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# Report of the 2019 Social Forum

The rights of children and youth through education



UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



# Report of the 2019 Social Forum\*

\* The annex to the present report is being issued without editing, in the language of submission only.

# Summary

In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 38/17, the Social Forum was held in Geneva on 1 and 2 October 2019. Participants considered the promotion and protection of the rights of children and youth through education. The present report contains a summary of the discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum.



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## I. Introduction

1. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 38/17, reaffirmed the Social Forum as a unique space for interactive dialogue between the United Nations human rights machinery and various stakeholders, including civil society and grass-roots organizations.<sup>1</sup>
2. The 2019 Social Forum was held in Geneva on 1 and 2 October 2019. It was focused on the promotion and protection of the rights of children and youth through education. The President of the Council appointed the Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Kadra Ahmed Hassan, as the Chair-Rapporteur of the Forum.
3. The programme of work was prepared under the guidance of the Chair-Rapporteur, with inputs from relevant stakeholders, including United Nations agencies, Member States and non-governmental organizations. The present report contains a summary of the proceedings, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum. The list of participants is contained in the annex.

<sup>1</sup> For further details on the Social Forum, see [www.ohchr.org/EN/issues/poverty/sforum/pages/sforumindex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/issues/poverty/sforum/pages/sforumindex.aspx).

## II. Opening of the Social Forum

4. In opening the 2019 session, the Chair-Rapporteur emphasized that although more children and youth were in education than ever before, millions were still excluded, and many did not receive a quality education. Djibouti had made great progress towards promoting and protecting child and youth rights through education, and prioritized education in emergencies. In the 2017 Djibouti Declaration on Regional Refugee Education, and the Regional Action Plan, Member States had committed to ensuring that every refugee, returnee and member of a host community had access to quality education in a safe, non-discriminatory learning environment. Much of the burgeoning youth population was from the developing world, and they must be empowered to become agents of change. The Social Forum had historically had a strong focus on the importance of education, young people, and empowerment to achieve rights and sustainable development for all. The Chair-Rapporteur considered the Social Forum an opportunity to bring together children and youth, and those working on education, human rights and sustainable development.





5. The Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, described the Social Forum as a unique meeting that allowed States, civil society, and concerned groups, such as children and youth, to discuss creative solutions to human rights and development challenges. The United Nations Office at Geneva had always regarded education as an essential tool to achieve change and inclusive development. It was prioritizing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through the work of its SDG Lab. Empowering children and youth to claim their rights through education was central to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on access to universal quality education and learning. The participation of local schoolchildren and university students highlighted the relevance and role of the United Nations Office at Geneva. Children and young people were the hope for the future, and all should work to ensure their rights so they may achieve their ambitions.

6. The President of the Human Rights Council, Coly Seck, welcomed the participation of children and young people in the Social Forum. Since 2008, the Council had adopted annually a resolution on the right to education and examined key issues, including commercialization and the regulation of privatization in education, and the justiciability of the right to education. The 2019 resolution on the rights of the child had been focused on empowering children with disabilities, including through inclusive education. Mr. Seck underlined the fundamental importance of human rights education in combating corruption, consolidating democracy, and promoting, protecting and effectively realizing all human rights. He highlighted the World Programme for Human Rights Education's fourth phase, which was focused on youth and was aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and reinforced by the Lisbon+21 Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes. He invited participants to reflect on how to: empower children and youth to claim their right to education; meet the right to education at all times, including during crises; meet the expanding challenges in education; and make education fit for the future.

### III. Summary of proceedings

#### A. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

7. The Chairperson and Founder of the Education Above All Foundation, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, spoke following a video about children affected by armed conflict and poverty, whose right to education and dreams were being supported by the Foundation. Prolonged armed conflict destroyed education, including through deliberate attacks on educational facilities. In the previous five years, 14,000 attacks against educational facilities had been registered, in 30 countries, including Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Young people frustrated by lack of education became vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups. Education was a socioeconomic concern and a global security issue requiring a global response by governments, the private sector, civil society and communities. The Foundation's achievement in educating 10 million children in six years set an example. Sheikha Moza bint Nasser called for accountability for those responsible for attacking education, and for new binding agreements to protect education. She proposed the creation of an annual day for the protection of education, to recognize progress, identify gaps and keep the protection of education at the top of the global agenda.

8. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, argued that the right to education was crucial given the record global youth population. Accessible, inclusive, quality education enabled children and youth to realize their other rights. Deep disparities in access to education and in educational levels were based on children's gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, financial situation, location or migration status. Armed conflict, gangs, and violence, including sexual violence, deprived millions of children and young people of education. Lack of accessibility for children with disabilities, of sanitation, of resourcing or of adequate normative frameworks also affected school attendance. Education should equip children and young people for work and empower them to become agents of change on issues such as climate change and women's rights. National laws, policies and strategies must uphold and implement the right to education in accordance with Sustainable

Development Goal 4. The High Commissioner welcomed the Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education, of 2019. She called for better data collection, including on the needs and numbers of children and youth not in education.

**9.** The Assistant Director-General for Education at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Stefania Giannini, warned of an imminent “education emergency”, given the millions of out-of-school children, including due to conflict and natural disasters. This entrenched inequalities and poverty within and between countries. Investing in lifelong education was necessary for more inclusive, resilient and sustainable societies. The *Right to Education Handbook*, and *Her Education, Our Future*, which were UNESCO projects, provided guidance for better legal and policy frameworks to address educational inequalities. Legislative frameworks must foster inclusion from the youngest age, especially of the most vulnerable. It should encompass teachers, learning contents and safe environments. To promote young migrants’ enrolment in secondary and tertiary education, the UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Vulnerable Migrants and Refugees was being piloted



in Zambia. Countries should invest 4 per cent of their gross domestic product and 15 per cent of their national budgets in education, and should prioritize it in official development assistance. The UNESCO “Futures of Education” initiative reimagined how knowledge and learning could contribute to humanity. Realizing the universal right to education was the top priority of UNESCO, a priority that should be shared by all stakeholders.

**10.** Maya Ghazal, a high-profile supporter of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), shared her experience as a young Syrian refugee since 2015 in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. She had faced language, cultural and educational challenges and had been rejected by three schools. Her refugee status had led to labels, stereotypes, and doubts about her abilities. Nonetheless, she had learned English, completed secondary education and started studying aviation engineering. The international community was still failing child refugees and, globally, university attendance was significantly lower for refugees. Her story demonstrated that refugees could have their dignity respected and contribute to the communities that welcomed them if given educational opportunities. Higher-level education turned students into leaders, and harnessed the creativity, energy and idealism of refugee youth. Refugee education – especially for girls – was essential for the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals. Investing in refugee education should be a collective endeavour by governments, business, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations, with collective rewards. UNHCR aimed to ensure that, by 2030, refugees had achieved parity with their non-refugee peers in pre-primary, primary and secondary education, and to boost refugee enrolment in higher education.

**11.** The Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Luis Pedernera Reyna, explained that, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the purpose of education should be the holistic development of the child to his or her maximum potential. Education should extend beyond regular schooling, strengthen children’s capacity to enjoy all human rights, and foster a human rights culture. While progress was being made in expanding education at younger ages, teenagers were often



discouraged from remaining in, or were expelled from, education. Educational programmes without a focus on inclusion wrongly normalized segregation of children with disabilities. Armed conflicts, internal disturbances and lack of infrastructure made attending school dangerous and generated anxiety, fear and post-traumatic stress. Highly competitive educational systems, which disregarded a rights-based education, had resulted in high student suicide rates. A school focused on children's rights should foster child participation. Children were a group with the right to self-representation, and with transformative potential when their voices were heard, as shown by the "Fridays for Future" movement.

