

Summary of High-level Breakfast Side Event “Inclusion of the Right to Education in Emergencies in the Post-2015 Development Agenda” United Nations, 30 September 2015

At an event marking the opening of the 70th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, the co-sponsors of the event: Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Norway, Portugal, Qatar and the Education Above All Foundation, urged the international community to address more effectively and decisively the lack of access to education by millions of children worldwide.

The High-level Breakfast entitled *Ensuring the Inclusion of the Right to Education in Emergencies in the Post-2015 Development Agenda* was held in at the United Nations, New York. The event came as two complementary processes are taking place: the UN Summit which adopted the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and the World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in Istanbul in May 2016.

H.E. Dr. Khalid bin Mohammad Al Attiyah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar; the Right Honorable Gordon Brown, UN Special Envoy for Global Education; and H.E. Mr. Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal and current Chairman of the Global Platform for Syrian students, delivered the key note speeches. The High-level breakfast event was moderated by Mr. Nicholas Kristof, Columnist, the New York Times.

Ministers representing the Member States co-sponsoring the event committed to support education in emergencies and specified concrete actions to improve the current status quo. These representatives included the following: H.E. Mr. Rui Machete, Minister of State and Foreign Affairs of Portugal, H.E. Mr. Adil Osmanovic, Minister of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, H.E. Ms. Tone Skogen, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway and H.E. Ms. Maria Rubiales de Chamorro, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua. Remarks given were further supported by the following: H.E. Ms. Annika Soder; State Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Sweden; H.E. Mr. David Dondua; Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia; and H.E. Dr. Reyad Yassin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Yemen.

Following the commitments made a high-level panel was convened, and included:

- Mr. António Guterres, UNHCR’s High Commissioner for Refugees;
- Mr. Svein Osttveit, UNESCO’s Director of Executive Office, Education Sector;
- Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, UNRWA’s Commissioner-General;
- Dr. John Sexton, NYU’s President;
- Mr. Marcio Barbosa, Education Above All Foundation’s CEO;
- Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict;
- Ms. Geeta Rao Gupta, UNICEF’s Deputy Executive Director;
- Mr. John Ging, OCHA’s Director of Operations; and
- Ms. Alice Albright, CEO of the Global Partnership for Education.

Summary of interventions

H.E. Dr. Khalid Al Attiyah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, stated that education is a basic human right for every child, whatever the circumstances, even during conflict. "Yet each day, millions of children are denied this right because they live in countries in the midst of or emerging from conflict". He made clear that denying children access to education increased their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation: "From Gaza, to Syria, to the refugee communities of Lebanon and Jordan, children are increasingly at risk of radicalization and of being persuaded to act on behalf of extremists, as in the absence of schooling and without opportunity for personal advancement, radicalization can easily take root."

The United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education and former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Gordon Brown, appealed for funds to support a Global Humanitarian Platform and Fund for Education in Emergencies, a system designed to improve how aid is provided in emergencies and to urgently address the gap in funding of education in emergencies. Mr. Brown noted that a number of countries hosting Syrian refugees would like to implement a double/shift system in which Syrian refugees would be educated in a second session of schooling taking place in the afternoons. He stated, "The teachers are in place, the infrastructure is there, making it one of the most cost-effective solutions to the education of millions of children refugees, but the funds are non-existent as the international community has failed to help." Mr. Brown appealed to the United States, Europe, Nordic Countries, and Gulf Countries to jointly support this endeavor.

Former President Jorge Sampaio of Portugal also urged the world not to forget higher education in emergencies. He made a strong case for setting up a rapid response mechanism for higher education in emergencies that would enable refugees and young people affected by crises to resume their university studies and avoid the creation of a lost generation of university graduates. He underscored the need to invest in the preparation of the future generation of leaders who will be responsible for rebuilding destroyed countries and societies. To achieve these goals he urged countries, the global academic community and other stakeholders to work together to set up a global fund for higher education in emergencies that could rely upon voluntary contributions as well as on a "solidarity levy" of one dollar/euro/ pound that all students and the academic sector could give each academic year.

H.E. Dr. Reyad Yassin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Yemen, reminded the international community that, in refugee situations, education alone is not enough, it has to be linked with vocational training and jobs.

Nicholas Kristoff drew attention to the transformative power of education, mentioning that this is something that extremists have understood, but that the developed world did not seem to grasp in its entirety. He also noted that the cost of illiteracy is much higher than providing the resources for education, as education both fosters security and plays a vital role in peacebuilding.

