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**MESSAGE FROM THE 47TH SESSION
OF THE UNESCO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION
AND
PROPOSED PRIORITIES FOR ACTION
TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION OF ALL YOUNG PEOPLE**

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CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND PROPOSED PRIORITIES FOR ACTION
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Meeting at the 47th session of the UNESCO International Conference on Education (Geneva, 8-11 September 2004), we, the Ministers of Education, heads of delegation and delegates from 137 Member States have, alongside representatives of 14 intergovernmental organizations, 21 NGOs and foundations, taken part in rich, frank and open debates on the theme “*Quality Education for all Young People: Challenges, Trends and Priorities*”. The youth attending the Conference expressed their desire for an education that responds to their expectations and expressed the high hopes that they place in this important event. This theme allowed us to share our concerns and difficulties, to jointly seek perspectives for solutions, to reaffirm our hopes and to reinforce international dialogue on educational policies. Education for All (EFA) goals were at the centre of our efforts and of the commitments made by the international community in Jomtien, Dakar and within the essence reflected in the Millennium Development Declaration and those of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and the International Literacy Decade, to improve the quality of education for all young people. It has become increasingly clear in all parts of the world that basic education can no longer be limited to primary education.

MESSAGE

1. Promoting quality education and training for all young people between the ages of 12 and 18/20 is essential to securing a better future and constitutes an essential mechanism for combating social exclusion at the local, national and global levels. As both a basic right and a public good, this education must respond to the needs and interests of all young people with a view to ensuring the realization of their full potential, their successful integration in the world of work, as well as their capacity to participate in active life and as responsible citizens.
2. In particular, this Conference has allowed us to agree at an international level on several fundamental aspects relative to the construction and reinforcement of our educational policies. There appears to be a need to:
 - recognize that while all countries, both in the North and the South, are confronted with difficulties, the situation of the education of youth is particularly dramatic in many developing countries where education systems appear to continue to be insufficiently adapted to the needs both of young people themselves, as well as those of society at large.
 - help young people confront an increasingly complex world characterized, in particular, by the challenges of humanizing globalization, by the important role of information and knowledge as factors of production and of development, by the increasing scale of population movements, by the marginalization of many social groups, as well as by the exacerbation of inequalities and poverty both among and within countries.
 - continue improving, in more practical and efficient ways, young girls’ access to and participation in education.

- ensure that all young people acquire the competencies required for personal autonomy and for citizenship, to enter the world of work and social life, with a view to respecting their identity, openness to the world and social and cultural diversity.
 - reinforce-through education for active and responsible citizenship-the willingness and the capacity to live together and to build peace in a world characterized by inter-state and internal armed conflicts and by the emergence of all forms of violence and war.
 - reaffirm the central role of teachers and trainers and to reinforce their professionalism both through their heightening status, as well as through pre- and in-service training, with a view to better preparing them to handle the new demands placed upon them by young people and society at large.
3. In many countries education systems, often inherited from the past, are no longer able to respond to the challenges that they are confronted with. New, broader and diversified pathways need to be defined. It is becoming increasingly clear that improving the quality of education for all young people can no longer be ensured by the public authorities, teachers and formal education systems alone. Education is the affair of all.
 4. Through this Conference, we reaffirm the crucial importance of education for our national development policies. We are consequently making an appeal for the mobilization of all partners, in order to enable ourselves to respond to the immense challenges of the education of young people, globalization with a human face and sustainable development of our societies and of the planet as a whole. Only through new efficient alliances and partnerships can we find diversified and adapted solutions to respond to the present and future needs of young people and to improve the quality of their education. These alliances must be built and reinforced within States themselves, as well as between governments, civil society, the economic sector, the media and youth themselves. They must also be reinforced between all development partners at the regional and international levels, so that the commitments undertaken by the international community supporting improvements in the quality of education may be met.
 5. We also express our hope that the Conclusions and Proposed Priorities for Action that we adopted unanimously on 11 September 2004 may become an effective source of information for our educational policies and serve to improve in an effective and sustainable way the quality of education for all young people across the world for peace, justice and sustainable development.

