should be available free to all. International law also obliges states to move towards free secondary education. Even so, schools around the world commonly impose charges. School fees are an insurmountable obstacle for many children, and girls are more likely to be excluded from school than boys when there isn't enough money to go round.

Sometimes these fees are described as "voluntary" contributions towards examination charges or books and materials. Even where schools do not charge such fees, girls and their families may have to cover other expenses associated with their education, such as transport, uniforms and school supplies.

When the costs of education are steep, girls may consider sexual relationships, which they would not otherwise, for example with “sugar daddies” (older men who give them gifts or cash), in order to get the money they need for school.

Poverty also leads many families to seek marriage for their daughters at an early age. Girls who marry young are less likely to continue their education.

<p><b>URGENT ACTION NEEDED</b></p> <p>November 2007          AI Index: ACT 77/011/2007          Amnesty International          International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House          1 Easton Street, London WC1X0DW, United Kingdom          www.amnesty.org</p>	<p>Amnesty International recognizes the determination of girls all over the world to gain an education. We demand that states take immediate action to fulfil their international commitments and make schools accessible to girls and safe. Amnesty International calls on governments to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminate direct and indirect fees for primary schools and take steps to make secondary schools accessible to all.</li> </ul>
<p><b>STOP VIOLENCE          AGAINST WOMEN          AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL</b></p>	<p>Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories, who campaign on human rights. Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.</p> <p>We research, campaign, advocate and mobilize to end abuses of human rights – civil, political, social, cultural and economic. From freedom of expression and association to physical and mental integrity, from protection from discrimination to the right to shelter – these rights are indivisible.</p> <p>Amnesty International is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. Our work is largely financed by contributions from our membership and donations.</p>