

Speech by Alice Albright to the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs

Good afternoon. I'm Alice Albright, Chief Executive Officer of the Global Partnership for Education. I am delighted to be here today. I would like to thank the Honorable Chair, Marta Grande, for inviting me to speak with you about education, the work of the Global Partnership for Education, and Italy's important role in our partnership.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisions a world free from poverty, hunger, disease, fear, and violence. A world that respects human rights and assures every woman and girl full gender equality. A world where every country reaps the benefits of sustainable economic growth. And a world where every boy and every girl learns to read, write, and achieve his or her potential.

We have just over a decade to achieve these goals, failure is not an option. But if we don't accelerate progress, we will not meet the Agenda's education goal in one decade — but rather in 10. One hundred years — I don't think that we as a global community can afford to wait a century to realize the vision of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

The Global Partnership for Education is designed to achieve SDG4 — to help children unlock their potential and societies succeed. We are a partnership, a fund, and a co-creator, with our developing country partners, of strong education systems. The GPE model is the key to increasing learning and equity in educational opportunities for the most marginalized children around the world.

What does equity mean? It means giving every child—whether a girl or a boy, whether wealthy or poor, whether rural or urban—a chance to go to school and learn the basics.

Education is a force multiplier to advance progress toward ensuring that people can lead more economically secure, peaceful, and healthy lives. It is therefore the foundation for achieving all the sustainable development goals.

So much is at stake for people, communities, and nations. That's why I commend the Committee for holding hearings to shine a light on the Agenda for Sustainable Development. My hope is that these hearings will help build the political will to hasten change.

GPE welcomed Italy's leadership of the G7 Summit two years ago, particularly the development of the Taormina Progress Report: Investing in Education for Mutual Prosperity, Peace and Development.

That report highlighted how G7 investments in education can drive progress across a range of priorities like global development and security. It set the stage for the G7's stepped-up engagement on education, including through its Gender Equality Advisory Council on which I now serve.

The challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa are especially vast. Many places on the continent are facing a potent mix of conditions that make it nearly impossible to deliver a quality

education to every child. In Burkina Faso, for example, 9 of every 10 children never make it past primary school. Coping with instability and violence, few governments have the resources to hire and train enough teachers, build enough schools, and acquire enough books and other materials to adequately teach growing populations of children. In turn, this lack of education is one of the reasons why parents migrate searching for a better life for their children. If we want to address migration effectively, we need to address its root causes, one of which is the lack of education.

Against this backdrop, we are grateful for Italy's leadership in the Sahel Alliance, an important cooperation platform to do more and better in the Sahel, including in education to ensure young people have the skills to take advantage of economic opportunities as they develop.

But we also need to ensure that refugee children can continue their education in their host countries. For most refugee children missed years of education will be lost forever – almost impossible to recover.

Take Chad, already one of the poorest countries in the world, and host to 400,000 refugees. Many of them have escaped violence, famine and abject poverty in their neighboring countries. In the remote Lake Chad region, where most of these refugees are concentrated nearly 2 of every 3 Chadian children are out of school. With GPE's support, Chad is not only addressing the humanitarian needs of the refugees, but also creating a stronger and more enduring education system for refugee and local children alike.

Recently, GPE and IGAD, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa have agreed to explore ways to work together to improve access to education for refugees, and children who are displaced within their own countries, and those returning home after conflict.

In Burkina Faso, the UN reports that about 100,000 people have fled the country and 330,000 more have been uprooted from their homes because of the violence. And that violence has had a direct impact on the country's education system. Dozens of teachers have been attacked, and some killed. More than 1,800 schools have closed, leaving hundreds of thousands of children without any options for getting an education.

I saw the impact first-hand when I traveled to the Sahel region this spring and met with school-age children and their families.

One girl in Burkina Faso — I'll call her Rose — told me, "My school got closed after terrorist attacks in January. At least 47 people were killed. . . . My heartfelt wish right now is to resume school."

Rose is far from alone. Surging international migration, often triggered by conflict and economic deprivation, is keeping millions of Roses out of school. While we've made great progress in getting more children into school — we've seen a 40 percent increase since the new millennium — an alarming 263 million children still don't attend school.

Conflict is not the only cause. Schools may have no running water or sanitation. Children may have to trek many miles to get to the schoolhouse door. Girls may face gender-based violence on the way to school or while there. They may be forced into child marriage or have too many chores at home. It is the most marginalized children — those who live in remote areas or

who are very poor, female, disabled, or from religious or ethnic minorities — that are most often shut out of school.

Getting every child into primary school and giving him or her a quality education is only the first step. Secondary-school completion rates are very low. If we don't speed the pace of change, it will take more than 90 years before all children in sub-Saharan Africa are completing lower-secondary school. And it will be girls who get there last, with the poorest girls following behind the richest boys by 70 years.

Without a surge in education investments, over half — 825 million — of the 1.6 billion young people who will be alive in 2030 won't have the skills to work and thrive. In order to contribute to the 21st century economy, people need to be educated.

And without more education investments that are distributed equitably, instability and radicalization will continue to threaten the world. It is not only extremism, poverty, or the lack of education overall but also the highly unequal way that education is delivered to communities that causes conflict.

Investing equitably in education — making sure that every child, even the most marginalized, has the opportunity to learn and thrive — can reduce conflict in fragile and conflict-riven countries.

