ECOSOC High Level Segment on Education

Annual Ministerial Review

4-8 July 2011

Statement

by

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Geneva
7 July 2011
Mr President,
Honorable Ministers of Education,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to participate in the ECOSOC High Level Segment on Education, and I would like to express my gratitude for giving me this opportunity to make a statement in my capacity as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

Mr President,

The right to education has been mentioned in the statements and interventions taking place during this High Level Segment. However, the state obligations for the right to education have not been adequately highlighted.

Allow me therefore to shed light on such obligations.

International human rights conventions establish everyone's right to education. Universalizing access to primary education - MDG 2 - is a core obligation of States under these conventions. This is an inalienable right of every child. The States must comply with this core obligation and provide universal primary education free of cost to all children - boys and girls alike. Under no circumstances the direct and indirect costs for accessing primary education be an impediment in enjoying this fundamental human right.

Similarly, gender parity in access to education at all level - the MDG 3 - has its foundations in human rights law, in particular in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). States have international obligation under the Convention to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education (...)" (Article 10). In fact, all the MDGs are underpinned by human rights and carry obligations for States with respect to the right to education.

The central role of education for accelerating progress towards MDGs is being recognized as evidenced by the outcome of high level discussions on the occasion of the 2010 MDGs Review Summit. However, it is full realization of the right to education which provides firm foundations for accelerating such progress. Respecting the right to education fully is crucial in bridging significant gaps which remain in attaining MDG 2 and 3 for universalizing access to primary level education, and ensuring gender parity in access to quality education at all levels. Millions of children and adults, especially children from poor households, who remain deprived of education, can become its beneficiaries only when their fundamental right to education is respected. In order to overcome marginalization and exclusion in education, much greater focus is necessary on the pivotal role of right to education and on its full enjoyment as an internationally recognized right. Recognizing that all MDGs are underpinned by human rights, we must ensure that no one is excluded from enjoying the right to education which is universal and does not allow any discrimination or exclusion.
Mr President,

Governments must constantly remind themselves of their political commitments pursuant to the Millennium Declaration and the Review Summits, and the responsibility they have undertaken.

The Resolution 65/1 - "Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals" - adapted by the UN General Assembly as a follow up to the 2010 Millennium Review Summit expresses the commitment by the international community "to provide equitable educational and learning opportunities for all children" and "ensuring quality education and profession through the school system." Clearly, the MDGs and the objectives of EFA are not attainable unless permanent support is guaranteed to the enjoyment of the right to education.

The right to education must be understood both as entitlement in terms of access to education and as empowerment in terms of quality of education provided. Its empowering role is vital in responding to quality imperatives. Ensuring full respect to the right to quality education would enable us to tackle 'learning crisis' which has been evoked in the debate at this High Level Segment.

Fulfillment of the State obligations is contingent upon the provision of adequate resources for education - this is as well crucial in reversing the trend of decreasing investment in education. Education is not high on the international development agenda, commensurate with its pivotal role in empowering the individuals and transforming societies.

Renewed impetus, therefore, needs to be given to development agenda with education at the apex, and to raise profile of the right to education so that all children, adults and youth - boys and girls alike - exercise the right to education which is their inalienable right. Challenges the international community is facing are indeed daunting. Poverty levels have increased especially in Africa. This has serious repercussion on educational opportunities for millions of children from the marginalized and poor households.

In this context, allow me to refer to the Special Policy Dialogue: on Education: challenges in Africa and in LDC's", which took place this morning, and to add that the Second Decade for Human Rights Education in Africa (2006-2015) deserves special consideration. The Decade recognizes the importance of knowledge, competencies and skills for development. The importance of basic skills must also be recognized having regard to national legislation which many countries including those in Africa have developed as part of the EFA process. Such legislation establishes the right to basic education in continuum with that of primary education. Achieving the MDG's will rest upon reinforcement of the central role that basic education plays.

In this context, much greater emphasis needs to be placed on education as a powerful tool in poverty reduction strategies. The right to education and the right to development are mutually reinforcing in many ways. On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, primacy must be given to the right to education in appreciation of its pivotal role in socio-economic development and especially in poverty reduction strategies. In this endeavour, we must be guided by the concepts of 'social justice' and 'equity. Empowerment through education is an indispensable prerequisite to the pursuit of the ideal of "freeing entire human race from want" which the international community embarked through the Millennium Declaration.

In concluding, let me say that the right to education, of which both the individual and the society are beneficiaries, can be a lever in accelerating progress towards the MGDs and
enable to bridge the *appalling gap* between commitments and reality which we witness. While all MDGs are underpinned by human rights, catalytic role of the right to education is vital to making sustained progress in achieving the MDGs and must be fully recognized. In that spirit, the international community must bring the right to education into forefront in the actions and concerns of the global partnership for development, so that we can build a better world for present and future generations.

Thank you.