

Welcome to As It Is, the daily current affairs magazine show from VOA Learning English.

Today we hear about a new film aimed at keeping girls around the world in school and learning. We hear how women stepped in to make guitars during the labor shortage of World War Two. But first, we hear about a recent report by Freedom House.

An independent press is one of the basic requirements of a free society. Freedom House is a group that seeks to support free reporting around the world.

Every year, the Washington-based group releases a report on press freedom. This year's Freedom of the Press 2013 report said the number of people who live in a free media environment is at its lowest point in more than ten years.

How does Freedom House judge media freedom? David Kramer is president of Freedom House. He says there are many issues affecting media freedom.

“The reason that a country is not free [is] because it fails to meet the criteria when it comes to a legal freedom, political freedom, economic freedom for journalists and news organizations to be able to operate.”

The report says only 14 percent of the world’s people enjoy a free press. People in the two most populous countries in the world are not among them. China is rated as not free while India is rated partly free. China, Russia, Iran and Venezuela have long suppressed reporters. Russia passed new censorship laws for the Internet last year. And China tightly controls its traditional and digital media with censorship and arrests.

A new movie is bringing attention to an old problem: the lack of education for girls in many countries, especially poor countries. Karen Leggett has the story.

Girls with eight years of education are four times less likely to marry as a child. But there are 66 million girls in the world who are not in school. American television producer Holly Gordon says, “If you want to improve the economy, if you want to change health outcomes, if you want to break cycles of poverty, educating girls is the best investment you can make.”

Gordon is the executive director of *Girl Rising*, a new movie about girls and the education they want and need. In the movie, nine girls act out their stories in nine different countries. Girls in the movie come from Afghanistan, Egypt, Peru, Haiti, and Ethiopia. Other countries include Sierra Leone, India, Nepal and Cambodia.

Sokha from Cambodia was forced to pick through trash to live. But in the movie, she finds a way to go to school; viewers see her dancing traditional Cambodian dances.

Each story is written by a writer from that country, such as Marie Arana for Peru and Edwidge Danticat from Haiti. Major actors provide the voice for each story.

This new movie is being advertised in new ways to influence people to act. Several non-government organizations and international companies are involved. They included Ten-by-Ten, Girl UP, a program of the United Nations Foundation, and the technology company Intel.

The movie was first seen in the United States in March. Social and political groups, companies, schools, colleges and individuals can organize a showing of the movie through a service on the Internet called Gathr.com. From the website, people anywhere in the world can ask for, organize or attend special showings of the movie close to where they live.

The ten-by-ten website encourages visitors to connect with partner organizations where they can give money or take other action. The organization will use social media to inform people about new chances to take action. Listen to the movie trailer.

“I will read. I will study. I will learn. If you try to stop me, I will just try harder. If you stop me, there will be other girls who will rise up and take my place. I am change.”

During World War Two, as American men went off to war, women filled the jobs they left behind. Women worked in factories, stores and shipyards. One group of women made musical instruments, building Gibson guitars. Christopher Cruise has more on their story.

John Thomas is a writer and a lover of guitars. He was surprised when he saw a wartime photograph of the Gibson guitar factory in Michigan. The 75 people in the picture were nearly all women. Irene Stearns, now age 90, spent several of the war years working at the factory.

"I got out of high school and everybody is looking for a job, and there weren't any jobs. Then one day, they called and I started at Gibson. I suppose it was because of the war."

Irene Stearns is one of the former Gibson factory workers who John Thomas found in the Kalamazoo, Michigan area. She made guitar strings for some of the thousands of instruments the factory produced in the 1940s.

"All the celebrities and people who were buying the guitars would come. And they would be on the other side of the wall from where I sat making strings. So, it was really nice in that part. I could hear them playing all these beautiful guitars."

John Thomas calls the women who worked at the Gibson factory, the "Kalamazoo Gals." That is also the name of his new book about the female guitar makers. He believes the company kept their work secret because it did not think guitar buyers of the day would use instruments built by women.

Mr. Thomas collected three of the World War II Gibson guitars and borrowed several others to help tell the story. Then a friend told him about Lauren Sheehan, a professional musician who agreed to help.

"Certainly I'm a champion for a story about women excelling at work that is traditionally a man's domain."

Lauren Sheehan bought a restored Gibson guitar for herself. She says she wanted to own a piece of America's musical heritage.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

Thank you for listening today. You can read and download our programs at learningenglish.voanews.com. Follow us on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Email us at special@voanews.com. And join us at the beginning of the hour Universal Time for the latest news.