

Introduction 'lecture Julia Gillard' – 11 FEB 2015

In some parts of the world, students are going to school every day. It's their normal life. But in other parts of the world, we are starving for education... it's like a precious gift. It's like a diamond.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For some of you this quote by Malala Yousafzai will ring a bell. Last year, the Pakistani girl received the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17. That makes her the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Malala was shot by the Taliban in 2012, for advocating girls' rights to education. But she herself wants to be remembered as the girl who stood up. In 2013, we offered Malala free tuition at our university, a scholarship that comprises all tuition fees as well as residence and travel costs. An offer that of course remains valid.

This week, a new United Nations human rights report reveals that schools in at least 70 different countries were attacked during five years between 2009 and 2014, with many attacks specifically targeting girls, parents and teachers advocating for gender equality in education.

The report calls for measures to change and influence the social, cultural, political, economic and security context within which violations occur.

But religious extremism is not the only reason why children and in this case girls cannot go to school. There are many reasons, in developing countries and in developed countries, and not one of them is a good reason.

Our university, the VUB, has always been socially committed from a non-dogmatic humanistic perspective. Equal opportunities and diversity are among our main values. We have always encouraged talented students from a difficult social background to study at university.

And international solidarity has always been in the heart of our commitment.

We have for instance our University Centre for development cooperation, UCOS in Dutch, an educational organization that wants to empower sustainable human development. UCOS sets up educational processes which aim at making people aware of their identity as world citizens and of the challenges of global society. UCOS is hosting this event.

We also have our spin-off Close the Gap, which is an international non-profit organisation that is bridging the digital divide by offering computers to educational and other projects in developing and emerging countries. The computers are donated by corporations and public organizations.

No need to say that I am looking forward to the lecture of Ms Julia Gillard, a lecture that is titled "Education - A key driver for development". I am really honored that the former prime minister of Australia and the chair of the board of directors of the Global Partnership for Education is here today.

As Prime Minister of Australia between 2010 and 2013, Julia Gillard reformed Australia's educational system at every level from early childhood to university education.

As chair of the Global Partnership for Education, she has brought her commitment to a worldwide dimension.

And I am even more proud that Ms Gillard has accepted the title of doctor honoris causa of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The honorary doctorate will be awarded during a brief ceremony after The Kapuscinski development Lecture. At the end of May, our university will also award honorary doctorates to two other exceptional women, in recognition of their achievements, their efforts and their dedication for education in poor parts of the world: Marie Levens and Francisca Anyango. Due to a very busy agenda, Julia Gillard cannot attend the

official award ceremony at the 29th of May, and that's the reason why she will receive her honorary doctorate here today.

I thank you very much.