**12.** The Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Koumbou Boly Barry, called on the State that had not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so. Despite progress on the effectiveness of the right to education, States should do more, with the support of non-governmental organizations, civil society, foundations and businesses. In particular, the private sector had an important role to play, but it must be regulated and organized in order to respect the right to education, as provided by the Abidjan Principles. The Special Rapporteur emphasized that it was important to promote diversity, tolerance and solidarity, as fundamental parts of education. She called for investment in education at the early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary levels, including vocational training. She concluded by calling upon Member States, civil society, and technical and financial partners to engage and make education a reality for all people, the world and society.

**13.** A video was shown sharing children's inputs on how education had empowered them. The children emphasized the transformative power of education and how it helped them realize their rights, defend the rights of others, and address issues such as bullying, discrimination, exploitation, violence and gender inequalities.

**14.** General statements were presented by the European Union, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the International Organization of la Francophonie, by Angola (on behalf of the African Group), and by Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Burkina Faso,

Cuba, France, Greece, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Montenegro, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Ukraine and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Statements and questions were also presented by the Ambedkar Center for Justice and Peace, the Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran, the Human Relations/Human Rights Commission of the City of Tucson, Make Mothers Matter, Maloca Internationale and Patriotic Vision. Participants emphasized the interdependence of the right to education with other human rights and highlighted the importance of the World Programme for Human Rights Education and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants mentioned challenges to realizing education in specific contexts, including in African countries, small island developing States, low-income countries, and countries affected by conflict, foreign occupation, terrorism, forced displacement, natural disasters and unilateral coercive measures. Vulnerable groups included persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases, Roma and other minorities. Violations of human rights pertaining to education related to discriminatory laws, restrictions on the use of one's mother tongue, privatization of education, child marriage, pregnancy and poverty. Participants presented solutions to these challenges, including universal and free access to quality education from the preschool to the tertiary level, hiring teaching assistants for inclusive classes, active civil society participation, policies to support families as primary educators and policies to support students in financial need. States were encouraged to ratify human rights instruments, engage in international cooperation, exchange good practices and dedicate official development assistance to promoting education. The principles mentioned included equity and efficiency, and the availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability of education. Participants stated that education should promote the common good, respect, solidarity, tolerance, transitional justice, employability, and skills for decent work, citizenship and critical thinking. Adolescents present asked what the main challenges to accessing education were and how youth could contribute to promoting access to education in the face of inequalities.

## B. REACHING THOSE BEING LEFT BEHIND AND DEFENDING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

**15.** Ann Skelton, a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the incumbent of the UNESCO Chair in Education Law in Africa, lamented that 262 million children were out of school, particularly girls, children affected by poverty and children with disabilities. She emphasized, as particular problems, the commodification and ineffectiveness of education. All children should have access to effective education systems, from the pre-primary level, and should remain in school for as long as possible. Worldwide, enhanced political commitment was key for equal access to quality education and for the accelerated action necessary to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

**16.** The Executive Director of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, Martha Muhwezi, focused on women's and girls' access to education. The Forum's mission was to promote gender equality and equity in education in Africa by fostering positive policies and addressing barriers preventing girls or women from pursuing their education or career. The Forum advocated for the education of those from disadvantaged backgrounds by creating partnerships and networking opportunities. In order to address inequalities, the Forum used the gender-responsive pedagogy model, promoted technical and vocational education, and offered comprehensive scholarships to girls who would otherwise be left behind. It focused on girls in vulnerable situations, such as those out of school due to armed conflict, teenage pregnancy or menstruation stigma. It supported sexual and reproductive health programmes in schools, and encouraged girls to study science, technical education, art, design and mathematics. The Forum worked closely with the African Union, specifically on developing a gender equality strategy.

**17.** The Advocacy and Research Manager of the Consortium for Street Children, Lizet Vlamings, relayed the experiences of street children in accessing education. Official data on school attendance are usually collected through household surveys, which exclude children in street situations. This undermines planning of adequate responses and ensuring inclusive and quality education for everyone. Children in street situations testified,

by video, about the importance of education and the difficulties they faced in accessing education and learning materials. They faced stigma, discrimination, exclusion and lack of birth registration. Ms. Vlamings noted that the Consortium for Street Children was a global network developing innovative education solutions that took into account the unique needs and realities of children in street situations. These included mobile schools used by social workers to help children to learn in a safe environment, art mentoring programmes, schools near places of work, and vocational training programmes and apprenticeships for older children and youth. Achieving sustainable development for all meant realizing universal access to education, including for children in street situations who needed targeted, specialized educational solutions and joint action by governments and civil society organizations.

**18.** Sylvain Aubry, representing the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, stressed that education was under threat from multinational corporations and commercial schools that risked controlling its content and format with limited State oversight. This had resulted in increasingly segregated educational systems and social tensions in several countries. The Abidjan Principles unpacked existing human rights law on the right to education, and were a useful tool for its meaningful implementation. The Abidjan Principles reaffirmed the right of everyone to good-quality public schooling. They recognized parents' freedom to choose a school other than a public school, and detailed the public service obligations that States must apply in such cases. The Abidjan Principles requested that States prioritize funding of public education, while recognizing the complementary role that non-commercial private actors may play in crisis situations where States were temporarily unable to deliver education, subject to substantive, procedural and operational requirements. The Abidjan Principles had been recognized by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, and civil society.

**19.** Alassane Gano, representing International Movement All Together in Dignity (ATD) Fourth World, highlighted the problems that children affected by poverty faced in accessing education



– which included families incurring debt to pay for enrolment fees and school supplies, children needing to work to support their families, a lack of schools providing education in children’s home language, and dropping out of school because of early pregnancy or bullying. Despite progress made by his country’s government, the number of schools in poor areas was often insufficient, and teachers were not trained to pay enough attention to children with special educational needs. In response, ATD Fourth World contributed to combating poverty and promoting education. It focused on obtaining birth certificates and working with community schools to promote admission of the poorest children. It organized street libraries, talks and artistic workshops where children could discover the pleasure of learning and develop their creativity. Such collaboration helped to bridge the gap between various ethnic groups, social classes and nationalities, and encouraged parents to enrol children, or keep children, in school.

**20.** The representative of the Mexican Young Indigenous Network and of the Fund for Development of Indigenous Peoples from Latin America and the Caribbean, Dalí Silvia Angel, conveyed challenges faced by indigenous young people in accessing education, as reported to her in a regional consultative process, which included poverty, exclusion, child pregnancy, and physical distance and poor infrastructure between settlements and schools. They had recommended scholarships for indigenous young people to continue their studies, and intercultural dialogues. Education about indigenous identity, culture and history contributed to young indigenous people’s self-esteem and to their valuing their heritage. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognized the right to preserve indigenous philosophy and cultural identity through education. Education was intrinsically connected to other human rights, such as health, housing, food, and indigenous peoples’ land rights. Migration by indigenous



youth from their community to cities for education damaged indigenous culture and identity. Moreover, 2019 was the international year of indigenous languages, and hence it was vital to promote and revitalize such languages.