António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, noted that we have to understand the scale of the problem. "Ten years ago there 20 million people were displaced, today this number has increased to 60 million. We are witnessing a growing phenomenon, conflict prevention is ineffective, there are no accountability mechanisms, and the number of displaced people is growing by the day. Education is in the middle of humanitarian and development programmes and funds. However, if we bring in humanitarian money, it will be taken out from food, health, and other critical sectors. There is an urgent need to finance education with

development money. However, most host countries are middle income countries and do not benefit from development cooperation money. The World Bank and other donors and partners should think seriously about identifying new, creative financing schemes for host middle income countries to cope with such crises," he concluded.

Svein Osttveit, UNESCO's Director of Executive Office, Education Sector, stressed that education plays a vital role in rebuilding conflict-affected communities as they transition to peace: "it signals a return to normality and stability". Secondary education can be especially valuable in promoting 'turnaround' in conflict-affected states. It helps provide the necessary capacity in both the formal and informal sectors to set up robust national institutions and kick-start the economy. He also emphasized that the right to education cannot be achieved unless proper partnerships and adequate funding are in place. "Without proper investment the way back to peaceful societies is not possible."

Pierre Krähenbühl, UNRWA's Commissioner-General, reminded the audience that while we rejoice with the adoption of the SDGs, year after year thousands of Palestinian children and youth, in UNRWA's refugee camps across the region, are at threat of being denied access to education services – as yearly UNRWA agonizes over lack of funds for its 700 overcrowded schools in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza, and which provide services to half a million Palestinian children. "For Palestinians education is the only parameter of hope that exists in their lives for better prospects in the future". He also stressed that the relationship between a fully funded education sector and security has never been more clearer "when youngsters are out of school, and also suffer from economic hardship, it's much easier to draw them into radicalization and violence - if you close the school, you open a prison". He said that the solution lies in linking education services with development. In this, there is an urgent need for multi-year long-term financial commitments from donors, this would reduce the impact of year-to-year donor volatility. He concluded his remarks, by highlighting that education in emergencies also requires innovative tools, to support and encourage the children to self-learn.

John Sexton, President of NYU, highlighted four important issues related to higher education and the role of universities: (a) the international community must act now to preserve the intellectual capital that exists in conflict affected areas; (b) universities in the US and in some many other countries are willing to offer institutional aid to Syrian students, "but they need money to travel to the US and other places and to buy food."; (c) University of the People is the world's first non-profit, tuition- free, accredited online university dedicated to opening the gates to higher education for all individuals otherwise constrained; (d) In the process of providing education the world community must never fail to provide quality. "All of this is needed and possible, all we need is money to provide hope. Let's act". He concluded.

Marcio Barbosa, CEO of Education Above All (EAC), noted that to date EAC has reached 6 million out of school children and of this number there are 1.5 million refugees and IDPs. 600,000 out of this number are Syrians of school age located inside Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. While underscoring the need for an updated UN General Assembly resolution on this issue, he called on the international community to put up front the right to education in the implementation of SDG 4 "Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All".

Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, said that "armed forces and groups must be held accountable when they attack schools" as this is central to protecting education for millions of children affected by conflict. "It's very clear

that attacking schools is a war crime,” the Special Representative said. Having mechanisms in place to document violations and identify perpetrators is key, she added, and when perpetrators are prosecuted, others will “think twice” before attacking a school. She cautioned that using schools for military purposes leaves them vulnerable to attack.

Geeta Rao Gupta, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, linked education with other key issues such as early marriage, girl’s empowerment, and peace-building. She also connected education in emergencies with long-term development and investment. “We need to build resilience through formal and alternative education opportunities to keep children and youth safe, protect them from harm and provide them with stability and hope for the future. In this we need to invest in innovation and to look at ways to use technology currently available to us.”

John Ging, Director Operational Division of OCHA, stated that surveys indicate that parents overwhelmingly prioritize education over and above other life-saving emergency relief needs. “Education is measurable, we need to set out some realistic targets and start achieving them.” He also underscored the impact of malnutrition on education as it restricts children’s cognitive development, reduces their ability to learn and has “a devastating impact on a child’s future potential and on the economy.”

Alice Albright, chief executive of the Global Partnership for Education, said that the global money needed to deal with education is spent each week on military activities by countries across the globe. “We have to call on our leaders to see more funding diverted to education,” she said.

Dean Brooks, Director of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), concluded by reminding those in the room of the INEE Minimum Standards for Education which were developed by over 3,500 educationalists around the world. “These standards protect the right to education in all situations and provide the international community with guidance on the importance of listening to communities and building upon and strengthening national education systems. The world continues to talk about the need for funding and yet the time it takes to build or decide upon this funding architecture means another year or more in which countless children and youth are not receiving an education. We must take these necessary next steps and we must move quickly. We cannot wait any longer.”

The high-level event was also the backdrop for the book launch of photography entitled ‘Challenges and Reality’ by the Education Above All Foundation. The book, which features photos taken by renowned photojournalist Maher Attar, captures the inspiring the sometimes harrowing journeys of children from ten countries, in pursuit of education.