 **Remarks by Ms. Tatiana Valovaya**

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva**

**The 2019 Social Forum**

**Tuesday, 1 October 2019, at 10.00 a.m.**

**Room XX, Palais des Nations**

**Ambassador Hassan *[Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Social Forum],***

**Ambassador Seck *[President of the Human Rights Council]* ,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Children and young people:**

**I am delighted to be with you today for the opening of the 2019 Social Forum. This platform is a unique tool of the Human Rights Council. It enables States, International Organizations, civil society, and concerned groups, such as children and youth today, to offer creative solutions to the different human rights and development challenges facing us.**

**This edition of the Social Forum will focus on** **the promotion and protection of the rights of children and youth through education.**

**Education for all has always been an integral part of the United Nations agenda as an essential tool to bring about transformational change in areas of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.**

**In the past decades, major gains have been made towards increasing access to education at all levels and increasing enrolment rates in schools. Notably, equality in primary education between girls and boys has been achieved worldwide. Basic literacy skills have also improved tremendously.**

**Despite the considerable progress, over 265 million children are currently still out of school and 22% of them are of primary school age. In addition, even the children who attend schools are lacking basic skills in reading and math. Therefore, bolder efforts are needed to achieve universal education goals.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines a holistic vision for education under the Sustainable Development Goal 4, emphasizing the need to ensure lifelong learning and to activate the key role of education in realizing sustainability and human rights. This Goal will not be achieved if we fail to reach those left behind – children and young people who are hungry, sick or in danger; or those suffering because of their gender, ethnicity, religion, family income level, disability or other reason.**

**Making education inclusive, equitable and more relevant is crucial to achieving sustainable development. Education plays a pivotal role in accelerating progress across all 17 Goals, be it poverty eradication, good health, gender equality, decent work and growth, reduced inequalities, action on climate or building peaceful societies.**

**This year, education has been high on the agenda of the international community:**

* **Notably, education has been the focus of the international community this year through the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which reviewed Goal 4 in depth.**
* **We also marked 30 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – a landmark achievement, which explicitly recognized that children have the same rights as adults as well as specific additional rights due to their special status as dependants – including their seat in a classroom.**
* **In August, International Youth Day 2019 on “Transforming education” highlighted efforts to make education more relevant, equitable and inclusive for all youth, including efforts by youth themselves.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is fitting that the Social Forum takes place in Geneva. Home to international organizations, NGOs and civil society actors, representatives of States, a rich private sector and academic institutions, International Geneva is the operational hub of the multilateral system and the best place to design and test collaborative and innovative solutions.**

**Having arrived in Geneva only a few weeks ago, I am impressed by the spirit of International Geneva and the strong focus on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which has been of importance to my predecessor and will remain one of my key priorities as Director-General.**

**Engagement of children and young people themselves is crucial to bringing about more relevant, equitable and inclusive education. Today, I am encouraged to see children from local schools and university students present in the room, which brings International and local Geneva closer still. In fact, the UN Office at Geneva has already had strong connections with schools in Geneva. One hundred years ago, the International School of Geneva was founded by local educators and by officials of the League of Nations and pf the International Labour Organization.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Gathered here, you will have a unique opportunity to exchange ideas and best practices from around the world and from diverse perspectives on how to empower children and youth through education. With the wealth of relevant international, national and local actors around this room, I am convinced that the recommendations developed during the next two days will serve to further advance the global agenda aiming at promoting and protecting the rights of children and youth through education**

**I wish you a successful Social Forum.**

**Thank you.**