**21.** During the interactive dialogue, representatives of China, Cuba, Mexico, Morocco, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and of the International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education, the Latvian Human Rights Committee, Millennials Energy, and Udisha, and an Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) intern, took the floor. Participants considered education as a national priority that should have precise budgetary commitments. Countries prioritized literacy and numeracy skills, universal access to equitable and quality compulsory education, a zero rejection rate for university applications, and increasing school attendance. Some considered education in relation to other rights, such as health and freedom from poverty, or as a pillar for development. Many statements focused on education for vulnerable groups. Education should recognize and respect indigenous children's identity, history, values and customs, and seek to overcome inequalities in

accessing education. Education systems should adapt to indigenous peoples' needs and traditional ways of life, through the provision of special boarding, nomadic or temporary seasonal schools, education in mother tongues, or workshops on traditional crafts, or through national and ethnic sports, or preferential access to universities. Participants suggested special measures for vulnerable groups, including girls, children in conflict zones, displaced children, persons with visual and hearing impairments, persons belonging to minorities, and persons living in impoverished or rural areas. Participants noted that cultural identity in education needed to be respected. Panellists were questioned on how to quantify the relationship between education and development, particularly in developing countries.

**22.** In response, Ms. Muhwezi stressed the importance of integrating gender into all development and investment plans to cater for specific educational needs of boys and girls. Ms. Vlamings stressed the importance of being educated in order to contribute to one's country's development. For children in street situations, it was important to become visible, through data that accurately reflected their unique needs, such as birth



registration. Mr. Aubry described two responses to the global inequality crisis: the adoption of a market approach fostering competition between schools, or building solidarity to face the crisis together. He favoured solidarity, which required building quality public education systems. Mr. Gano called for all stakeholders to cooperate on solutions that would guarantee universal education. Ms. Angel congratulated delegations on the progress achieved, and invited them to meet the challenge of collecting disaggregated data on ethnic origin, and to ensure appropriate consultations with indigenous peoples. Ms. Skelton reiterated that the Abidjan Principles recognized the difference between private actors working in the public interest in education and those interested only in commercial benefits. She called on all States to become the primary defenders of the right to education.

### C. EDUCATION IN CONFLICT AND EMERGENCIES

**23.** Hans Brattskar, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, welcomed the inclusion of education in the global compact on refugees, and refugees in national education systems. Crises and conflicts

had negatively affected children, especially girls. Schools offered a safe place where children could receive an education offering opportunities for the future. It was essential to ensure education continued and to invest in quality education in emergencies. The international community should do more to protect education from attack, including through the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

**24.** The Director of the Centre of International Studies of the University of Buenos Aires and National International Humanitarian Law Coordinator of the Ministry of Defence of Argentina, Luciana Micha, focused on global progress in protecting education from attack through the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Almost 100 States had endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and there had been a significant decrease in the use of schools and universities for military purposes in those countries. There were concrete examples of implementation at the international, national and local levels. With regard to the United Nations, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations prohibited



the use of schools for military purposes, and numerous countries had updated their guidelines, policies and practices to prohibit such use too. At the military, education and foreign policy level, States had started to share best practices, and three Safe Schools Conferences had been held, highlighting good practices as well as challenges to implementation. Military doctrines, manuals, tactics and operations must incorporate the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Ms. Micha called for increased dialogue with military stakeholders to protect education in conflict zones, strengthened cooperation with academia and national committees, and regional workshops on implementing the Guidelines.

**25.** A senior education adviser at UNHCR, Becky Telford, called for closing the enrolment gap between displaced children and their non-refugee peers. It was crucial to focus on the protracted nature of enforced displacement and its impact on refugee children's education. The Refugee Education 2030 strategy, of UNHCR, was aimed at ensuring refugee children and youth reached parity with their non-refugee peers at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. The global compact on refugees recognized the right of refugee children to be included in host countries' education systems. As one third of refugees lived in the poorest countries, it was important to consider how best to support host governments in providing education to refugee children. There were specific needs around language support and enrolment procedures, which included removing barriers such as the requirement for birth certificates or for previous school registration documents or certificates. Refugees' school attendance alongside their non-refugee peers benefited all children, by promoting tolerance and inclusion. The global compact was an opportunity to deliver on refugee education and to include refugees in education systems – a condition for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.

**26.** Alison Joyner, an education in emergencies specialist at Plan International Norway, spoke about ensuring education for girls and young women in conflict and emergency situations, based on the rights-based "Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery", of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.

Girls in crises saw education as crucial to their future well-being, enabling them to claim rights, access jobs and become more self-reliant and resilient. Local advocacy and relationship-building contributed to long-term progress towards girls' education, changing attitudes and addressing harmful social norms and violence against girls. Plan International worked with partners, including ministries of education, to address root causes of vulnerability and gender inequality, and supported gender-responsive education sector planning at the governmental level. Following displacement or quick-onset disaster, children needed safe places to learn, that met their immediate education and well-being needs, including psychological support. Curricula, teaching methods and learning materials needed to be non-discriminatory and gender-responsive and class management needed to be child-friendly. Pregnant girls and young mothers should be supported to remain in education – including through targeted outreach, part-time formal schooling and vocational training. Girls' and young women's participation in good-quality education contributed to long-term peace and stability.

**27.** Arizza Nocum, a youth representative of Extremely Together, an initiative of the Kofi Annan Foundation, examined the role of education in countering recruitment of youth by violent extremist groups. Multiple drivers, including discrimination, lack of purpose, and political and religious factors, pushed often vulnerable young people towards violent extremism. Investment in education to prevent violent extremism required targeted social media campaigns, engaging young influencers and media networks, working with religious educators, including families in education, and understanding youth. Young people needed to understand why peace was an indispensable part of education, and the importance of values needed to sustain peaceful communities. Peace strengthened and improved societies, to unite and share common goals. Increased understanding across diverse groups also improved the chances of addressing global problems, including corruption, climate change and transnational terrorism. Young people must learn critical and independent thinking to resist fake news, propaganda and demagogues. They needed to learn to unlearn in order to develop better habits, paths and life views.



**28.** The Global Education Director of Save the Children, Bushra Zulfiqar, examined how education safeguarded children and youth and helped them rebuild their lives in crisis settings. The effects of conflict and emergencies on children and education were multi-faceted, and included displacement, psychological stress, missing certificates, loss of learning, increased violence and enforced recruitment. Well-delivered education in emergencies could provide a safe, stable, protective environment, restoring dignity, hope, emotional health and peace. It provided access to life-saving information and survival skills, such as preventing sexual abuse, identifying landmines, and better nutrition. Ms. Zulfiqar called for a global action plan on securing learning outcomes in pre-primary and basic education, particularly for the countries that were the furthest behind and for the poorest and most marginalized children. She recommended enhanced funding for education, including through the Education Cannot Wait fund. States must deliver the education commitments in the global compact on refugees, including through a needs-based global plan for refugee education, and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

**29.** During the interactive dialogue, representatives of France, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine, and of the State of Palestine, as well as of Action of Human Movement, the Ambedkar Center for Justice and Peace and the Reliable Future Social Initiatives Public Union, took the floor. Participants described barriers to and initiatives for safe access to education in armed conflicts and under occupation, especially for refugees and internally displaced children. Protracted crisis and occupation presented specific challenges around the world, including in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and South Asia. Participants described relief work of international organizations, such as UNHCR and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and of official agencies and public foundations. One delegation asked panellists for optimal and durable solutions for education in emergencies, considering donor fatigue in protracted contexts. Some participants emphasized social and economic empowerment, especially of families and children that had been marginalized due to ethnicity or caste.

