



Foreword

My interest in girls' education was sparked when I read *The Breadwinner* to my nine-year-old daughter, Nikki. We were both moved by Deborah Ellis's compelling story about a girl in Afghanistan who is forced to disguise herself as a boy in order to support her family. The book depicts the harsh reality that can confront girls, and the barriers they can face in attempting to receive an education. When we closed the book, Nikki asked me simply: "Mummy, what can we do to help?"

In Canada, first as a business leader involved in my community and now as a politician, I have seen the effect of economic and political forces on people's jobs, livelihoods and on their quality of life. I have worked to help build economic opportunities at the community, national and international levels. When I had the honor to serve as a Cabinet Minister in Canada, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, I focused on improving the role that government can play in helping out, and helping up, disadvantaged groups in our society. My term as Minister also spanned the Year of Development, when the challenges of meeting basic needs on a global level rose to the forefront of international attention.

Strong leadership at the highest levels of all governments is essential if the international community is to succeed in ensuring that, over time, all countries can provide essential services to poor and disadvantaged citizens. As Maureen Lewis and Marlaine Lockheed show in *Inexcusable*

Absence, girls' schooling is a neglected issue in too many countries; indeed, throughout the developing world, 60 million girls are still out of school, three quarters of them from excluded minorities. The cost in human and economic terms of this effective educational segregation is simply too high, in terms both of opportunity lost to individual girls and women and of the damage to the health of local communities and entire societies. Education is the golden key to advancement, a global right, and yet an entire group of people is denied the ability to contribute fully.

But there's good news. Effective solutions are not only possible—they have been demonstrated, and there is a growing body of best practices.

This book is a very important step in the right direction—but it is only the first step. It is my hope that the policy solutions proposed in the book will focus the global discussion we need to have on girls' education, and stimulate leadership for an action campaign. This is one of the most important issues in global development today.

To make good decisions, we need good information. So I am delighted to see the Center for Global Development take the lead in providing a credible platform for careful research and creative ideas to help make education possible for the world's girls and young women for whom going to school remains an elusive dream.

The Honourable Belinda Stronach
Member of Parliament of Canada (Newmarket-Aurora, Ontario),
and member of the board of directors, Center for Global Development
www.belindastronach.ca