

Education and Gender Equality at the United Nations

By: Adina Mistry

As a 13-year old, an opportunity to present at the United Nations comes very rarely. It was an honor for me to participate as part of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) UN NGO team presenting, "Education: A Powerful Tool for Gender Equality", at the 59th Commission on the Status of Women: Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, on March 16, 2015.

But I have to be honest that at the beginning, I had no knowledge of what this topic meant and how I could relate to it. To live in the United States, go to school, have options to study what I am passionate about, and enjoy afterschool activities are part of my life that I take for granted. I now know that getting even

basic primary education is a struggle and privilege for many children around the world.

According to UNESCO, worldwide 121 million children ages 6 – 11 are denied access to education. This is a sobering statistic especially when viewed together with how the lack of education breeds poverty and exploitation, especially for girls.

I was very fortunate to learn about Pratham and was proud to introduce our audience to Pratham during our presentation. Over the last two decades, since its inception in 1995, Pratham has become the largest educational movement in India and one of India's largest and most respected education NGOs. Pratham has been recognized for its innovation and impact by many of the world's leading experts and philanthropic organizations, and received several awards year after year by a range of external and independent organizations for both the quality of its innovations and for its extensive impact in addressing literacy problems. And Pratham has achieved this success through several innovative programs such as *Read India*, which is Pratham's flagship program and helps to improve reading, writing and basic arithmetic skills of children 6-14 years of age; the *Second Chance Program*, which helps girls 14 years and older complete their secondary education; the *Annual Status of Education Report*, which is a highly influential survey and most comprehensive large-scale educational measurement tool that helps shift the focus of primary education from enrollment to learning quality; and the *Vocational Training Program*, which provides underserved young adults occupational skills so that they can be employed in the manufacturing and service sectors.

Today, I benefit from those that have come before me who made education an equal opportunity for boys and girls, men and women, and as I commence my high school years, I have the opportunity to pay it forward. Pratham has given me the inspiration to dedicate myself to the spread of education, especially education for girls, as a tool for gender equality, as I do believe that knowledge brings independence and freedom of thought because as Nelson Mandela said, "*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*"



On the top (left to right): Adina Mistry, Narges Kakalia, Nurelle Mehta

One the bottom (left to right): Nina Mistry and Homi Gandhi