REMARKS BY LAURA FRIGENTI, GPE CEO, AT THE ITALIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARING

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The **Global Partnership for Education** (GPE) is the leading international organization, global fund and multistakeholder partnership to support partner countries in achieving SDG 4, focusing on education. We welcome and applaud the focus of the Italian Government on education in the next Italy and Africa Summit in Rome.

Since its start in 2002 GPE has mobilized more than 8.8 billion dollars, including generous contributions from Italy. GPE supports nearly 90 partner countries to transform their education systems to get the most vulnerable girls and boys in school, improve teaching and learning, and build resilience to withstand shocks and adapt to the challenges of the 21st century. For more than 20 years, GPE has been financing and supporting lasting change in education so that countries can capitalize on the opportunities of the 21st century.

GPE's unique model gets results. Since 2002 GPE contributed to 160 million more children in school in partners countries, and more children are completing primary and lower-secondary school. Twice as many girls are enrolled in school, and girls are now just as likely to finish school as boys in three quarters of GPE partner countries. 67 million more students have access to professionally trained teachers. Governments have saved more than $6 billion through more efficient education spending, freeing up more funds to invest in education for the most marginalized.

Italy and GPE: Italy has been a member of GPE since its inception and provides financial contributions to GPE work. Italy has contributed more than 77 million USD, which ranks it 17th among other donors. Italy and GPE are already partnering together to raise the profile and the specific sectoral priorities of education. Italy requested GPE to focus on Girl's education, during our last replenishment. For instance, on September 19th, in the margins of the UN General Assembly's 2023 High-Level Week, the Permanent Italian Mission at the UN, GPE, and the AVSI Foundation convened a discussion on the value of investing in education to build a safer, more prosperous future for all, especially children at risk of being left behind in situations of crisis.

Education is a common thread underlying the Italian and African relationship for just and stable societies. At its essence, education is a foundation for supporting vibrant economies, and forging the skills necessary for modern jobs to support communities.

Learning crisis and its economic impact: In lower-income countries, 7 in 10 children now cannot read a simple story by age 10. This learning crisis puts an entire generation at risk of losing US$21 trillion in potential lifetime earnings, accounting for 17 percent of today's global GDP. These potential losses have grown steadily since the start of the pandemic. The cost of lost potential from lack of learning is equivalent to US$129 billion a year or 10 percent of the global spending on education.

The intricate web of challenges facing Africa today connects education, climate change, and migration in ways that demand attention. At the heart of this nexus lies the continent's education system. Insufficient access to quality education hampers the ability of individuals and communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change. When communities lack educational resources, their capacity to address environmental challenges, such as prolonged droughts or food insecurity, is limited. As a result, these communities become more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, often forced to leave in search of better prospects and more secure environments.

It is time to **shift our perspective on education from an expense to a strategic investment.** Quality education enriches human capital, strengthens social bonds, and fuels economic growth. Investing in education is an investment in equipping individuals and nations for the future. The level and relevance of skills gained today will dictate an individual's employment, wealth and well-being tomorrow, as well as the economic stability and resilience of societies.

How does investing in quality education help? Quality education is not just a means to acquire knowledge. It is the cornerstone of economic growth and stability in Africa-and beyond. It empowers individuals, reduces inequalities, fosters innovation, and paves the way for a brighter future. As we collectively invest in education, we pave the path towards a prosperous and stable Africa, where the potential and agency of its people is fully realized, and the continent takes its rightful place on the global stage.

From Italy-Africa Summit to the G7 Summit: Italy can gain significant recognition and traction in Africa and beyond by driving action and investment that builds on previous commitments to the global education agenda. Through the Italy-Africa Summit, the development of Italy's 'Piano Mattei' and its ascent to the G7 presidency in 2024, Italy can highlight education's centrality to today's challenges and help avert a learning crisis that could in turn exacerbate migration, limit African growth, increase climate change, inequality and

instability. It begins with the Italy Africa Summit, the AU Summit on Education and the upcoming G7 Presidency, it's a journey we think worth embarking upon, not just for the benefit of Africa but for the entire world.

By **prioritizing global education in Africa and for its G7 Presidency, Italy will be a G7 leader** in the effort to skill the next African generation to fight climate change, equipping them to create enterprises, and secure safe livelihoods. Nearly 40 percent of world employers already lack workers with the skills they require. Reframing the global paradigm on education and vocational training as investments rather than just expenses can unlock the potential to meet this demand.

