

Call for Action by Ministers
Inclusive and equitable education for all learners
in an environment free from discrimination and violence

July 2016

1. Preamble

We, Ministers and their designated representatives of Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, Italy, Japan, Madagascar, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Mozambique, The Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Peru, The Philippines, Romania, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States of America and Uruguay:

- 1.1. Recall** the right to education enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960); as well as the rights of the child to non-discrimination and to be protected against any form of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)¹;
- 1.2. Welcome** the UNESCO report 'Out in the open: education sector responses to violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression';
- 1.3. Reaffirm** our commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which contains goals on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG4), and specific targets relating for 'ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (target 4.7) and 'building and upgrading education facilities that are child-, disability- and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all' (target 4.a);
- 1.4. Recognize** that any form of discrimination and/or violence including bullying in educational settings are an obstacle to the enjoyment of the right to education and to equal access to educational opportunities of learners, and that no country can achieve inclusive and equitable quality education or equal access to educational opportunities, if any learners are discriminated against or experience violence because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity/expression;
- 1.5. Confirm** our responsibility to promote human development, including education and health, as well as to implement effective strategies to educate all children and young

¹ In 2003, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child clarified that 'States parties have the obligation to ensure that all human beings below 18 enjoy all the rights set forth in the Convention without discrimination (art. 2) [...] These grounds also cover adolescents' sexual orientation'. Subsequently, the Committee issued additional General Comments related to the protection of the rights of LGBT children.

persons, and protect them from any form of discrimination and violence; through the harmonious development of their potential and capabilities, valuing and respecting their differences and similarities, as well as ensuring the full exercise of fundamental rights of all individuals and communities.

2. Whereas

Advances have been made in countries around the world to fulfil the above-mentioned commitments and responsibilities, there are still significant challenges:

- 2.1 **Evidence** from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and the Pacific consistently shows that learners who are perceived not to conform to gender norms or stereotypes i) report a much higher prevalence of violence compared to others, and ii) are more likely to experience such violence in school than at home or in their community;
- 2.2 **The available data** across regions also reveal that violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression occurring in educational settings, has significant negative impacts on learners' current and long-term education, health and well-being; and therefore is a serious concern.

3 We acknowledge:

- 3.1 **The promising policies and practices** from a number of countries across the world, which demonstrate that effective education sector responses to school-related violence require a comprehensive approach that both promotes inclusion, diversity and prevents and addresses violence in a broader sense and situated context. Such an approach includes all of the following elements: effective national and school policies, relevant and appropriate curricula and learning materials, training and support for staff, support for learners and families, strategic partnerships, systematic data-gathering and monitoring of violence, prompt and effective responses to acts of school-related violence, and evaluation of responses. It involves all relevant stakeholders and is implemented at national or sub-national levels.
- 3.2 **The significant gaps** in our existing responses to violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in educational settings, as only some countries have most elements of a comprehensive education sector response in place to tackle this type of violence.

4 Based on the above considerations, we will work towards developing and implementing comprehensive responses to prevent and address discrimination and violence in all educational settings in our countries.

Specifically, we commit to reinforcing our efforts to prevent and address violence including that based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, within the broad framework of a comprehensive education sector response to school-related violence including bullying, and while taking into account the specificities of different legal and socio-cultural contexts, ensuring the cooperation between countries to share best practices.

- 4.1 **Monitoring systematically the prevalence of violence in educational settings**, including violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, through data-gathering mechanisms and other methods.

- 4.2 Establishing comprehensive policies at the appropriate level (national, subnational, school)** to prevent and address violence in educational settings, including violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.
 - 4.3 Providing learners with access to age-appropriate, non-judgmental, human rights-based and accurate information on harmful gender stereotypes and issues relating to gender non-conforming behaviours**, including as appropriate through inclusive curricula, learning materials and learning outcomes, information campaigns, research and partnerships with civil society and the wider school community.
 - 4.4 Providing training and/or support to teachers and other educational and school staff** to prevent and address violence in educational settings, including violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.
 - 4.5 Taking other actions to ensure inclusive and safe school environments** for all learners and provide support for those affected by discrimination and/or violence, including discrimination and/or violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, as well as their families.
 - 4.6 Evaluating the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of education sector responses** to violence, including violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.
- 5 We invite all countries to join in our efforts** and indicate their support to this Call for Action, so that they shall be added to the list of affirming countries.