

Full Text of First Lady Peng Liyuan's Speech on High-Level UN Roundtable

Sept. 26, 2015

Director-General Bokova, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to join you for this important initiative as the UN marks its 70th anniversary.

Education is very close in my heart. My father grew up in a small village in China. In those days, not many villagers could read. So my father opened a night school to teach them how to read. With his help, many people learned to write their own names; with his help, many people learned to read newspapers for the first time; with his help, many women were able to teach their children how to read.

As his daughter, I know what education means to the people, especially those without it. After generations of hard work, China has come a long way in education. I myself am a beneficiary of that progress. Otherwise I would never have become a soprano and a professor of music.

I am following in my father's footsteps by teaching at China's Conservatory of Music to help continue China's success story. I want to thank Director-General Bokova and UNESCO for naming me the Special Envoy for Girls and Women's Education. I am truly honored to work with the UN and do something for Global Education. I have visited many schools around the world. I've seen first-hand how much more we can do on education.

Education is about women and the girls. It is important for girls to go to school because they will become their children's first teachers someday. But women still account for over half of the world's poor in population and 60% of adults who can't read.

Education is crucial in addressing such inequalities. In China, the Spring Bud Education Program has helped over 3 million girls go back to school. Many of them have finished university education and they are doing well at work.

Education is about equality. In poor countries and regions the number of school dropouts is astonishing. We call for more educational resources to these places.

Education is about the young people. Young people are the future. Education is important because it not only gave young people knowledge and skills but also help them become responsible citizens. As the UNESCO special envoy and a mother myself, my commitment to education for all will never change.

Many years ago, my father made a small difference in his village. Together we can make a big difference in the world. I was once asked about my Chinese dream. I said I hope all children especially girls can have access to good education. This is my Chinese dream. I believe one day education first will no longer be a dream, it will be a reality enjoyed by every young woman on this planet.

Thank you very much.