Research shows that each year of education lowers the risk of conflict by about 20 percent. An increase in secondary school enrollment reduces the probability of civil war significantly.

And a quality education gives a child living in fragile and war-torn regions a sense of normalcy and the prospect of a better future. That is why equity and quality are bedrocks of GPE's mission.

They are front and center in GPE's work with Ethiopia, one of our largest and closest partners.

When Ethiopia became a GPE partner in 2004, less than half its children attended primary school. And those who did often were not taught by skilled teachers. Since then, GPE has provided \$368 million dollars in grants to Ethiopia to improve teaching and learning in the country's 40,000 schools and strengthen Ethiopia's education system. Currently, we help the government to integrate ICT into teaching and learning.

The government has stepped up by making primary education a priority. Today, more than 90 percent of Ethiopian children attend primary school. All students enjoy a new curriculum. There are 200,000 more trained teachers. Two hundred million more textbooks. For the first time, every student gets a textbook. All these interventions work together to make Ethiopia's education system stronger.

Now Ethiopia's children are on a path to a brighter future. That is what happens when you invest equitably in quality education.

That is especially true for girls. Girls need to be educated, healthy, and safe. GPE has a laser focus on girls because girls' education will change the course of history.

Invest in a girl and you invest in her nation. Consider that women who attended primary school earn as much as 19 percent more than those with no education. If they attended secondary school? Almost twice as much.

GPE's emphasis on girls pays dividends. Nearly half of GPE partner countries have improved equity for girls and for rural and poor children. Two of every three GPE partner countries have as many girls as boys completing primary school.

An educated girl means she can imagine a better life — and get it.

Investing in girls' education is not a panacea for all the ills of the world, but doing so does create a virtuous cycle. Apart from being more likely to marry later and have fewer children, an educated girl who becomes a mother is more likely to vaccinate her children, to have them sleep under mosquito nets to prevent malaria and to make sure they go to school.

On the other side, the economic costs of failing to educate girls are massive. According to a recent GPE-World Bank report, educational opportunities for girls to complete 12 years of education cost countries between \$15 trillion and \$30 trillion dollars in lost lifetime productivity and earnings. We ignore these costs at our own peril.

In Afghanistan, the number of children — especially girls — in school was extremely low under the Taliban. One major obstacle for girls was the lack of female teachers and schools in rural areas. Through our support of Afghanistan's education plan, we are ensuring that female teachers are recruited, trained, and deployed to schools in some of the poorest districts. The result? The percentage of girls in primary school nearly doubled in 15 years.

The Global Partnership for Education was created in 2002 to partner with governments to give *all* children, especially the most vulnerable, a quality education to change the world one community at a time.

GPE is the only global partnership and fund dedicated exclusively to improving education in the lowest-income countries, including those that are fragile or driven by conflict— More than half of GPE's grants support the most vulnerable children there. More than half of our country partners are in Africa. Our business model ensures a continuum between providing emergency support during a crisis and building stronger, more resilient education systems to transform how children learn.

We are a country-led partnership — never top-down. We scale up financing, bring together key stakeholders, and deliver results. Since we opened our doors, we have invested \$4.9 billion in partner countries, helped to put 77 million more children in school, and trained millions of teachers.

“Partnership” isn't just a nice word that we like to use at GPE. It animates everything we do.

And it's what makes GPE so special. We don't prescribe. We don't dictate. We listen. Countries tell us what they need and we support them.

When we partner with a country, we bring together all the stakeholders — governments, donors, NGOs, teachers, international organizations, and the private sector — to help ministries of education develop quality education plans, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for

children – including the poorest, those in remote areas, those with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. Then we rally support for the plan and provide crucial funding to implement it.

Domestic funding accounts for the majority of education spending in developing countries. GPE encourages strong, ongoing education investments by partner countries to build their own capacity to improve education over the long-term. That is why GPE works closely with governments to ensure that they devote at least 20 percent of their domestic budgets to education. Four of every five GPE countries have an education budget at or above that threshold or are on track to get there. But the educational needs are so great, and partner countries can't go it alone.

I'm pleased to say that Italy has been an essential donor partner from our earliest days. Your support is vital. You are helping to provide a lifeline to some of the world's poorest children. So far you've contributed more than 50 million dollars to our fund. And last year at the GPE Financing Conference, you announced a pledge of 12 million euros over three years. In making the pledge, the Italian representative noted that 4 million euros a year was a guaranteed floor and that he hoped that Italy could increase this level of support on a yearly basis. Of course, we share that hope. As your economy and aid budget grow, my wish is that you will join other G7 partners that have significantly scaled up support to GPE.

Of course, funding is only part of the solution. Our relationship with Italy and other donor countries is rooted in a partnership that harnesses the talents of many.

In February, I met with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Emanuela Del Re. We talked about ways for GPE and Italy to work together in places such as the Horn of Africa.

Italy has also been a valued contributor to GPE's Board and its committees. And the GPE Secretariat looks forward to welcoming a member of your esteemed Junior Professional Officers Program this fall. It will be the first time we have hosted a junior professional from a donor partner.

We appreciate Italy's support for education and hope to see our partnership with you — as a donor and a thought leader — flourish. If we are to have any hope of reaching the Sustainable Development Goal on education in just over 10 years—let alone in our lifetimes—we need Italy's leadership to help shake up the status quo to advance progress.

Let us show the world what can happen when political will, financial commitment, and concrete action lift up every child to achieve his or her potential.

Thank you.

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