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On International Women's Day, Invest in Education for Girls

Since members of the Taliban boarded her school bus and shot 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai in the head, the Pakistani teen activist has proved unstoppable—she's addressed the UN, been nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize, and gone global in her campaign for the simple right to go to school. But her work is far from finished: quality education is still a distant dream for millions of children.

As we mark International Women's Day on March 8, it's time the United States join Malala in her quest, committing to the women of tomorrow by investing in the girls of today.

While U.S. school children count down the days until spring break, roughly 57 million primary school-aged girls and boys around the world are not attending school at all. **In places like South Sudan, a young woman is more likely to die in childbirth than she is to finish 8th grade.**¹ And even among those students who do make it into a classroom every year, many still struggle with basic reading, writing, and counting skills. According to just-released UN data, a staggering total of **250 million girls and boys—nearly 40% of the world's children of primary school age—still cannot read.**²

The persistent lack of access to quality education outside U.S. borders has real consequences within them—affecting our security, economy, and moral standing in the world. Even as we work to strengthen schools in our own communities, the U.S. can help ensure the poorest and hardest-to-reach children worldwide can also go to school and learn. **This spring, donors will come together to pledge support for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the only international organization dedicated to quality education for all. The U.S. must commit to do its part, investing in the world's children through GPE.**

Why global education matters there *and* here

Malala has reminded the world that education is a human right—and that a quality education can radically change the trajectory of a child's life. But the benefits extend far beyond an individual girl or boy, helping create economic growth, healthier communities, and a more secure world for all of us.

- **Maternal & Child Health:** A child born to an educated mother is more than **twice** as likely to survive to the age of five. As women's education levels increase, immunization rates go up, preventable child deaths go down, and nutrition improves.³
- **Gender Equality:** Education increases self-confidence and decision-making power for girls, as well as their economic potential. On average, for a girl in a poor country, each additional year of education beyond third or fourth grade will lead to 20 percent higher wages.⁴
- **Economic Development:** Education is a prerequisite for economic growth: no country has achieved continuous and rapid growth without at least 40 percent of adults being able to read and write.⁵ Every \$1 invested in a person's education yields \$10-15 in economic benefit over that person's working lifetime.⁶ As countries succeed economically, they become better trade partners—currently, 50% of U.S. exports are purchased by developing nations.⁷
- **Security & Democracy:** People of voting age with a primary education are 1.5 times more likely to support democracy than people with no education.⁸ Countries with higher primary schooling rates and a smaller gap between rates of boys' and girls' schooling tend to enjoy greater democracy and stability.⁹

Stalled on the path toward universal education

Recognizing education's impact, the international community has made astounding progress getting kids into classrooms. In 1999, 108 million children were out of school; today, that number has dropped by nearly half. But new data show that **not only has progress toward universal access stalled since 2008, but of the children who do make it to school, many aren't actually learning.** Making matters worse, donor nations like the United States have reduced financial support for global basic education in recent years, and the world now faces a \$26 billion annual funding shortfall.¹⁰ So long as these patterns persist, we will pay the consequences in health, security, development, and human rights.

Our chance to get back on track: Investing in the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE), with its exclusive focus on ensuring **all** children have the chance to learn, is central to improving basic education worldwide. GPE unites ministries of education with international donors, the private sector, and community groups, who all work together to develop, fund, and implement education plans in nearly 60 of the poorest countries around the world. GPE is a catalytic force for improving both education access and quality in some of the most challenging environments.

Among a long list of accomplishments in its 12-year history, GPE has supported **training for over 300,000 teachers** and helped enroll **22 million children in quality schools** in places like Afghanistan, Somalia, and Haiti.¹¹

"Support from the Global Partnership since 2007 has contributed to a transformation in our basic education sector. We are close to achieving universal primary enrollment and the percentage of children completing primary education has climbed by over 20% in just three years."

- Hon. Dr. Mathias Harebamungu, Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education, Rwanda

In November 2011, many of GPE's developing country partners came forward and pledged to increase their own domestic education budgets by \$5 billion over three years. Overall, poor countries currently provide almost 90% of funding for the basic education of their own children.¹² These countries are politically and financially committed to building strong, lasting systems to educate children into the future. Donor countries can help fill the critical remaining gaps and make that vision a reality. To meet the pressing financial need, the European Union will host a **pledging conference for GPE in June 2014.**

Time for the United States to lead on education

In 2011, the last time GPE solicited donor support, the United States made its first-ever pledge of \$20 million, a big step in the right direction. The U.S. figure, however, paled in comparison to those of many other donor governments—including much smaller countries like Denmark and the Netherlands—who pledged 10- or 20-fold more than the United States. **This year, the United States has the chance to show ambition in its contribution, coming forward as a leader on global education, not a reluctant follower.**

A better educated world means a healthier, more stable, more prosperous world. Investing in educating the world's children is the smart thing to do. Perhaps more importantly, it is, quite simply, the right thing to do. Malala was willing to risk her own life demanding the right to education for all. This spring our leaders should make a pledge worthy of that commitment.

¹ [Building a better future: Education for an independent South Sudan](#). UNESCO. 2011.

² [Education for All Global Monitoring Report](#). UNESCO. 2014.

³ [Education Counts: Towards the Millennium Development Goals](#). UNESCO. 2011.

⁴ [What Works in Girls' Education](#). Herz and Sperling. Council on Foreign Relations. 2004.

⁵ [Teach a Child, Transform a Nation](#). Basic Education Coalition. 2004.

⁶ [Overcoming inequality: why governance matters. Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009](#). UNESCO. 2009.

⁷ "International Policy." U.S. Chamber of Commerce: International Policy.

⁸ [Putting Education to Work. Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2012](#). UNESCO. 2012.

⁹ [Education and Development](#). World Bank.

¹⁰ [Education for All Global Monitoring Report](#). UNESCO. 2014.

¹¹ [Global Partnership for Education](#). 2014.

¹² [Education for All is affordable – by 2015 and beyond](#). UNESCO. 2013.