



Women in South Africa learning to read and write. Photo: English Literacy Project

International Liter

The United Nations has declared 1990 International Literacy Year. They want to raise awareness that 900 million adults around the world cannot read and write. This means that one out of every three people in the world cannot read and write. International Literacy Year is a call for action to all countries, their governments, organisations and projects, to fight this problem. It will be a year in which literacy

learners from different countries will travel to meet each other and share their experiences. The writings from many learners all over the world will be published in books. The voices of literacy learners will be heard. The problem of not being able to read and write goes hand in hand with poverty, and so it is the poor countries that suffer most. This is where the campaigns will be very important.



Thanks to English Literacy Project for contributing to this article

Paulinah Phungwayo is a literacy learner in South Africa. She wrote this:

Women and Fear

Women have more fear than men.

Some do not talk about it.

They fear the men will say they are useless.

Some who want to go to learn fear to go out.

They fear their men because the men do not want them to go out.

Men want to be in control.

Women have fear when they do not have beauty or dress nice.

They fear the man will go for other women.

For the whole life the woman spends time to make self beautiful.

Our men must take us the way we are.

They must stop making us into toys, things that they can pick up and throw down.

We are tired of this.

I want to support all women. To stop having fear.

I have seen many women who did not get the education.

I want to say to all women:

do not be stopped by your husband to learn.

We must all learn to break this fear and the silence.

Literacy Year 1990

In South Africa it will be a year of challenge to the mass democratic movement to take up this problem. Six out of 10 black people cannot read and write in South Africa. 9 million South African adults cannot read or write. People who cannot read and write are the working class and the rural poor. They are fighting for a better life. Literacy can help in this fight. Literacy means knowledge, and knowledge

means power.

For women, the struggle to learn to read and write is tied up with the struggle for equality with men. The freedom to learn to read and write is everyone's right. It is up to women to fight for that right. And it is up to brave new men to take up the challenge to share the tasks at home, and to offer women the freedom to learn.