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SDG ROUNDTABLE – EMPOWERMENT OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

SEPTEMBER 25, 2015

Good afternoon. Many thanks to the co-chairs and the President of the General Assembly. I am very pleased to be with you in this building on this historic day.

We are here to forge a better world - a world in which every child has the opportunity to thrive, to live a life of opportunity, to enjoy peace. In which humanity has combined to end poverty whilst nurturing the planet we share.

As we meet today we know we cannot even begin to realise this dream if we do not empower and enable half the population, our world's women and girls.

It is simply not possible to achieve the new and ambitious SDG agenda without ensuring universal access to a quality education, without educating our girls.

The facts are crystal clear.

Educated mothers invest more in their children's education, and economic growth is faster when girls and boys learn.

Educated girls and young women are healthier and go on to have healthier children who are more likely to live past the age of 5.

Ensuring that girls stay in school and learn is one of the most effective ways to prevent early and forced marriage. And the benefits are greater the longer girls stay in school.

Even if none of these things were true, it would be every girls' right to have a good education.

But given they are true, the case for educating our girls is overwhelmingly powerful.

Although the numbers of children not in primary school have declined 40% since 2000, and 37% for primary and lower secondary, our progress is much too slow.

32 million girls of primary and lower secondary school age are out of school.

We are not making up these numbers fast enough. At the current rate of progress, we will not see the first cohort of sub-Saharan African girls to universally attend primary and lower secondary school until almost a century from now. That means no-one in this room will live to see that day.

We must forcefully reject this business as usual approach.

At the Global Partnership for Education, we are determined to accelerate progress. We are confident this can be done because we know what works. Over the past 13 years, GPE has committed over $4.3 billion to 60 developing country partners, including almost 50% to fragile and/or conflict affected states.

We work with country partners to develop national education sector plans to ensure every child gets access to a good quality education. For the poorest nations we help fund these plans. In turn, countries have increased their financing commitments on average by 10%. The GPE tide is lifting education budgets around the world.

And our approach gets results:

31 GPE developing country partners are close to or have achieved gender parity in primary education.

69% of girls in GPE-supported countries completed primary school in 2012, up from 56% in 2002.

It is important to know the statistics about girls' education is today. But the real question is: how do we improve life for girls tomorrow?

Effective change is underway – but there are not enough resources to get every girl and boy a quality education.

We need more funds to adequately resource effective programs. We need infrastructure and data to quantify what is working, including gender disaggregated data to ensure we see clearly whether our policies and approaches are working and can make corrections, if needed.

With the support of our donors, GPE will further invest in empowering women and girls through education. And we will invest in strengthening the systems and data strategies that make progress at national level possible in scores of countries.

We must also engage on attitudes and leadership. Change will not come until cultures change, until leaders make this a priority, until voices are heard throughout society calling for full opportunities for girls and women to be a part of the fabric of everyday life.

The challenge is immense – but the education of our girls is worth fighting for. Worth committing the dollars to. Worth raising our voices for.

Thank you for being here today to do exactly that.