**30.** In response, Ms. Micha said that many signatories to the Safe Schools Declaration did not apply appropriate measures for the protection and non-military use of schools. Endorsing the Declaration and adopting sustainable political commitments were essential. Ms. Zulfiqar confirmed that appropriate quality education could help children recover from trauma and to reinstate hope. Evidence showed that children who felt safe learned better. Ms. Telford hoped that children's passion for education would inspire the international community to act. The global compact for refugees provided guidance on supporting receiving countries and communities so that they could share the responsibility for durable solutions. Ms. Joyner emphasized the importance of investing in teachers so they could support learners, listening to learners and their communities, and of multi-stakeholder action to implement the Minimum Standards for Education. Ms. Nocum called for more infrastructure and resources for schools, curricula to teach relevant skills for employment, and empathy. In conflicts, counselling and therapy should be available to children. Education should empower, and help learners empower others' lives.

#### **D. AN EDUCATION FIT FOR THE FUTURE: OPENING OF DAY 2**

**31.** In a video message, the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, stated that education was a birthright established in international law. Lack of access to quality education meant that children and youth could not exercise other rights. Universal education must become a reality, including by removing barriers for those most vulnerable or at risk of being left behind. Human rights education empowered youth to act and participate in democratic decision-making processes, and protected them from extremist ideologies. The United Nations Youth Strategy committed the United Nations system to substantially increase education commitments. Ms. Wickramanayake called for multi-stakeholder partnerships focused on revolutionizing education and making it accessible for all.

**32.** Vartan Melkonian, a guest conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and patron of the Consortium for Street Children, presented his experiences as a street child. He described multiple challenges that children in street situations

faced: displacement, constant movement, lack of security and stability, living in constant fear, and experiencing pain and lack of love. He had a lifelong desire to attend school and never did. Mr. Melkonian urged all stakeholders to ensure education for all children, particularly those living in street situations. He called on all present to put aside political, religious and cultural differences and to invest in and prioritize street children and their education, which was crucial for future opportunities and development.

#### **E. HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION FOR YOUTH AND BY YOUTH: EXPERIENCES FROM DIFFERENT REGIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD**

**33.** Paulina Tandiono, an OHCHR staff member, highlighted the timeliness of human rights education for youth and by youth given the recent adoption by the Human Rights Council of the plan of action for the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education. She affirmed the importance of developing existing good practices in implementing the plan of action, which was why the panel focused on youth human rights trainers' experiences.

**34.** Guillermo Gutiérrez, a representative of the Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice and the International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development, described human rights education projects in Uruguay. One project provided human rights education for persons deprived of liberty who were under the age of 30, addressing coexistence, and lack of knowledge of and respect for rights in prison. Participants discussed specific sets of rights and how those rights related to their past experiences and to daily prison life. Other projects had been developed in collaboration with local community members, for children and youth from neighborhoods with a critical socioeconomic context, through pedagogical tools such as service-learning. Youth volunteers spent a week in neighbourhoods and organized workshops on human rights themes, at the end of which participants created a community action plan to promote human rights. Human rights education affirmed that every person was a rights holder, irrespective of his or her situation (e.g. deprivation of liberty, or social vulnerability), and that through

upholding the rights of others, one recognized one's own rights.

**35.** Victoria Ibiwoye, Director of the OneAfricanChild Foundation for Creative Learning, shared her experience in overcoming exclusion from education, as she had dyslexia, which was not accommodated in the education system of Nigeria. Consequently, she had become an advocate for access to quality and inclusive education in Nigeria. Ms. Ibiwoye emphasized that education was the most powerful weapon to change the world, and called for increased investment, as the quality of education determined the quality of participation in society. Human rights education contributed to universal quality education, and encouraged learners to adopt a broader global perspective and consider others' rights. Ms. Ibiwoye worked in community schools in Nigeria on issues surrounding human rights and global citizenship. She employed a play-based methodology and a participatory approach, stimulating learners to participate, reflect, question, generate results, and see issues around them from a system thinking approach. She highlighted the four pillars to meaningful youth engagement: youth consultation, youth contribution, youth as partners, and youth as leaders.

**36.** Aunell Ross Angcos, from Millennials PH, had been inspired to further his involvement with human rights education because of the human rights situation in the Philippines. Successful human rights education should invoke a sense of ownership, which would naturally create a sense of responsibility and action. He described the Millennials PH Orientation on Leadership Development programme, which targeted youth at the grass-roots level and involved human rights workshops in schools and universities. Since 2017, the programme had worked with more than 3,000 youth advocates. The impact of the programme had been felt, for instance, in the case of Kian delos Santos, a 17-year-old boy killed in the context of the war on drugs. The youth advocates had actively contacted their communities for support in demanding accountability through campaigns, including designs, plays and songs, which in turn had created national awareness about extrajudicial killings. This had eventually led to the trial and the first-ever conviction of law enforcement personnel involved in killings since the beginning of the war on drugs.



**37.** During the interactive dialogue, representatives of Cuba, Egypt and Qatar, and speakers from Amnesty International South Asia, the Institute of Human Rights Education – People’s Watch, and the University of Warwick, and an OHCHR intern, took the floor. Participants highlighted human rights education as a tool for children and youth to become active global citizens and counter attacks on civic space worldwide. They shared national good practices on human rights education, such as its inclusion as an integral part of basic education and a compulsory subject in tertiary education, and the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health education in national curricula and teacher training programmes. Measures must be implemented to ensure universal access to human rights education. Participants also called for multi-stakeholder partnerships in designing human rights education, involving, among others, national human rights institutions and indigenous representatives. It was important to collaborate with youth and ensure their meaningful engagement in implementing the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education. Participants described good practices in providing a platform for youth to participate freely and share their views on government initiatives. Participants urged States to submit progress reports on the implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

**38.** In response, Mr. Gutiérrez said that human rights education was important for all young people, and especially for those in situations of vulnerability as it enabled their self-awareness as rights holders and as part of the society that had previously excluded them. Human rights education brought diverse young people together. Mr. Gutiérrez called on the United Nations to support local-level youth projects and empower youth to contribute to realizing human rights and peace for all. Mr. Angcos added that human rights education must be conducted using local concepts, narratives and stories that youth could relate to, in order to make human rights more relatable. Ms. Ibiwoye affirmed that young people needed to know their rights in order to claim them. There was an urgent need to invest in education that spread knowledge, values, attitudes and respect for a culture of human rights and lawfulness. Youth should not be seen

as mere beneficiaries, but should be empowered as leaders. She argued that more young people should be involved and appointed in high-level positions so that they could influence decisions affecting them.

## **F. HOW EDUCATION TODAY CAN STRENGTHEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE**

**39.** A senior human rights adviser at OHCHR, Chris Mburu, shared his experience growing up in a small impoverished Kenyan village, where children had limited opportunities to receive education. School fees provided an additional barrier. His education had been funded by a Swedish woman, Hilde Back, in whose name he had established a foundation to support children’s access to education. In order to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children, governments should guarantee free education.

