

# President and first lady push a global program to help educate girls

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Pakistani Muslim girls attend a religious madrassa, or school, to learn the Quran, in Karachi, Pakistan, March 4, 2015. Religious schools in Pakistan, most of them in mosques, are the only source of education for thousands of children. AP Photo/Fareed Khan

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama announced Tuesday that the U.S. government will expand a program that helps girls around the world receive an education.

The new initiative is called Let Girls Learn. It builds on a campaign launched last year by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that aims to provide an education to more than 60 million girls around the world who are not in school. There are already government programs addressing topics like education, leadership, nutrition and protection against gender-based violence and forced marriages.

## **"Every Girl Deserves An Education"**

"I want to make sure that no girl out there is denied her chance to be a strong, capable woman with the resources that she needs to succeed — that no girl is prevented from making her unique contributions to the world," President Obama said. "Every child is precious. Every girl is precious. Every girl deserves an education."

The president and first lady said this issue is personal for them because they have two daughters.

“I see myself in these girls. I see our daughters in these girls,” Michelle Obama said. “And like all of you, I just can’t walk away from them. Like you, I can’t just sit back and accept the barriers that keep them from realizing their promise.”

The Peace Corps is one group that will work toward the Obamas' goals. The Peace Corps is a volunteer program that was founded by the U.S. government in 1961. It sends U.S. citizens abroad to help people in developing countries.

## **Uniforms, Fees, Textbooks**

There are many barriers that can prevent girls from getting an education. These include the cost of a uniform, school fees or a lack of textbooks. The Peace Corps will look for ways to overcome these barriers, Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet told reporters Monday night.

The organization has nearly 7,000 volunteers in more than 60 developing countries already working with communities through training programs, Hessler-Radelet said.

“Peace Corps volunteers are in a unique position to break down barriers to girls’ education at the community level,” Hessler-Radelet said. “They speak the local language. They understand the local culture.”

The girls education program will start with 11 countries the first year: Albania, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Georgia, Ghana, Moldova, Mongolia, Mozambique, Togo and Uganda. More countries will be included the following year, the White House said.

## **First Lady Flies To Asia**

As part of the new initiative, Michelle Obama will travel to Japan and Cambodia later this month. She said she will meet with Akie Abe, the wife of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and Caroline Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador to Japan. In Cambodia, she said she will meet with Peace Corps volunteers and visit a local school.

President Obama’s budget recommends \$250 million for girls programs worldwide, including education, said Tina Tchen, the first lady’s chief of staff.

USAID already invests \$1 billion annually in international education. The organization has helped train more than 300,000 teachers worldwide and provided more than 35 million textbooks and teaching material in a single year, said Susan Markham, USAID’s leader on girls and women’s issues.

“Access to education is one of the foremost challenges we face as a global community,” Representative Kay Granger, a Republican from Texas, said at the White House on Tuesday.

**"Transformative Power Of Education"**

Gayle Smith of the National Security Council said improving education for girls helps a country's economy and can create potential leaders in a country.

Citing the struggles of girls and women in Nigeria and Sudan, Smith said the initiative will also focus on the rights and security of young women worldwide.

National security adviser Susan Rice said this program comes "at a vital moment."

"We cannot allow these challenges to rob generations of young women of their future," Rice said. "Together let's make sure that every child, no matter where they're born or what they look like or what their gender, has a chance to forge the future that they deserve, starting with an education."

As for young girls and boys in the U.S., Michelle Obama said she wanted them to "understand the transformative power of education." Obama said they should learn about the sacrifices girls around the world must make to receive an education.

## Quiz

- 1 All of the following are barriers to girls' education worldwide EXCEPT:
- (A) the cost of school
  - (B) the need for a uniform
  - (C) the lack of school materials
  - (D) the lack of attention from the U.S. government
- 2 Which of the following statements would Kay Granger be MOST likely to agree with?
- (A) The U.S. has spend too much money on USAID so far.
  - (B) The U.S. is justified in spending money on supporting global education.
  - (C) The U.S. should focus on its own education system before helping other countries.
  - (D) The U.S. cannot help other countries without understanding those cultures first.

- 3 What does the word "campaign" mean in the following selection from the article?

*The new initiative is called Let Girls Learn. It builds on a campaign launched last year by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that aims to provide an education to more than 60 million girls around the world who are not in school.*

- (A) military activities
- (B) social movement
- (C) important position
- (D) race for an election

- 4 Which of the following could replace "forge" in the following sentence WITHOUT changing its meaning?

*"Together let's make sure that every child, no matter where they're born or what they look like or what their gender, has a chance to forge the future that they deserve, starting with an education."*

- (A) create
- (B) witness
- (C) imagine
- (D) understand