

FROM THE UN

# MALALA

MALALA is an example to all women and girls. There has been an enormous outpouring of emotion and support for Malala, the young Pakistani girl shot in the head by the Taliban for speaking out for education for women and girls. But when the Pakistani government proposed a resolution in response to the shooting, the main opposition party opposed the resolution and it was dropped. Now a smear campaign by religious conservatives has started against Malala, painting her as an American agent. The struggle goes on and on..

The fear, abuse and violence against women has a long tragic history. The recent attack on Malala demonstrates again, that the negative attitude toward women and their empowerment remains deeply embedded in many cultures. The world needs the empowerment of women and for this we must have the education of girls. Women are half the world population and yet they remain an untapped potential for societal improvements. It is both the ethical and intelligent way to go forward!.

**Why is the need for improvement of women's status not accepted in many cultures?** An historical perspective concerning value of half the human race can be found as far back as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Genesis, in the Old Testament, men and women were created on the sixth day. Later on, in the Garden of Eden, Eve was created from Adam's rib. There are, however, two creations of women. Who was the first one? According to commentators and Jewish folklore, Lilith was the first wife of Adam. Unfortunately, she gave Adam a hard time and he complained to God, who solved the problem by making Lilith into a demon. In past times, some women wore an amulet to protect themselves from her demonic force. Second wife Eve became disruptive by urging Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge. Women have been seen as troublemakers - the source of evil and need to be controlled by male power.

October 11 was designated by the UN as International Day of the Girl Child. The theme this year was ending child marriage and particularly education for protection against early marriage. A recent UN report on very young marriage around the world is shocking. It calls for ending a practice that every day shortens the childhood of many girls, some as young as 5 years old, ending their education, endangering their health and entering a life of drudgery. As an example, imagine if you were 11 year old Ghulam--a bright and playful Afghan girl, pulled from school and forced into a loveless marriage with a man nearly four times older.

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At a panel discussion a question arose concerning the wisdom of breaking entrenched cultural practices. In response Mary Robinson former UN high commissioner of Human Rights and seven years as president of Ireland., stated that culture is not monolithic, it is man-made and some groups benefit from these cultural practices. But... they can change. For example, in Ireland disappointment in having a girl ended in the course of one generation.

**What about the condition of women worldwide?** While there has been some progress it is slow. Women comprise two-third of the worlds illiterates. Most refugees are women, Women contribute much of the working hours in the world, yet they earn little of the worlds income and own very little of the worlds property.

What is it like to be a girl in a boy's world and a woman in a man's world?. Women's empowerment in the US, for example, has been a struggle: to get the vote, for black women who dared to enter all white schools, the women who only 50 years ago dared to become doctors and scientists. They defied convention and often came home from work to their second job- taking care of their families. In 1960 salaries for women at most colleges and universities were very unfair. It took an act of Congress to make the playing field more even and yet to this very day women are paid 77% of what men get for the very same job ( see American Association of University Women). It is a mantra often heard: Every working woman needs a wife.

Attitudes towards women in the work world remain ambivalent. Women continue to earn less than men for equal work. Female doctors are still payed much less than their male counterparts. Many observers assumed that the difference is related to having children. A new study showed salary inequities even among women without parental responsibility.

The plight of girls and women in some parts of the world is plagued by rape as an everyday event. In a recent PBS TV program called "half the sky" by Kristof and WuDunn (the title comes from a Chinese proverb: "women are half the sky" ) comes an amazing story of resilience. There is a village in Congo formed by women who have been raped and have had their babies there. They are self-supporting and grow their own crops sand sell their own art work. The son of one woman there plans to return after high school to help support and protect the women in the village. The village is under constant attack by men. We highly recommend the book, " Half the Sky". It contains information on how to

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contribute. Other sources to contribute are UNICEF and UNFPA ( UN population fund). The struggle will go on. Edmund Burke said two centuries ago " All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men and women to do nothing".

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