



Canadian Federation of University Women  
Fédération canadienne des femmes diplômées des universités

502- 331 Cooper Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 0G5  
Telephone: (613) 234-8252 Fax: (613) 234-8221  
[www.cfuw.org](http://www.cfuw.org)

For Immediate Release:

**On International Literacy Day IFUW and CFUW call for concerted government action to improve female literacy**

(OTTAWA , September 8, 2013) – On the occasion of International Literacy Day, September 8, the International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](http://www.ifuw.org)), based in Geneva, Switzerland, and the Canadian Federation of University Women are calling on the Government of Canada to provide increased funding and support to developing countries in order to boost female literacy rates, and more specifically to assist vulnerable women and girls in gaining literacy skills. CFUW also calls on all levels of government in Canada to improve adult learning policies, programs and services to address the large percentage of Canadian women with low literacy skills.

Two-thirds of the world's nearly 800 million illiterate adults are women, representing a sizable proportion of the world's population. In many developing countries, the percentages of women who cannot read or write are astonishing. In Pakistan, only 40% women over the age of 15 can read and write, compared to 70% of men. In Tanzania, one third of women – more than 4 million women in total – are not literate, and in Bolivia, 30% of adult women cannot read and write, compared to just 5% of men.<sup>1</sup> Canada however, is not immune, over 40 per cent of the population between 16 and 65 falls below the internationally-accepted level of literacy required to cope in a modern society. Aboriginal peoples and new immigrants are particularly affected.

“Literacy, and female literacy in particular, liberates people from the shackles of poverty and accelerates a nation’s advancement,” said IFUW president Catherine Bell. “Literacy enables human dignity by giving people increased autonomy as well as the ability to earn a livelihood.”

“While the rates of low literacy are quite similar for both women and men in Canada, women with low literacy suffer from starker economic outcomes”, said Susan Murphy, CFUW President. “Women with low literacy are more likely to be unemployed or employed in low paying jobs than men with similar levels of literacy. Many women in these situations are also single mothers, and this can have a huge impact on their children”.

Literacy skills are one of the cornerstones of development, and are crucial for social, economic and political participation. Literacy helps to eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, curb population growth, achieve gender equality and ensure sustainable development, peace and democracy.

“This is a worldwide issue that the Government of Canada can play an important role in addressing both here in Canada and abroad. Strengthening our efforts to address illiteracy and low levels of literacy among women and girls will surely have high social, political and economic dividends”, said Murphy.

CFUW is a non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization with over 100 CFUW Clubs, located in every province across Canada. Since its founding in 1919, CFUW has been working to improve the status of women, and to promote human rights, public education, social justice, and peace. CFUW is the largest affiliate of the International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](http://www.ifuw.org)), the leading girls’ and women’s global organization run by and for

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<sup>1</sup> Key Messages and Data on Girls’ and Women’s Education and Literacy UNESCO 2012

women, advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels.

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For more information please contact:

Nina Joyce, T: +41 22 731 23 80 ; Email: [nj@ifuw.org](mailto:nj@ifuw.org) or Robin Jackson, T: 613-234-8252;  
Email: [executivedirector@cfdu.org](mailto:executivedirector@cfdu.org)