**40.** Parmosivea Soobrayan, a regional education advisor to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, questioned what kind of education would lead us to the future we want for all people. He criticized contemporary education systems, which were too focused on individual prosperity and consumption, resulting in marginalization. Education systems were designed to favour children of a particular socioeconomic background with a particular learning style and cognitive ability. Consequently, a small proportion of children achieved the learning levels intended by the curriculum, while millions were left behind. Solutions needed to focus on the social



**Dalí Silvia Angel of the Mexican Young Indigenous Network and of the Fund for Development of Indigenous Peoples from Latin America and the Caribbean**

dimensions of development and highlight social norms and social capital. Pedagogical practices should be grounded in inclusive quality education. Teaching should be based on a universal design that was learner-centred and adopted multiple strategies that responded to the diversity of learning needs and styles. Equality and inclusion benefited growth and development and created the necessary conditions to overcome the factors that drove social discord.

**41.** Elin Martínez, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, spoke about strengthening secondary education for all and underlined that the international community was already behind on its commitments. Most States provided secondary education to high numbers of children, and there had been greater emphasis on formal secondary education at the national and international level, particularly through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, many children – including children with disabilities, children who dropped out early or whose grades were not high enough, and children who could not

afford fees – were effectively barred from formal secondary education, with poor-quality technical and vocational education being the only educational option available. Five key changes could contribute to universal secondary education: free secondary education in law, policy and practice; the removal of filtering exams before or mid-way through secondary school; eliminating discrimination in teaching, curricula and the learning environment; ensuring that pregnant girls, adolescent mothers and girls forced to marry can remain in education; and eliminating stigma, discrimination, bullying and violence by teachers and students, and protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.

**42.** Dominic Wilcox, founder of Little Inventors, focused on creativity in education for children. Little Inventors challenged children to use their imagination to invent ideas to solve problems, improve people’s lives and bring delight to others. Children submitted these ideas on paper and Little Inventors built and exhibited them. This encouraged people to think about the world from different and





surprising perspectives. Little Inventors' challenges covered global issues, including conflict and the environment. Mr. Wilcox underlined that supporting children's creativity increased their self-confidence, accorded their thoughts and ideas importance, and encouraged them to be proactive in improving their lives and the world. Creativity was often overlooked in education, yet creative thinking was a vital skill in today's world. Children could feel powerless and overwhelmed by challenges, and creative education could help to help address this. It empowered young people to express their inner thoughts, ideas and feelings, become resourceful and resilient problem-solvers and bring joy to others.

**43.** Hiromichi Katayama, programme specialist at the Youth, Literacy and Skills Development Section of UNESCO, examined the role of education and training for a better life and decent work. The UNESCO Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training 2016–2021 had three priorities: youth employment and employability, equity and gender equality, and helping States transform to greener economies, including through digitalization. UNESCO recommended access, inclusion, equity, financing and management in order to improve education and training. UNESCO worked with several ministries, employers, workers and other stakeholders to understand what skills were required in the labour market and in specific sectors. The lack of a unified lifelong learning system

was challenging. UNESCO was compiling different national practices from education, employment and social protection systems to better understand the policy actions and institutional arrangements needed for lifelong learning. UNESCO worked on emerging technologies, a possible technical service for educational and training institutions, and technology in different sectors. Finally, UNESCO helped countries forecast the skills required in the future, by occupation and industry, to provide clearer information for educational planners and jobseekers.

**44.** Lucija Karnelutti, representing the Organizing Bureau of European School Student Unions, shared a youth perspective on changes needed to secure an education fit for the future. She highlighted the importance of life skills alongside academic competences, and stressed four areas for progress: the curriculum, assessment, lifelong learning and technology. Most school curricula focused on textbook knowledge, instead of preparing for life in society or supporting creative and critical thinking. Curricula should be inclusive, flexible, open for choice and mainly learner-oriented. Assessment should demonstrate how students learned and received information, how different approaches worked, and how to plan efficient and flexible educational systems so that education adjusted to different challenges. Students must be provided with skills and competences to understand technology and critically examine information, to distinguish

false from true and to process logical pieces of knowledge that could be applied to their lives. Teachers should be open to lifelong learning, willing to adapt to new approaches, able to evaluate their practice, and should strive towards constant improvement.

**45.** During the interactive dialogue, representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Portugal, Qatar, Sierra Leone and Ukraine, and of Franklin University Switzerland, the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Association of Human Rights in Kurdistan – Geneva, and Patriotic Vision, and OHCHR interns, took the floor. Participants noted countries' efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4. Participants called on all stakeholders to renew their commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child by putting children's rights at the forefront of national agenda and providing equal access to education for all. Some delegations focused on the right of minorities to receive education in their mother tongue, or on those experiencing prolonged conflict and displacement using their education to access the labour market. Delegations reported positive developments in national education policies, such as elimination of barriers to quality education, elimination of corruption for university entry, or universal national school enrolment programmes. These policies guaranteed all citizens the right, irrespective of their origin, residence or financial situation, to obtain quality education and progress in society. Many participants focused on education for youth and referenced the Lisbon+21 Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes. Youth should learn critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and creativity to collaborate, network, innovate and participate in decision-making. Businesses and potential employers should value the global power of education. Panellists were asked about measures for participation, about opportunities and greater responsibilities for youth when entering the workforce, about reallocation of resources due to economic stagnation, and about increasing access to free, quality public education, including through taxation or redistribution of existing resources.

**46.** In response, Mr. Soobrayan highlighted prioritizing secondary education and making it universally accessible, especially in developing, lower- and middle-income countries. Ms. Martínez focused on public education systems as the only way to tackle inequality. States' international obligation was to provide quality public education and ensure that laws, policies and systems were strong. With regard to funding education during austerity, some developing countries had committed to prioritizing public education and had mobilized resources through progressive taxation and by addressing corruption. Mr. Wilcox noted that working with technology stimulated children's creativity and taught them to approach the world in a proactive problem-solving manner, but technology could not be the only tool. Mr. Katayama emphasized that the policy advice of UNESCO encouraged financial mobilization of the private sector, considering the country context. Mr. Mburu encouraged States to find innovative budgetary measures to prioritize free, quality public education.

## **G. EDUCATION AS EMPOWERMENT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**47.** Jillian Dempster, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, argued for a rights-based approach to education in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4. She drew on the Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights general comment No. 13 (1999) on the right to education, emphasizing education as an empowerment right, through which economically and socially marginalized adults and children could lift themselves out of poverty. She also underlined the importance of a well-educated, enlightened and active mind, and stressed that education opened doors, unlocked opportunities and led to change and empowerment. Education was central to peace, environmental protection, making informed health choices, and enabling one to stand up for human rights. Inequitable access to education could, and did, have multi-generational impacts.

**48.** The Director of the Geneva office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Monica Ferro, addressed the importance of sexual education in school curricula as a tool to empower youth. Incorrect or confusing information about sexuality and gender led to serious risks to health, well-being and dignity. Comprehensive sexual education promoted evidence-based and age-appropriate knowledge on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health issues. It contributed to creating a fair and compassionate society, by empowering individuals and communities. It also promoted critical thinking skills and young people's citizenship, sense of responsibility, respect and tolerance. Parents, families and community leaders should be engaged to positively contribute to sexual education. School-based sexual education should be complemented by out-of-school programmes for the most vulnerable. Sexual education prevented HIV/AIDS and reduced adolescent pregnancy, allowing more young

people to complete education. Sexual education that addressed gender and power issues led to better health outcomes. School-based programmes should be combined with non-discriminatory youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including access to modern contraception. Implementation should include national policy reports, monitoring and evaluation, and the provision of support to teachers.

