**Address by Stefania Giannini,**

**Assistant-Director General for Education**

**UN social Forum on the promotion and protection of the rights of children and youth through education**

**The transformative power of education for young people**

Your Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser of Qatar,

Ms. Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Mr. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees,

Ms. Maya Ghazal, High Profile Supporter, High Commissioner for Refugees,

Mr. Luis Pedernera, Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,

Ms. Koumbou Boly Barry, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education,

HE Ms. Kadra Ahmed Hassan, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Social Forum,

Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, UNOG Director-General,

H.E. Mr. Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council,

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be among such prominent defenders of human rights – and of the right to education in particular – for this UN Social Forum.

I wish to thank you for placing the focus on education today.

I have just returned from the UN General Assembly’s High Level Segment, following the High Level Political Forum in July.

Five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, time is not on our side.

We face no less than an education emergency.

According to our most recent projections, 12 million primary school children will never see the inside of a classroom, of whom 9 million are girls. And 220 million children and youth will still be out of school in 2030. Four in ten will not complete secondary education.

Every day, conflict, crisis and natural disasters are disrupting education for the world’s most vulnerable young populations.

This is an intolerable violation of the right to education, of human dignity.

It is entrenching inequalities and poverty within and between countries, and seriously jeopardizing progress across the entire development spectrum.

This crisis ignores the irrefutable evidence on the transformative power of education – for people, prosperity and planet.

Simply put, the starting point for building more inclusive, resilient and sustainable societies is to invest in education from the youngest age and throughout life.

This is a human right and a public responsibility – one for which governments and the international community should be held accountable.

The right to education is entwined with the founding of the United Nations and of UNESCO.

Our Constitution expresses belief in the “full and equal opportunities for education for all” and pledges “to advance the ideal of equality of educational opportunity”.

The 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, now ratified by 104 countries, is the first major binding international instrument on the right to education.

Meanwhile, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified human rights instrument, has just turned 30.

We cannot ignore the tremendous expansion of education over the past 60 years; the investments governments have made in enforcing the right to free and compulsory education for all to build more prosperous societies.

But we are at a turning point.

We are seeing countries falling backwards; grappling with humanitarian disasters, economic crises and violent extremism.

We are seeing inequalities on the rise, fuelling social tensions and marginalization.

The 2030 Agenda is the most ambitious, universal commitment every made to education – spanning all levels, committing to 12 years of free, publicly funded education, taking into account learning, contents and competences to fit our times.

To move forward, we must strengthen the right to education, for everyone, everywhere.

This is a matter of entitlemen*t* and empowerment.

Respecting this right has multiple dimension, spanning legislation, policy and financing.

Let me begin with legislation.

We must ensure that legal frameworks in all countries are aligned with international obligations and standards, and fully translated in to effective policies.

This means going from political commitment to real legal obligations, in order to make governments responsible for their commitments under human rights law, in pursuit of SDG4.

Our *Right to Education Handbook*, jointly published this year with the Right to Education Initiative, offers comprehensive guidance for accelerating efforts towards enforcing the right to education in national systems.

UNESCO is supporting close to 40 countries, from Nepal to Mozambique to Haiti, in reviewing national legislative frameworks. In six East African countries, we are developing a training programme to help government officials undertake comprehensive reviews of legislation and policy frameworks.

We have also put in place solid monitoring mechanisms that foster enforcement of the right to education and assessment and inform national reviews.

Lack of robust legislation can justify all forms of inequalities – in particular gender discrimination. This is why better legal and policy frameworks is one of the pillars of our recently launched initiative, “Her Education, Our Future”, to advance girls’ and women’s education. As part of it, we have developed an interactive atlas mapping the status of national constitutions, legislation and regulations.

We find that less than half of the world’s countries guarantee the right to education within their constitution, without discrimination based on sex or gender.

The Atlas will also look at legislative measures that can make or break a girls’ educational journey from the minimum age of marriage or employment, to whether pregnant or parenting girls can stay in school.

Second, these legislative frameworks must be geared towards fostering inclusion from the youngest age, with special attention to the most vulnerable.

We must dare to innovate, to harness technologies and work in partnership, with health, social affairs, labour, religious and community leaders – to leave no one behind.

This ambition characterizes our partnership with Education Above All reaching out of school children in Iraq and Pakistan, and I thank Your Highness for this support, and for all your action to protect the right to education, especially when it comes under attack.

Third, for the right to education to carry transformational impact for young people, education has to transform from a qualitative standpoint, to strike the right policy mix, encompassing teachers, learning contents and safe environments, free from discrimination and violence.

Through education for sustainable development and global citizenship, UNESCO is promoting learning that gives students the knowledge and values to be change makers and peacebuilders, to respect diversity and human rights, to build resilience to extremist ideologies, to safeguard the environment and the planet.

Today we are speaking about empowering youth – the world’s 1.2 billion young people – a formidable force on the frontlines of demanding change.

Increasing numbers are on the move – half of the forcibly displaced are under 18.

Education is their lifeline to rebuild a future, yet only a quarter are pursuing secondary education and only 3% of refugees have access to tertiary education.

Last week in New York, we launched the UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Vulnerable Migrants and Refugees. Based on a tested methodology in Europe, in partnership with UNHCR, this new knowledge passport is being piloted in Zambia, a country hosting over 80,000 refugees.

This is one concrete contribution – to facilitate integration and the contribution that these youth can make to their host communities.

Finally, respecting the right to education carries financial commitment.

Too many countries are not meeting the recommended education spending benchmarks: 4% of GDP and 15% of national budgets. And we are seeing education slide down on development assistance agendas.

So UNESCO’s appeal is to raise the sense of urgency, with political leadership, commitment and financing.

We must act in the present but prepare the future.

In this vein, UNESCO launched, last week at the UN General Assembly in New York, the ‘Futures of Education initiative’ to reimagine how knowledge and learning can to meet the challenges of today’s increasingly complex world and contribute to the common good of humanity. The project will be resolutely forward-looking and grounded in human right.

Translating the right to education into a living reality for all is our top and most urgent priority.

It must become a global political priority, and I am confident that the voices gathered here today will serve to advance this responsibility.

Thank you.