



**ECOSOC**

United Nations Economic and Social Council

**TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES**

## **Global Education Meeting 2018**

### **Education in an Interconnected World: Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Development**

#### **Ministerial Segment**

**Brussels, 4 December 2018**

#### **President of ECOSOC**

#### **Opening Remarks**

H.M. Queen Mathilde of Belgium (UN Special Advocate for the SDGs)

Mr. Rudy Demotte (Minister-President, Belgium)

Ms. Hilde Crevits (Vice Minister-President and Minister of Education, Belgium)

Ms. Stefania Giannini (Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO)

Mr. Tibor Navracsics (European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports)

H. M. Queen Mathilde,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you today for the opening of the Ministerial Segment of the first Global Education Meeting since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I would like to thank UNESCO for convening this important gathering and the Government of Belgium for generously hosting it.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 is near and dear to my heart. I am the child of educators and I have myself dabbled in the field; I have taught both Mathematics and English as a Second Language, and I have owned and run a Mathematics Tutoring Service for a number of years.

This meeting provides an excellent opportunity to exchange views on the progress made so far toward the promise of universal quality education, and to strengthen our coordinated commitment to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

Over these three days, we will have the chance to identify priority areas requiring political guidance and interventions to be taken up when SDG 4 is reviewed in depth next year at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). I congratulate UNESCO for starting these discussions early. This is imperative for assuring that all contributions are duly reflected at the HLPF and also for supporting a strong and positive outcome at the SDG Summit in September 2019.

An overarching message from the HLPF last July was that “while progress has been achieved in many areas related to the SDGs and their targets, we still have a long way to go to reach the Goals, and little time left for action.”

This sentiment echoed the Secretary General’s report on Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals which stated that “progress to ensure that no one has been left behind has not been rapid enough to meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Besides being a basic human right that everyone should enjoy, education is central to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Inclusive access to quality education and life-long learning opportunities have reciprocal linkages with almost all other SDGs and will play a key role in building sustainable and resilient societies.

Access to quality education is an avenue for social mobility and reducing inequalities. It gives people the knowledge and skills they need to access decent jobs and live more prosperous lives in dignity. Each additional year of schooling raises average annual GDP growth by 0.37 per cent; 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills – equivalent to a 12 per cent cut in world poverty.

Education is essential for building the knowledge base we need to tackle critical challenges like climate change. It improves people's health and fosters gender equality. Moreover, education is a foundation for peaceful societies, as it brings hope, stability and opportunity when crisis and conflict disrupt young lives. It sows the

seeds of peace by fostering reconciliation, mutual understanding and social cohesion.

Yet, despite these recognized benefits, we are struck by the current facts:

- Learning outcomes are falling short. Minimum standards in reading and mathematics are not being met by over half of children and adolescents worldwide.<sup>1</sup>
- Globally, one-third of schools are without basic sanitation services.<sup>2</sup> In Least Developed Countries, only 34 per cent of primary schools have electricity and less than 40 per cent have spaces for hand washing.<sup>3</sup>
- Access to quality education is divided: with children from the richest 20 per cent of households and from urban areas achieving greater reading proficiency than children from the poorest 20 percent of households and from rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

These are just some of the challenges we face. Yet, we have to remind ourselves that progress is indeed possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary General's report on Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals, E/2018/64.

<sup>2</sup> Global Education Monitoring Report 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary General's report on Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals, E/2018/64.

<sup>4</sup> Secretary General's report on Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals, E/2018/64.

At the global level, 70 per cent of children attend early childhood and primary education, up from 63 per cent in 2010.<sup>5</sup> These children will have opportunities that previous generations did not enjoy in terms of enhancing their life-long learning abilities.

We need to focus on reaching those children who still lack these opportunities and also ensure that the quality of education is high, consistent, and equitable. We also need to examine the extent to which education is genuinely preparing children and young people for the future. Globalization, new technologies, changing labour markets, and transnational environmental and political challenges demand new approaches.

Whether in an advanced economy, or in a less developed one, learners must be equipped with the necessary skills to navigate unexpected challenges ahead. The skills-mismatch is a global one, calling for more inclusive and future-focused, quality education and training systems.

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<sup>5</sup> Secretary General's report on Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals, E/2018/64.

Education has a responsibility to ensure that new technologies do not exacerbate divides, including gender divides, by including digital skills in the curriculum early on.

Given that children and young people make up 50 per cent of the world's population, we have to act with a sense of urgency. We have no time to lose in ensuring that the children and youth of today, and tomorrow's generation, have access to quality education that enhances their life potential. Indeed, the success of the 2030 Agenda depends on this.

Likewise, we cannot leave behind those who did not benefit from quality education in their youth. Adult education and access to life-long, learning opportunities will become ever more important as technologies change and skill demands shift.

Excellencies,

Education is a foundation for achieving our dreams and shaping our common future.

Next year, when the HLPF meets as a summit in September, I am confident that it will reaffirm the political will at the highest level to address the remaining obstacles and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

If we join hands - governments, the private sector, civil society, and individual citizens across the world - we can achieve our shared goals. I am looking forward to working together with you as we move ahead through this year and into 2019.

In conclusion, I would like to celebrate the General Assembly's decision this week to proclaim 24 January as the International Day of Education, which will help raise awareness and action for making equitable quality education for all a reality.

I thank you.