**49.** Kristeena Monteith, a Young Leader for the Sustainable Development Goals, focused on youth empowerment, including through education. Education systems must be designed to protect and improve humanity by building intelligence and character. Young people should have opportunities to build a global awareness of their own agency, including the establishment of educational mechanisms aimed at practising citizenship. It was important to engage all children, including the most vulnerable and those traditionally left behind.



Every child should have access to an education deliberately designed for them and their future. As some actors worked against human rights and sustainable development, there was a need for partnerships to engage in dialogue with such actors in ways that empowered them to change. Communications skills, storytelling, organizing and conflict resolution were crucial in that regard. Education must be human-centred, research-driven, flexible and brave in the face of the challenges that the world faced. Ms. Monteith called for collective action to empower youth and prepare them to advance the welfare of the whole human race.

**50.** The Secretary-General of the Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, Hamda Hassan Abd-al-Rahman Abu Za'in Al-Sulaiti, focused on child and youth education and the economic and cognitive empowerment of young people. Education promoted economic, political and social participation, and developed a culture of global citizenship

and interest in national issues, loyalty, and a sense of belonging. Ms. Al-Sulaiti highlighted the importance of building a knowledgeable human base for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Education developed skills that contributed to a healthier life for children and young people, including through self-control, decision-making skills, ethical rules, community engagement and integration. There were four types of empowerment: cognitive, social, political and economic. Ms. Al-Sulaiti emphasized the economic empowerment model, and particularly the Al-Fakhoora programme applied across the Middle East. It included services such as psychosocial support and medical care in marginalized areas, and reconstruction of education infrastructure. The cognitive empowerment model that Qatar employed focused on developing a knowledge-based economy by promoting innovation and scientific research in youth and preparing them for university education.





**51.** Alex Conte, director of Child Rights Connect, examined education as a tool for empowering children and promoting human rights. Education should be a lifelong and participatory process, develop knowledge, skills and attitudes to defend and promote human rights, and prepare children for responsible life in a free society. For the Committee on the Rights of the Child 2018 day of general discussion on children as human rights defenders, Child Rights Connect and Queen's University Belfast had conducted consultations with 2,700 children from 53 countries. These children had called for quality, inclusive, universal and accessible education, adapted to those left behind. Children underlined that real empowerment required engaging, involving and preparing them, in appropriate language, and with reference to children's lived experiences. Children should be taught how to identify and address human rights violations, participate in decision-making processes, and resolve conflict and bullying. Educating children to be human rights defenders allowed them to empower other children, express themselves and develop opinions. Education needed to shift from informational to practical: providing children with means and confidence to claim their rights and those of others through participation at school and in broader contexts, including the United Nations.

**52.** Jorge Cardona, a professor at the University of Valencia and former member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, argued that inclusive education was necessary to empower all children, regardless of their abilities. Democratic societies valued and appreciated diversity and built

social, political, economic and cultural structures to allow all to exercise their rights on an equal basis. Inclusive education systems should adapt to all races, cultures, religions and abilities and teach children to live in diversity, recognizing their equal right to do so. Children should not be encouraged to compete against each other, but rather to compare themselves against their potential according to their own characteristics, feeling unique in their identities and equal in their rights. The cost of adopting inclusive education was much lower than the long-term costs of a non-inclusive society. The Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had established a working group to harmonize their interpretation of the rights of children with disabilities, including in relation to inclusive education, bringing the recommendations of the former committee closer to those in general comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education, of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**53.** Sigall Horovitz, a legal officer at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), focused on how education could empower children and youth to counter corruption. Under the Education for Justice Initiative, UNODC worked with educators and academics to strengthen the rule of law. The Initiative implemented the Doha Declaration, which recognized universal education as key to preventing corruption, crime and terrorism. In particular, the Initiative developed and provided age-appropriate education materials on criminal justice, crime prevention and the rule of law and promoted their integration into curricula

at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Corruption denied millions of young people their right to learn and to a decent future. Corruption was linked to climate change, conflict, poverty and inequality. It was important to ensure access to quality, effective, inclusive education that shaped values and developed future leaders. The Initiative focused on ethics, universal values and integrity and the ways in which they linked to relevant fields and professions. Ms. Horovitz underlined the importance of empowering teachers and educators.

**54.** During the interactive dialogue, representatives of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine, and of the American Association of Jurists, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, ATD Fourth World, and the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey, took the floor. For participants, education was a basis for development and could save, empower and change lives. Participants discussed legal and administrative measures promoting more inclusive schools for those affected by humanitarian crises, including remote learning. Some participants emphasized families' role in education to build better societies. One delegation argued that sexual education should respect different societies' religious and cultural principles and children's mental security. Another delegation praised the UNFPA guidance on promoting human rights-based sexual education in schools. Participants recommended that education should promote non-violence and peace, active listening, resilience, inner peace and critical thinking, and not what Paulo Freire called a "banking concept of education". Some participants emphasized the importance of youth activism in politics and in combating corruption, including by participating in oversight institutions and exercising the right to public protests. One delegation stressed the contribution of sports for integrating children and youth, and the value of cultural expressions and promoting solidarity and harmony with nature.

**55.** In response, Mr. Conte stressed the complementarity between education and empowerment, through promoting participation to form leaders, critical thinkers and influencers.

Ms. Monteith emphasized the importance of inclusivity for children with disabilities, refugees and the leadership of youth, and called for tackling corruption and resistance to change. Ms. Al-Sulaiti agreed that the promotion of justice and fairness was the best way to empower children. Ms. Ferro stressed the importance of access to evidence-based, age-appropriate, comprehensive and accurate information about sexual and reproductive health and life to empower youth, and of life-saving and game-changing investment. Mr. Cardona emphasized that inclusive education for persons with disabilities benefited all society, and that failure to act on it affected everyone's human rights. He emphasized religious leaders' responsibility to contribute to inclusive education. Ms. Horovitz recalled the importance of empowering educators to empower future generations. She shared the collaborative and open nature of the UNODC Education for Justice Initiative.

**56.** A video was shown sharing children's views on how education needed to change to become fit for the future. Children called for education to be practical and oriented towards their future aspirations, for greater investment in education, for the abolition of financial barriers to education and for education to be truly inclusive. They underlined the importance of teaching global topics, such as environmental issues and peace, so they could influence society.

#### **H. CONVERSATION ON THE WAY FORWARD WITH THE DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

**57.** The last session was a conversation between the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore, and youth representatives Ms. Monteith and Ms. Ibiwoye. In opening, the Deputy High Commissioner emphasized investment in education and allocation of adequate funding to ensure quality, inclusive education for all. She questioned how young people could be old enough to have children and drive, yet not old enough to access comprehensive sexual education or vote. She emphasized the importance of greater involvement of young people in different processes. She emphasized that the onus was not on children and youth, but on the "educated non-young" to pave the way for young people and leave them space



to participate. She also referenced reprisals and criticisms against youth advocates.

