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Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify today about barriers to girls' education. This topic is critical to our foreign policy goals—and so I'd like to thank you for your important leadership on these issues.

As you know, tens of millions of girls around the globe are not in school. 31 million of these girls are of primary school age, and 32 million are adolescents. The majority of these girls live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

My colleague, Susan Markham, will speak more about the many investments the U.S. government is making to ensure girls of all ages have access to education, including at the primary level. But what I would like to talk to you about today is a new focus area for our government—the challenges facing adolescent girls.

Thanks to concerted efforts by the United States and the international community, the gender gap in primary education enrollment has narrowed in many countries. But in many societies around the world, puberty triggers a marked divergence in the lives of boys and girls, usually resulting in greater opportunities for boys and greater limitations for girls. That is why disparities appear and widen with successive levels of education. In

primary education, 66 percent of countries have achieved gender parity, compared to 50 percent in lower secondary, 29 percent in upper secondary, and only 4 percent in tertiary.

Last year, I visited an all-girls school in Kenya. I can still picture the girls lined up in the courtyard, with big smiles on their faces. As I walked through the grounds with the principal, we came across a sign that said, simply: “You are not too young to change your nation.” That sign is both a promise and a warning. Adolescent girls are the future of their countries, and if that future is going to be bright, girls need to reach their full potential.

When women are able to fully participate in society, their communities and economies benefit as well. And yet around the world, there are large gender gaps in women’s economic, cultural, and political participation. The State Department has four lines of effort to address these gaps:

- preventing and responding to gender-based violence;
- promoting women’s economic empowerment;
- advancing women’s roles in peace and security efforts;
- investing in adolescent girls.

In order for women to fully participate in society, we need to support them as adolescents. We’ve seen how women’s’ potential is often determined during adolescence, which can be a fork in the road for girls. On one path, an adolescent girl will remain in school, which means she is more likely to marry later and have fewer and healthier children. She also is more likely to

graduate, ready and able to earn an income that she will invest back into her family and community.

The other path is much harder. When an adolescent girl drops out of school, she faces increased risks of early marriage, trafficking, early pregnancy, HIV infection, susceptibility to violent extremism, and maternal morbidities. She is more likely to be unskilled, have less earning power, and be less able to meaningfully participate in society.

Research shows that far too many girls are on that second path.

- A quarter of a billion girls live in poverty.
- More than 700 million girls and women alive today were married as children—and if current trends continue, the total number of women alive that were married in childhood will grow to almost 1 billion by 2030.
- Girls account for more than 80 percent of new HIV infections among adolescents in countries hardest hit by HIV/AIDS.
- An estimated 200 million women and girls in 30 countries have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting.
- Of the 13 million illiterate youth around the world, 63 percent are girls.
- And 62 million girls are not in school— which means they face diminished economic opportunities and increased risk of discrimination and violence.

As a country that cares deeply about all individuals' ability to realize and exercise their rights as human beings, the United States plays an important role in supporting these girls and their communities.

The human rights of these girls matter deeply—that is certain. But we see them through another lens as well: their welfare and empowerment will be critical to achieving our goals for development, as well as global security and stability.

While adolescence is a time of great vulnerability for girls, it is also the ideal point to leverage development and diplomacy efforts. Investments in adolescent girls pay dividends in the peace, security, and prosperity of communities and countries. To break the cycle of poverty, our efforts must reach girls before they arrive at this intersection of adolescence and follow them until they complete their education.

Thanks to research by the World Bank and others, there is a strong evidence-based case to be made that educating girls may be the development investment with the highest return. Girls' education has a demonstrated positive effect on a broad range of priorities, including ending poverty and promoting economic growth; improving the health and survival rates of women and children; preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS; protecting children from early marriage, forced labor, and sexual exploitation; and promoting gender equality and women's economic, social, and political participation.

Multiple research studies have shown:

- An extra year of education beyond the average boosts girls' eventual wages by 10-20 percent.¹
- Educated women are more likely to join the formal sector, which broadens a country's tax base and increases its overall productivity.²
- If the world closes the gender gap in workforce participation, global GDP would grow by \$28 trillion in 2025.³
- When women gain four more years of education, fertility per woman drops by roughly one birth.⁴
- When a girl in the developing world receives seven years of education, she marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children.⁵
- In Africa, children of mothers who receive 5 years of primary education are 40 percent more likely to live beyond age five.⁶
- Multi-country data show educated mothers are about 50 percent more likely to immunize their children than uneducated mothers.⁷
- Women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to know the basic facts about HIV/AIDS, according to a 32-country review of demographic and health surveys.⁸

¹ Psacharopoulos, George. 1994. "Returns to Investment in Education: A Global Update." *World Development* 22 (9): 1325–43.

² Malhotra, Anju, Caren Grown, and Rohini Pande. 2003. "Impact of Investments in Female Education on Gender Inequality." Washington, D.C.: International Center for Research on Women.

³ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-09-24/mckinsey-says-gender-equality-would-boost-gdp-by-28-trillion>

⁴ Klasen, Stephan. 1999. "Does Gender Inequality Reduce Growth and Development? Evidence from Cross-Country Regressions." Policy Research Report on Gender and Development Working Paper No. 7. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

⁵ UN Population Fund, *State of World Population*, 1990.