G7 legacy and 2024 Italian Presidency. Italy is well positioned to create its own legacy on the G7 by reiterating existing education targets, especially on girls' education, from commitment to the girls' education targets to promises of ensuring a fully funded GPE. Building on its strong partnership approach, the Africa-Italy Summit and the AU Summit the G7 Italian presidency could lead on one of the following education-related areas:

- 21st-century skills for jobs are a crucial element of the upcoming AU Summit as well as a deep interest of countries in Africa, and we know that gender equality is an important cross-cutting issue. Governments are keen to invest in skilled labor forces - including from the very basic level - to improve opportunities for citizens and foster women empowerment.

- Digital education for girls in Africa has the potential to be a transformative force, offering opportunities for empowerment and economic development in Africa. While access to quality education has been a challenge in many African countries, the rapid expansion of digital technology and the internet has opened new avenues for learning. However, there are still significant barriers to overcome. Girls in Africa often face limited access to devices, the internet, and digital skills training, which can hinder their participation in online education. Additionally, cultural norms and societal expectations can sometimes discourage girls from pursuing education. It is crucial to prioritize launching an initiative that promotes digital literacy and digital inclusion for girls, providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to harness the full potential of online learning.

- Techers and Artificial Intelligence. Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to revolutionize education in Africa by providing personalized learning experiences, automating administrative tasks, and offering teachers valuable insights to tailor their teaching methods. Teachers in Africa worry about the potential displacement of their roles due to AI. Professional development programs are essential to

empower teachers with the skills to navigate this new landscape effectively. By actively involving teachers in the development and implementation of AI technologies, Africa can harness the transformative potential of AI to improve the quality and accessibility of education across the continent while ensuring that teachers remain central to the learning process.

- Education for Climate: Without quality education for all, the number of deaths due to the climate will rise dramatically, communities will not adapt, and climate goals will continue to elude us. GPE is leading the sector in developing tools and mechanisms to ensure adaptation, mitigation and investment. This includes the GPE's Climate Smart Education Framework where we are putting money on the table to support countries to build resilience in their education systems, including for girls.

- "Action Plan on innovative financing for education" Leading up to the UN Summit in 2024, there is a growing interest in finding new and innovative ways to expand fiscal space for education outside of traditional ODA. This includes expanding the menu of modalities available to donors in support of sustainable financing and bringing in private sector partners and foundations. Approaches could include securing new commitments to GPE's innovative and co-financing mechanisms such as Debt2Ed, the GPE Multiplier, and potential new education outcomes funding mechanisms, such as impact bonds on girls' education outcome.

All these areas are interconnected and could be brought under the umbrella of 'educating for resilience for girls' – touching upon multiple G7 priorities that build quality learning to help create intergenerational resilience around health, empowerment, growth climate, and digital development. The Italy G7 Presidency can count on and could be supported by/linked to GPE's new demand-driven initiatives, created to provide partner countries with targeted expertise, resources, tools or solutions to reinforce government capacity and promote girls empowerment.

GPE has a track record with G7 Presidencies support as far as education is concerned. In particular we worked with the last Japanese presidency to include a focus on financial requirements and add a reference to vocational training. GPE supported the G7 UK and the French Presidencies to have a strong focus on gender and Girls Education.

GPE is mobilizing its partners to put gender equality and education for girls at the heart of national education systems. GPE's grants support diverse strategies for girls' education at all levels, including awareness-raising campaigns, community gender training, female teacher recruitment, boarding schools for girls, gender sensitive curriculums, gender training for

teachers, capacity building of school management committees, better access to water points and latrines, and measures against gender-based violence.

As the world grapples with complex global challenges, **GPE strongly encourages the Italian G7 Presidency to prioritize education challenges in Africa**. There is a clear demand from African Head of State to support the transformation of Education systems fit for the 21st challenges. By building an honest partnership with African Governments, the GPE and the whole G7, the Italian Presidency can serve as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for positive change, demonstrating that, together, we can create a brighter and more sustainable future for all. GPE is there to build a genuine partnership between the G7 and the African governments, we would like we can have the change to share our expertise and proposal by being invited at the upcoming Italy-Africa summit and at the G7 Foreign Affairs Ministerial in Capri and the Development Ministerial in Pescara.