**58.** The Deputy High Commissioner asked Ms. Monteith and Ms. Ibiwoye to reflect on the Social Forum. Both youth representatives reflected that there was a clear message on the transformative power of education, and that the discussions had been enriching and inspiring, allowing different stakeholders to discuss the realization of child and youth rights through education. Youth voices were critical and their experiences tangible, therefore it was critical to have this reflected in the discussions. Ms. Ibiwoye recognized that the world and its systems, including the United Nations, were not perfect and emphasized that we needed to appreciate that everyone was doing their best when working together. Ms. Monteith noted the importance of discussing both positive developments and challenges and barriers.

**59.** With regard to implementation of the right to education, the youth representatives underlined the need to invest in and prioritize education and to include all stakeholders, including youth, in discussions. Ms. Monteith emphasized the importance of investing in the quality of education and in preparing young people for the future to strengthen understanding and respect for one another, society and the planet. Education was about resilience, humanity and empathy, yet this was often missing when discussing education systems. Ms. Ibiwoye recommended investment in an education that taught diversity, pluralism and lawfulness. Ms. Monteith emphasized that youth were interested in discussing public investment and

that strong leaders who cared about education were needed for a change in public education spending. Ms. Ibiwoye recommended a focus on the long-term impacts of education and one that inspired youth to act – including how individuals could promote human rights. She emphasized the lack of attention on the exclusions that people faced, including displaced youth, youth with disabilities and youth living with HIV. Ms. Ibiwoye challenged stakeholders to consider how to create an inclusive human rights-centred ecosystem. Ms. Monteith called for a model that focused on the human level.

**60.** Regarding progress still to be achieved concerning empowerment, the youth representatives reflected that more effort was needed in terms of child and youth engagement. It was critical to include them and listen to them. This involved creating a suitable environment for youth to share their experiences and ideas. Ms. Ibiwoye recommended that young people be included in planning events such as the Social Forum in order to make these truly reflective and inclusive. She also called for capacity-building of young people with regard to the United Nations, the way in which it functioned, and opportunities for engagement. Ms. Monteith focused on the need to recognize the time and effort that young people spent participating in these processes and to truly include their voices and perspectives. She underlined the importance of recognizing the needs and vulnerabilities of youth activists and of building the capacity of young people to engage, including through skills and knowledge of processes. Furthermore, youth should be included at the highest decision-making levels of the United Nations.



## IV. Conclusions and recommendations

**61.** In her closing remarks, the Chairperson-Rapporteur highlighted the role of education in promoting human rights, peace and understanding, and economic and social development – all central to the Human Rights Council. She called on all stakeholders to ensure that all children and youth could access education on an inclusive, equitable basis. Children and youth were agents of change who were claiming their rights and sustainable development. She called on all stakeholders to ensure that this happened, by removing barriers, giving the voices of children and youth a platform, and listening to them. Central to achieving this were the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, focused on youth, the United Nations Youth Strategy, and the 2019 Human Rights Day on “Youth standing up for human rights”.

**62.** The following conclusions and recommendations emerged from the 2019 Social Forum:

### A. CONCLUSIONS

**63.** Education is a fundamental human right and a means for children and youth to realize other human rights and sustainable development. Education is transformative and a key tool for child and youth empowerment, yet hundreds of millions worldwide remain out of school or do not receive quality education.

**64.** Funding of education remains of critical concern, both in terms of allocation of adequate financial and human resources and in terms of targeting of funding.

**65.** Barriers to equitable, inclusive, quality education are wide-ranging and include poverty; discriminatory laws and policies; conflict and emergencies; violence; child labour; the financial costs of education; the overcommodification of education; inadequate educational facilities, including sanitation and hygiene, and inaccessible facilities for children with disabilities; inadequate human, technical and financial resources; learning



in an unfamiliar language; and weak curriculum content and teaching methods.

**66.** Education improves young people's future educational and work opportunities and strengthens their resilience. The international legal framework includes, *inter alia*, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Discrimination in Education and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The international policy framework includes the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Sustainable Development Goal 4.

**67.** Children and youth from specific groups are disproportionately affected, including those affected by poverty, humanitarian disasters and conflict, those from indigenous, low-income, rural, and marginalized communities, from developing countries, and children on the move, children with disabilities and girls. Such groups require dedicated policies to ensure they are not left behind, including strategic litigation.

**68.** Conflict and emergencies significantly affect education, through displacement, interrupted education, traumatization, increased violence and enforced recruitment. Schools are safe, protective environments where children can receive support, protection, and access to crucial services and learning. Education is a powerful tool for conflict prevention, that emphasizes peace, inclusion and non-violence. The Safe Schools Declaration has positively influenced the protection of education during conflict. The global compact on refugees provides a key opportunity to ensure that refugee children access equitable, quality education.

**69.** Youth are rights holders and key actors in realizing human rights. Human rights education for youth is a lifelong process that fosters knowledge about human rights as well as skills for their daily realization, and develops attitudes and behaviours so that youth defend and promote human rights and become active citizens. It is crucial to engage youth as recipients of and key partners in all stages of human rights education: planning, design, implementation and follow-up.

**70.** Education should evolve alongside society and reflect society's diversity. States must deliver on commitments to ensure secondary education and lifelong education for all. Curricula should be inclusive, flexible and learner-oriented, and promote critical and creative thinking to allow children and youth to express themselves and learn to think independently and challenge.

**71.** Children and youth are agents of change. The transformative role of education cannot be realized if they are not actively engaged. Empowering children and youth is the first step to realizing their rights, and means involving them in all stages of relevant processes. They require knowledge of global topics, humanity, peace, inclusion and anti-corruption, and the skills and tools to use this knowledge to advocate for human rights and sustainable development. Material must be age- and language-appropriate and relevant to their experiences.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**72.** States, civil society, United Nations agencies and other stakeholders should respect, protect and fulfil all human rights of children and youth, especially education, in line with international human rights law and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The right to education must be enshrined in national laws, policies and strategies, and implemented concretely at the national and local levels.

**73.** States should invest in universal quality, inclusive education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, in particular in conflict and emergencies, including through targeted investment. Official development assistance should be available for developing countries to address investment gaps in order to realize universal quality education.

**74.** States should adopt measures to reach those left furthest behind, including by assessing and prioritizing their specific needs and vulnerabilities. States should ensure that educational facilities are accessible.

- 75.** States should remove all direct and indirect financial barriers to education, including tuition fees and additional costs, and establish programmes to support families whose children work so that they remain in school.
- 76.** States should collate and provide transparent, accurate data concerning the needs of out-of-school children and youth, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, religion, disability and other relevant groups, to inform education planning.
- 77.** States should ensure that education is upheld in conflict and emergency settings, and that safe spaces are provided for children and youth to access critical services and learning, including psychosocial support. States should endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, and fully implement the Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
- 78.** States, United Nations agencies and other stakeholders should ensure that all refugee children can access quality, inclusive education on an equal basis with students in host countries, including by implementing the education commitments in the global compact on refugees.
- 79.** Curricula, teaching methods and learning outcomes should be non-discriminatory, inclusive, effective, learner-centred and gender-sensitive. They should have contextualized methodologies, prepare young people for the workplace and global challenges, and reflect technological, political and scientific developments. They should encourage creative and critical thinking and consider students' differing needs and abilities. This includes comprehensive age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health education and the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development and human rights.
- 80.** States should adopt policies to ensure that pregnant girls and young mothers can access education, including through part-time classes and technical or vocational training.
- 81.** States should ensure that learning environments are free from discrimination and violence, including sexual violence, by eliminating direct and indirect discriminatory policies and behaviours and holding perpetrators accountable.
- 82.** In line with the plan of action for the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, States should establish a national coordinating body involving relevant government entities and civil society, including youth representatives, and develop a national strategy to promote human rights education for youth.
- 83.** States should develop policies and legislation, in collaboration with youth, to ensure the inclusion of human rights education in formal education and facilitate civil society provision of human rights education for youth in non-formal settings. States should encourage organization of and participation in human rights education activities and guarantee freedom from reprisals.
- 84.** States, United Nations agencies, civil society and other stakeholders should collaborate, conduct local advocacy and build relationships at the local level to change societal norms around education.
- 85.** All stakeholders should strengthen child and youth participation in their processes by giving them a voice and engaging with them. States, United Nations agencies and civil society should strengthen capacity-building of young people to ensure that they understand the possibilities and channels for engaging in relevant processes at the international, regional and national levels.