⁶ Summers, Lawrence H. 1994. "Investing in All the People: Educating Women in Developing Countries." EDI Seminar Paper No. 45. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

⁷ Gage, Anastasia, Elisabeth Sommerfelt, and Andrea Piani. 1997. "Household Structure and Childhood Immunization in Niger and Nigeria." *Demography* 34 (2):195–309.

⁸ Vandemoortele, J., and E. Delamonica. 2000. "Education 'Vaccine' against HIV/AIDS." *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 3 (1).

- An Ivory Coast study found that educated girls were only half as likely to experience female genital cutting.⁹
- A review of 113 studies indicates that school-based AIDS education programs are effective in reducing early sexual activity and high-risk behavior.¹⁰

Despite the wealth of data demonstrating that adolescent girls are a sound and smart investment, the barriers standing in the way of girls' education are varied and complex.

- Attending secondary schools, which are more widely dispersed than primary schools, often requires girls to walk long distances. Parents worry for their daughters' safety traveling to and from school.
- Girls experience sexual harassment from teachers and students in their classes.
- Domestic chores leave girls without time or energy to do homework or make the long journey to school.
- Early and forced marriage typically forces girls to drop out of school because they get pregnant or have more duties at home.
- Schools lack proper sanitary facilities for girls, which means that girls miss a week each month when they menstruate.
- Parents often cannot afford school fees, or choose to pay only for their sons to go to school.

⁹ World Health Organization. 1998. "Female Genital Mutilation." Geneva: World Health Organization.

¹⁰ Kirby, D., et al. 1994. "School-Based Programs to Reduce Risk Behaviors: A Review of Effectiveness." Public Health Reports 109 (3): 339–61.

- Communities don't value girls in the way they value boys, and don't see girls as worthy of an education or any role for them outside the home.

In conflict-affected communities and refugee environments, the challenges to educating girls are exacerbated by the violence and displacement around them. Refugee and displaced children are five times less likely to attend school, and the situation is far worse for girls who are 2.5 times more likely than boys not to attend school in crisis situations.

The United States recognizes the need for access to education for the most vulnerable children affected by conflict and crises—whether they are in their own communities, displaced, or in new and longstanding refugee populations—which is why both the State Department and USAID invest in girls' education in emergencies.

While barriers vary by community and country, they all have the same effect: girls are held back from reaching their full potential, and consequently so are their communities and countries.

To address the range of challenges facing adolescent girls, Secretary Kerry launched the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls in March of this year. Not only is this the first U.S. strategy to focus on this age group, the United States is the first country in the world to develop a strategy focused on the protection and advancement of adolescent girls.

The strategy recognizes the need to match our investment in adolescent girls with the pivotal role they play in our development and foreign policy efforts. Its launch signifies our intent to take a strong leadership role in this area.

In addition to the State Department, a number of government agencies are part of this strategy, including USAID, the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. The Strategy outlines five common objectives:

- enhancing girls access to quality education in safe environments;
- providing economic opportunities and incentives for girls and their families;
- empowering girls with information, skills, services and support;
- mobilizing and educating communities to change harmful norms and practices, such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting;
- and strengthening policy and legal frameworks and accountability.

The strategy also outlines the full range of challenges facing girls at this age and identifies education as the single most important tool to equip them to overcome these barriers and fully participate in their societies.

We are proud to highlight the work we are doing in coordination with Let Girls Learn—a presidential initiative championed by the First Lady and a central part of implementing the strategy. Let Girls Learn is focused on

making sure that adolescent girls can get a quality education that empowers them to reach their full potential.

This initiative is unique in that it is holistic. We are working to address the range of challenges facing adolescent girls in a comprehensive way, including by tackling cultural biases that place little value on education for girls, as well as the inability of parents to pay school fees. And we are doing everything we can to include the relevant stakeholders—across the U.S. government and beyond—to address the challenges that hold back girls.

I'd like to highlight one particular component of Let Girls Learn that my office is working on with the USAID, and that Susan will speak about as well. Through the Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund, we are undertaking a comprehensive effort to improve education outcomes for adolescent girls in two focus countries—Malawi and Tanzania—that President Obama announced last year. We selected these countries after a careful and extensive vetting process that took into consideration the countries' relative political stability, high number of girls out of school, high rates of early and forced marriage, and political will on the part of the government.

What we ultimately hope to do is to develop a successful model to keep adolescent girls in school. The model could be used by the United States or other interested governments to scale up efforts elsewhere. We recently held a workshop on this initiative with civil society partners in Tanzania, and I was highly encouraged that representatives from the governments of the

United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, South Korea, and Norway were in attendance.

I am delighted that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is a central partner in this effort. The PEPFAR's DREAMS partnership is investing \$385 million in 10 African countries—including Malawi and Tanzania—to reduce HIV infection in adolescents and young women. DREAMS will work far beyond the health sector, by focusing on things like lack of access to education for girls, as well as poverty and sexual violence.

Research has shown that keeping girls in secondary school can have a large protective effect against the transmission of HIV. One study published in the Lancet found that one additional year of education for adolescents can reduce HIV acquisition before age 32 by one third. The protective effect of education is even stronger among young women—risk of HIV acquisition was cut nearly in half.

We recognize that advancing girls' education requires taking a comprehensive approach—through diplomacy, programming, and partnerships. That's what it will take to make sure that girls around the world—like the ones I met in Kenya—are getting the education they need to succeed. As the sign said, these girls are not too young to change their nation. And it's not too late for us to support them in reaching their full potential.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.