Educating Girls – What the World Can and Must Do

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Access to free, primary school education is a promise to children that all world leaders have made through the U.N. Millennium Development Goals and the Education For All movement. But the right to education, particularly for girls, is still too often denied – sometimes violently as the recent abduction of more than 200 school girls in Nigeria shows. This is completely unacceptable and we condemn the terrorist actions of Boko Haram in the strongest possible terms. We call on the entire international community to stand together for the right of all children – girls and boys – to education.

Despite considerable progress, today an estimated 57 million children of primary school age are still not in school – more than half of them in fragile and conflict-affected states. Around 250 million children either don't make it to grade 4 or fail to learn the basics of reading and writing by the time they reach grade 4.

Girls are disproportionately represented in these figures. They are more likely to face barriers such as violence and discrimination, leading them to drop out or never enroll in school at all. At the secondary level, gender disparity often increases, as girls are pressured to leave school to marry, have children or work at home.

The reasons to invest in education are clear: nations cannot thrive without educated workforces and informed, engaged citizens. Education combats inequality and leads to improved health outcomes. Countries with higher levels of education are less prone to conflict and instability, while gender parity in education is closely linked to higher economic growth.

For girls and women, education is transformational. If, for example, all women in sub-Saharan Africa were to complete primary education, the maternal mortality ratio could fall by as much as 70 percent. Child marriage rates would decline dramatically. Each year of education can increase a woman's income by 25 percent. Educated women have healthier children and infection risks for HIV are reduced the longer a girl stays in school. In simple terms, education for girls helps to make countries richer and more peaceful, and it saves lives.

Over recent years, we have not only amassed proof of the social and economic benefits of education, particularly girls' education, we have also made considerable progress in learning how to deliver education more effectively, including through the Global Partnership for Education . This model is based on robust country-led partnerships that deliver real political commitment and results in the very poorest countries of the world.

We are encouraged that developing countries have been increasing their domestic financing of education considerably over recent years, and we applaud the Global Partnership for Education's efforts to increase this tangible political commitment in its partner countries. However, we are very concerned that there has been a decrease in aid to education of five percent annually since 2010, seven times the rate of decline of overall global development aid. Turning this around will be an important test of global commitment to development, and show whether we really are able to work together to advance the interests of all humanity.

This year Denmark celebrates 200 years of free universal primary education and maintains a strong focus on education in its international development policy, especially for fragile and conflict-affected states. Norway has made education a foreign policy priority and promises to increase support to girls' education in particular. The European Union is a strong supporter of

education worldwide, and the world's largest donor of development assistance, including education.

We are very aware that if we do not accelerate support for girls, at current rates of change it will be more than 70 years before the very poorest girls get access to a quality, basic education. The world and these girls in particular cannot afford to wait that long. It is not acceptable that global aid for education is falling when the benefits are indisputable and the needs are so clear. Simply filling the growing gap is not enough; we need to ensure that funds continue to flow to improve access and quality education for all.

As leaders with a deep commitment to education both at home and overseas, we urge all donors and developing country partners to step up their support for education. In June, the Global Partnership for Education will bring together leaders in education, representatives of governments, international finance, philanthropy and civil society for its second Replenishment Conference. The aim is to increase both domestic and external financing for education. This includes raising pledges from donors towards the target of US$3.5 billion for the GPE Fund for the period 2015 to 2018. Whether the funding goals of the Global Partnership for Education are met will be an important test of global commitment to education, and more broadly to the post-Millennium Development Goals agenda.

Only then will we come close to fulfilling the promises we have all made to the world's girls and boys – and take a vital step forward in shaping a post-2015 agenda based on true development partnerships.

Sincerely,

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