Statement to HRC Social Forum

***Inclusive and equitable quality education: a key ingredient for strengthening future opportunities for all***

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This session calls on us to pose the overriding questions: “what is it to be human and what society do we want in the future” and then to ask, “what kind of education and training will get us there”. A dominant perspective on an ideal future derives from a perception of prosperity and happiness; one imbued with high consumption and material possessions. The extension of this perspective is that this should be available to all people.

But this is not realistic or sustainable for humanity and the planet. Yet, our education systems are designed to produce a supply of human capital to build and maintain economic systems that are intended to deliver this future. Our curricular and teaching practices are designed to favour children of a particular socio-economic background, with particular type of learning style and cognitive ability; who come from a particular socio-cultural-linguistic milieu; and who have a particular range of functioning capabilities.

As a result, only a small proportion of children – even in the highest achieving schools – can achieve the levels of learning intended by the curriculum. Yet the dominant focus of our education improvement strategies tries to improve learning outcomes within the same structural and policy settings that tend towards excluding children with diverse needs. So, millions of children are left behind.

Numerous speakers in this forum have highlighted data about the extent of exclusion, inequality and marginalization in education. These data confirm that we have a crisis at hand…this is a global crisis. Demographic factors and the permeability of national borders makes it a global crisis.

**What is driving the crisis in education?**

The solutions we propose today, are predicated on what we understand will be needed in the future. Our predictions invariably revolve around an analysis of the skills required to do the jobs of the future that are defined very narrowly. This is of course extremely important to maintain a momentum of development. However, there is something important that is missing in this analysis. We rarely account for the fact that future success depends very much on the social dimensions of development – the importance of social norms and social capital. We need people who can develop and maintain inclusive and equitable public policy and access to services. We need people who can develop and maintain a social compact. We need collective agency to mitigate climate change. All of these suggest that the development of socio-emotional and problem-solving skills are critical for the future.

Yet in most countries, the learning process serves to exclude most children and serves to reproduce inequality. One of the reasons for this derive from ineffective school management and teaching practice. But the greatest impact on exclusion are related to factors, such as disability, gender, poverty, ethnicity, geographic location, etc. In fact, education policy, the way schools are run, and the pedagogy of learning and teaching is what often pushes children out of the mainstream.

The current practice of learning and teaching is not working for most learners. We need a practice that is grounded in Inclusive Quality Education. In this approach, teaching and learning is based on a universal design for learning; one that puts the learner at the centre and adopts a multitude of learning strategies that respond to the diverse needs and learning styles of different learners. In this way the learning potential of all learners can be optimally realised. Through learning in such settings, children acquire social norms and an orientation to embrace diversity and inclusion. The engineers and scientists and policy makers to emerge from such settings will invoke an inclusive mindset in the practice of their future vocations.

**What do we need to do to realise the future we seek?**

There are considerable evidence that inclusive and mainstream classes produce positive results for all children. There has been much progress and success on how effective teacher training has promoted Inclusive education practices in learning settings.

Inclusion is a necessary condition to overcome the factors that drive social discord and conflict that retards development and leads to immense human suffering. There is incontrovertible evidence that countries with high levels of inequality have much poorer development trajectories compared to countries that are less unequal. Equality and inclusion are good for growth and development. It is good for our humanity and it is critical for creating the future we seek. To build an inclusive and equal society, a society that is economically prosperous and that is technologically capable to support humanity and the environment, we need to design learning episodes, schools and education systems to be inclusive and to embrace diversity. We need to organize learning to realize our collective potential as much as we focus on realizing individual potential. Our commitment to a human rights agenda enjoins us to do this. But there is a compelling economic and development justification for doing it.