

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Keynote Speech at Social Forum for the Human Rights Council 2019

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Thank you. I am delighted to be here this morning.

The film we saw just now tells the story of children living in dire circumstances and desperate situations. But, these children still have hope. They still have dreams. They still dare to dream. They see hope as a light to guides them towards a better future.

We also saw Tabarak. Tabarak is a young 6 years old girl who lives in war-torn Mosul in western Iraq. We see her sitting in an abandoned classroom, one of 130 schools destroyed. Nevertheless, Tabarak and her sister, Maryam, will walk everyday for hours to go to their school. Why would they take this arduous journey? Because Tabark and her family know the importance of education. The power of education. Education opens possibilities and opportunities

As we speak now, tens of millions of young people are deprived of opportunity to acquire knowledge to start their lives. Trapped in cycle of violence and misery. Robbed of a better future. Trauma has become a part of their DNA.

I struggle, when I sit with them, to hold onto my optimism. When I took this endeavor years ago, I knew that it would be hard work, but believe me my friends nothing could have prepared me to realize the harsh reality of these young people.

I experienced disappointment, frustration, even lost trust in our unjust global system. But I have no choice. We have no choice, but to continue to support education for young children like Tabarak and her sister.

Prolonged armed conflict has led to irreversible destruction of education. Let me be clear about that, I don't mean collateral damage. I mean deliberate attacks on education. Deliberate attacks on basic human rights. During the past 5 years alone, we saw 14,000 attacks in 30 countries, and our MENA area has been hard hit. Some of you might have seen the report released by UNICEF a few days ago. This report highlighted the reality of education in Yemen. It says that as of today, we have 2 million children and teenagers out of school and the education of 3.7 million others is at risk.

But, conflict has many faces. We in Qatar faced a different kind of conflict when our right to education was violated by the blockade enforced on us by our neighboring, blockading countries. But we, in Qatar, have prosperity and peace. For others living in conflict, peace for them sounds like a dream. Entire cities reduced to rubble and ruin.

It will take decades to rebuild Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. Except, for education what has been lost will be impossible to restore. Where there is no education, there will be no nation. If we do not turn the tide, we will continue to pay a high price.

People think conflicts come and go. But, we know now for a fact that when conflicts come, they come to stay. And, they stay for long. We are already past the monitoring stages. We have international crisis on our hands.

Lack of education can escalate into enormous frustration among young people. They can be easy targets for recruitment by different criminal groups and extreme ideologies. For example, Moses, a young boy, was 17-years-old from South Sudan. When war broke out in Sudan, his father was murdered and his mother was missing. Moses, alone, hungry, frustrated, desperate and with no a sense of belonging, was recruited as a child soldier. As part of his initiation, he had to kill many innocent people. He told our team that he killed so many that he stopped counting.

An education could have given him stability and spared him, and others, their grievance. Moses is not the only one trapped in this precarious situation, there are many others like him. We know now that this is not only a socioeconomic crisis. It is a global security crisis that need to be addressed by a global movement.

We all have a role to play, individually and collectively. We know from our experiences, there is no one answer to every situation. We know that different countries have different problems and different dynamics that need to be approached in different ways. We need to selective and eclectic, and always innovative and creative.

We need to look to the private sector not just funding but for ideas... We need to take existing technologies and apply their principles to our challenges.... We need to consider all answers from all sectors.

The best way to get started is to look around the room. Every one of you has power to enact positive changes in your own countries. Let's harness all of our strengths and ensure that every child gets the opportunity to attend school and receive a quality education. It can be done. This may sound naive, but I heard this before, when I promised to educate 10 million children and, by the way, we've done it in six years. It's possible, but we need to secure stability and continuity of education.

Therefore, we need to establish new, stronger mechanisms for punishing those who attack education and for the violation of global system that bind us all. Governments need to form new binding agreements for protecting education, but these binding agreements will only work if everyone signs and ratifies.

Civil society – NGOs, individuals – need to be at the center of our work. To achieve effective change locally, we need to bring people from different backgrounds to listen and learn from each other. They are the people closest to the issue and they are the people who know better.

A few days ago at SDG Advocacy meeting, I proposed creating an annual international day for protecting education, to recognize how far we have come and how much we need to do, and keep the protection of education on top of the public agenda.

It is a perfect time to bring the international community together and galvanize their interest, and send a strong message to perpetrators of violence and their enablers: Attacks on education will no longer be tolerated.

We cannot and should not lose sight of the bigger picture: our greatest human resources — our young minds.

Thank you.