

## Girl Advocates

The first International Day of the Girl Child was celebrated with much enthusiasm in many parts of the world. **What did you do to mark the occasion?**



St Teresa Students, Darjeeling



Malala Yousafzai



Head of UN Women with girl advocates

**Why choose 10/11/12 to focus attention on the girls of the world?** The girl advocates, who submitted the request for an international day to the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, explained that this date was significant because for many girls gender inequity becomes apparent when they turn 10, 11 or 12 and their lifelong struggle to combat discrimination, harmful cultural practices and violence begins.

Kamleesh Rai, Loreto's UN Contact in Darjeeling, said that the schools in the region celebrated the International Day of the Girl with much pomp and gaiety. *The purpose of the day was to generate in our students a sense of belonging, ingraining in them a confidence to face this challenging world. The day was marked with merrymaking and fun, which indeed left an indelible impression on every girl, preparing her for what is to come in the future.*

A Darjeeling newspaper, the Statesman, filed a special report to mark the occasion. *International Girls' Day was observed here at Loreto Convent School and St Teresa Higher Secondary School. The United Nations General Assembly last year passed a resolution to create the 11 Oct day highlighting girls' issues. St Teresa's girls* organized a school fete, open only to girls, and gave each one a number of specially designed coupons. Both staff and students wore pink.

**Loreto Convent's girls** performed a street play for an open audience in Chowastra, *as part of an anti-trafficking program with Darjeeling-based Mankind in Action for Rural Growth (MARG). As hundreds of audience members enjoyed the play, the convent girls distributed brochures and leaflets to raise awareness about the issue.*

*"With the UN passing the resolution to celebrate October 11 as Girls' Day, the Convent students performed a play today on how easily Hills girls get trafficked," said Loreto Convent Senior School Coordinator. "Although women in the Hills get good opportunities, trafficking is a major concern. While many arrests are made, wealthy traffickers can easily get bail."*

While the girls in the mountains of Darjeeling were demonstrating that advocacy about serious issues can also be fun, not so far away in Pakistan, **Malala Yousafzai and two companions** were gravely wounded for exercising their human right to attend school. An outspoken critic of gender inequity and oppression from an early age and proficient blogger in both English Urdu, Malala has been strongly supported in her activism by her family despite the obvious danger of retaliation from the Taliban. Nevertheless her father believes that not allowing her to talk about injustice is actually a greater risk than silence, because then she would have *given into the slavery and subjugation of ruthless terrorism and extremism*. In Malala's words: *If this new generation is not given pens, they will be given guns.*

**What is inspiring you at present in your advocacy efforts?** I look forward to hearing what you and the people with whom you work are doing.

Anne Kelly ibvm, UN Representative  
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