CHALLENGES

6. **Sheer numbers:** At present, half the world's population is under age 25. The world has the largest generation of young people ever. More than 1 billion people are between the age of 12 and 20. In 2020, 87 % of young people in the world will live in developing countries, where today they are already the majority. Developed countries will be faced with the demographic challenge of an ever-ageing population.
7. **Greater access and opportunities:** The number of young people completing primary school is constantly rising. The number of enrolments at secondary school level in the world has multiplied tenfold over the last 50 years. While secondary school enrolments on a global level increased from 56 % to 77.5 % in the last decade, this masks the reality that millions of young people, particularly in the South, who finish primary school are still denied the opportunities to make a living or to continue their education. Furthermore, many do not even complete primary education. Females are particularly affected.
8. **Improved quality of education for the twenty-first century:** Too many young people do not have the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge, attitudes and values for life in the twenty-first century. There is a demand for education to be relevant to the modern world and to create learners for life. Therefore, the quality of education for this age group is now at the heart of national and international concerns.
9. **Gender equality:** In most parts of the world, there are unacceptable gender differences in access, opportunities, retention and learning outcomes. This reflects the inability of many education systems to be gender-responsive.
10. **Competencies for life:** Currently, education systems do not provide young people opportunities to obtain and strengthen the complex set of competencies for life, including technical and vocational education. Many of these competencies are essential for addressing modern problems such as HIV/AIDS and other pandemic diseases, exiting and entering the labour force and social and political indifference. Lack of technical and vocational education and training, including entrepreneurship and training for creativity, hampers employability.
11. **Social inclusion:** In a world that is increasingly becoming closer due to globalisation and information and communication technologies, exclusion is on the increase. Factors such as poverty, gender, ability, origin, language, culture and various kinds of discrimination can impinge on effective learning.
12. **Conducive conditions for teachers:** Teachers and trainers in many parts of the world lack sufficient training, resources, support, materials and conducive conditions of service. As a result they cannot be effective in facilitating the learning of young people.
13. **Anticipating the future:** Today's rapidly changing and unpredictable world has rendered current educational offer less appropriate.

14. **Resource allocation:** In many countries the educational needs of young people are not always a priority, mainly due to economic and social reasons. Therefore, not enough resources are allocated to this important age group, neither by the countries nor by the donor community as a whole.
15. **Alliances and partnerships:** Effective alliances for quality education for young people are not sufficiently mobilised among students, teachers, parents, local communities, civil society, media, economic enterprises, the global community and other stakeholders. Particularly, young people are in many instances not given enough opportunities to be active partners in the development and conduct of their education.
16. **Peace, sustainable development and social justice:** Young people must have the access to quality education and training in order to enhance their ability to be actors for sustainable development and a peaceful and just world. Education must reflect the nature of cultures and languages, the value of the individual in relation to the larger context, and the importance of living in a way that promotes equality in the present and fosters a non-violent and sustainable future.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

17. **Develop a comprehensive strategy.** In order to attain development, peace and justice at the global level it is essential to conduct a comprehensive strategy ensuring that the learning needs of all young people are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills and training programmes. All the aspects of the quality of education must be included.
18. **Increase access and equity for all young people.** New approaches to education, involving organizational and pedagogical creative methods and the use of ICT have to be constructed to increase access and retention. It is important to recognise the correlation between formal and non-formal learning. Governments are encouraged to implement systems for validation of non-formal learning.
19. **Improve the way of innovating and creating.** Governments, teachers and trainers and all other stakeholders should promote renewed national goals, focusing on the relevance of education in the twenty-first century. Reinforcement, evaluation, innovation, diversification and reform of existing educational delivery, and of their pertinence to each context, particularly those of poverty and countries coming out of strife should also be borne in mind.
20. **Take affirmative action to compensate gender imbalance.** In many instances it will be necessary to take concerted affirmative actions to compensate for historical and new inequalities. A great deal of research, knowledge and good experiences exist, and this must be taken into account as a matter of urgency to universalise gender equality at national, regional and global levels.
21. **Put in place strategies to focus on competencies for life.** In order to learn to solve problems and act, competencies have to be better defined, to assist with preventing HIV/AIDS, enhancing employability and active citizenship. Proven

practices include conflict-resolution, peace-building and intensive reading and writing of meaningful materials.

22. **Focus on the most prevalent reasons for exclusion.** It is imperative to act on the identified reasons for exclusion from learning.
23. **Recognize the importance of teachers and trainers.** Improved possibilities for in-service teacher education are needed. Moreover, working conditions, career paths and wages that make teaching attractive must be secured to reinforce teachers' status in society. Good management is needed to support teachers.
24. **Use the available knowledge and promote research.** When developing educational policies knowledge predictions and alternatives trends for the future have to be taken into account, conscious choices have to be made.
25. **Improve the use of resources.** Governments and civil society are encouraged to find creative and new mechanisms for financing quality education for all young people (for example, exploring the possibilities of converting debt services into investment in education). This should go hand in hand with a greater capacity for innovation and transformation.
26. **Promote alliances and partnerships at all levels.** Incentives and appropriate legislation would help the effective functioning of better partnerships. Governments are encouraged to continue involving such stakeholders as students, teachers, parents, NGOs, media, social partners-including teachers unions-and other decision makers. A cross-sectorial approach is desirable. The role of UNESCO as a leading agency to enhance quality education for all young people is essential.
27. **Educate for sustainable development, peace and social justice.** Strong efforts are needed to ensure effective educational strategies, policies and practices for quality education for young people. The UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development and the UN Literacy Decade should provide a great opportunity to strengthen efforts in this area.

THE ROLE OF UNESCO AND ITS SPECIALIZED INSTITUTES

28. This document, deriving from the works of the forty-seventh session of the International Conference on Education, will be taken into consideration in order to enrich the reflection and to reinforce, in the short, medium and long terms, the programme of action of UNESCO, the International Bureau of Education and the other specialized institutes with a view to improving the quality of education of all young people.