

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser's Speech

World Education Forum

May 19, 2015

Mrs. President, Prime Minister, Secretary-General, Director-General, Ministers, distinguished guests

I would like to thank the South Korean government for hosting this Forum, and for its commitment to addressing the global education crisis

Mrs. President, this morning in Seoul we engaged with leaders from across Korea and Asia in invigorating discussions about the challenges that face education on a global level.

The international community has been promising to provide every child with the chance to have a quality primary education since 1948.

Many countries have made tremendous strides in giving millions of children better opportunities.

Laws have been passed to make education mandatory for primary aged children.

New schools constructed.

Policies implemented to help close gaps between rich and poor.

Some countries have launched parental awareness campaigns to help get children in school and keep them there.

Others have made lower secondary education compulsory.

Over the next few days we will discuss the Incheon Declaration and the draft framework of action designed to help us meet the 2030 Education agenda.

We have gone through a process of unprecedented consultation and prioritized primary education within the context of holistic basic education.

Our ambitious goal expresses a deeper aspiration for quality education to be a transformative force and enabler of human development.

Yet the 2030 education agenda carries some “unfinished business” that needs to be addressed.

Millions of out-of-school children and adolescents have not been served by the past agenda.

Only half of all countries have achieved universal primary enrolment and 58 million primary aged children are out of school.

Millions of these are victims of poverty – the poorest children are 5 times more likely not to complete primary education than the richest.

Often they drop out of school to work and help support their families.

This is why 2 out of 3 adolescents do not finish lower secondary school in low income countries.

As the international community is now recognizing, millions more are living in areas affected by conflicts or humanitarian crisis.

In fact, the proportion of out of school children in conflict affected areas has increased continually, particularly in the Arab States where the proportion has risen to 87%.

And these numbers are increasing daily at an alarming rate, from Nepal, to Myanmar to Yemen. For example, almost 3 million Syrian children are out of school, about half-million of them in refugee camps in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

I have personally visited these refugee camps in Turkey and was deeply moved by the children's determination to resume normal lives, to educate themselves, despite the harshness of their circumstances.

Add to this the fact that millions of children are leaving primary school unable to read and write.

We need to understand the entirety of this problem and address the issue of out of school children holistically. Tackling the different barriers that deny children's education whether they are social, cultural, economic or conflict related.

We must not give up because the task is tedious and dangerous.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Both political will and funding is required.

Let us ask why aid to basic education fell by 15%, in just two years, between 2010 and 2012.

Why? Have we forgotten that our agenda is not yet finished?

Qatar has responded to this global decrease by committing 50% of our official development assistance to education. We invite others to also reconsider their priorities.

Genuine political will set our priorities right and get the job done.

The ambition of the 2030 Education agenda must be met with realism and pragmatism.

Over the next few days let us keep our discussions focused and productive.

Let us renew our national commitments by implementing funding mechanisms that channel funds to primary education first.

In this regard, Korea sets an excellent example. It first provided universal primary education in the 1960's, before it focused upon universal secondary education in the 70's. The government allocates almost 8% of its GDP to education.

Yet, this responsibility for primary education should not remain with Ministries of Education alone but also requires the support of the private sector.

Considering primary education as the sole responsibility of the State has not solved the problem of out of school children.

Further, let us always evaluate our achievements through the lens of quality and never ever accept that 250 million children leave primary school without knowing how to read and write.

Today in Incheon we have a once in a generation opportunity to focus governments, galvanize donors and attract new investors.

So let us prove that the international community is indeed committed to ensuring quality universal primary education.

Let us make sure that this declaration is not just another declaration.

Let us be the generation to be remembered.