# Annex

## List of participants

### STATES MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

States Members of the Human Rights Council

Afghanistan; Angola; Argentina; Austria; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Brazil; Bulgaria; Burkina Faso; Chile; China; Cuba; Czechia; Denmark; Egypt; Fiji; India; Iraq; Italy; Mexico; Nepal; Nigeria; Pakistan; Peru; Philippines; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Senegal; South Africa; Spain; Togo; Tunisia; Turkey; Ukraine; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; Uruguay.

### STATES MEMBERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Albania; Algeria; Azerbaijan; Barbados; Belarus; Belgium; Bolivia; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Chad; Colombia; Congo; Costa Rica; Côte D'Ivoire; Cyprus; Democratic Rep. of Lao; Ecuador; El Salvador; Estonia; Eswatini; Ethiopia; France; Gambia; Georgia; Germany; Ghana; Greece; Guatemala; Honduras; Iran (The Islamic Republic of); Jamaica; Jordan; Kuwait; Latvia; Lebanon; Libya; Maldives; Mauritania; Mauritius; Montenegro; Morocco; Myanmar; Nauru; New Zealand; Nicaragua; Niger; North Macedonia; Norway; Oman; Poland; Portugal; Republic of Moldova; Romania; Russian Federation; Serbia; Sierra Leone; Singapore; Slovenia; Solomon Islands; South Sudan; Sri Lanka; Syrian Arab Republic; Thailand; Uganda; Venezuela (The Bolivarian Republic of); Viet Nam.

### NON-MEMBER STATES REPRESENTED BY OBSERVERS

State of Palestine; Holy See.

### OTHER ENTITIES

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; Sovereign and Military Order of Malta.

### UNITED NATIONS

Committee on the Rights of the Child; Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UN-AIDS); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

### INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

European Union; International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF); Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC).

### NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

Latvian Human Rights Committee; Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey.

### ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Centre for Children's Rights Studies of the University of Geneva; Centre for International Studies of the University of Buenos Aires; Collège de la Présentation de Marie – Saint-Julien-en-Genevois; Conservatório de Música Calouste Gulbenkian – Braga; École d'études sociales et pédagogiques – Haute école de travail social et de la santé (ÉÉSP) – Lausanne; École internationale de Genève (Ecolint) La Chat; École internationale de Genève (Ecolint) Nations; École Sacré Cœur – Thonon les Bains; Franklin University Switzerland; Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations (GSD); Georgian Technical University; Gubkin University; Haute école de travail social de Fribourg (HETS-FR); Haute école spécialisée de Suisse occidentale (HES-SO); Herzen State Pedagogical University of

Russia; Institut Florimont; Institut International de Lancy; Kinnaird College for Women; Liceo Artistico di Zurigo; New Cambridge College Sydney; Singisunum University – Belgrade; Tver State University; Ulster University; Universität St. Gallen (HSG); Université de Genève (UNIGE); Université Grenoble Alpes; University of Pecs; Hungary; University of Valencia; University of Warwick; Webster University Geneva.

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHERS

Action of Human Movement (AHM); Action pour la protection des droits de l'homme en Mauritanie; Aide et Action; AISA NGO International; Al Jazeera Media Network; Ambedkar Center for Justice and Peace; American Association of Jurists; Amnesty International South Asia; APE@; Association "Paix" pour la lutte contre la Contrainte et l'injustice; Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani people in Iran (AHRAZ); Association mauritanienne pour la promotion des droits de l'homme; Association Points-Cœur; Association pour l'Éducation et la Santé de la Femme et de l'Enfant (AESFE); Association promotion droits humains; Association Solidarité Internationale pour la Paix; Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG-XXIII); Bity SA; Cabine de Leitura; Centre de Conseils et d'appui pour les jeunes en matière de droits de l'homme; Centre de Documentation; de Recherche et d'Information des Peuples Autochtones (doCip); Centre International d'investissement/International Investment Center; Child Rights Connect; Child Rights International Network (CRIN); Consortium for Street Children; Education Above All Foundation; Empowerment Lab; European University Network (ERENET); Extremely Together; First Modern Agro. Tools – Common Initiative Group (FI.MO.AT.C.I.G); Forum for African Women Educationalists; Fund for Development of Indigenous Peoples from Latin America and the Caribbean; Geneva International Centre for Justice; Geneva International Model United Nations (GIMUN); Genève pour les droits de l'homme : formation internationale; Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Globethics.net Foundation; Green Jobs & Sustainable Development International Centre (GJASD International); Hilde Back Education Fund; Human

Relations/Human Rights Commission of the City of Tucson; Human Rights Watch; Initiative d'opposition contre les discours extrémistes; Institute of Human Rights Education – People's Watch; Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Loreto Generalate; Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE); International Catholic Child Bureau; International Commission of Jurists; International Committee for the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas; International Educational Development; Inc.; International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) at UN Geneva; International Investment Center; International Movement All Together in Dignity (ATD) Fourth World; International Planned Parenthood Federation; International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development; International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations; International-Lawyers.Org; Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice; Kofi Annan Foundation; Association of Human Rights in Kurdistan – Geneva (KMMK-G); L'Albero della Vita; Latter-day Saint Charities; Little Inventors Worldwide; Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organisation; Make Mothers Matter; Maloca Internationale; Marketing Research Foundation; Melkonian Foundation; Millennials Energy; Millennials PH; Mexican Young Indigenous Network; Ministério Público do Trabalho (Brazilian Labour Prosecution Office); Musique Universelle Arc en Ciel; OneAfricanChild Foundation for Creative Learning; ONG Hope International; Organizing Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU); Patriotic Vision; Plan International; Plan International Norway; Portuguese National Youth Council (CNJ); Reliable Future Social Initiatives Public Union; Réseau Unité pour le Développement de Mauritanie; Right To Play; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; Save the Children International; Seven Eyes music band; Silatech Foundation; Société Civile Africaine sur la Société de l'information (ACSIS-SCASI); Sprachdienstleistungen Römling; Swiss Indigenous Network; Talk Up Radio Show – Nationwide 90FM – Jamaica; Terre des Hommes Suisse; The International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers' Association (ICoCA); Udisha; Union of European Football Associations (UEFA); United Methodist Church – General Board of Global Ministries; World Economic Forum; World Evangelical Alliance; World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations.





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