

Report on the launch of 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report: *The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education*

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The conference held on March 1st 2011, at Columbia University was devoted to the launch of UNESCO's new 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, called *The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education*. This groundbreaking report documents the scale of this hidden crisis, identifies its root causes and offers solid proposals for change.

Several distinguished personalities presented the report and reflected on some of the most crucial issues that it covers. The presenters included: Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO; Kevin Watkins, Director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report; Mary Robinson, President of the Mary Robinson Foundation, a former President of Ireland; Michaëlle Jean, UNESCO Special Envoy for Haiti; Jeffrey Sachs, Director of The Earth Institute, Columbia University; and Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, a former president of Chile.

The opening speech given by Ms. Bokova provided the audience with a good sense of the report's main agenda: children's inability to access education in armed conflict zones and the non-stoppable conduct of the gravest human rights violations against children, which continues happening in many parts of the world today.

Ms. Bokova highlighted some statistical data from the report, stating that out of the total number of primary school age children in the world who are not enrolled in school, 42% – 28 million – live in poor countries affected by conflict. Armed conflict has exposed millions of children to widespread physical abuse, sexual violence, targeted attacks on schools and other horrors.

In her speech, Mrs. Bokova emphasized the vital significance of education today and called for more targeted and tougher action against children's human rights violations, an overhaul of global aid priorities and more attention to the advancement of education as a key means capable of strengthening global peace and sustainability.

All of the following speakers discussed numerous relevant subjects, issues and concerns that the report touches upon, including:

- the human rights violations against children in armed zones;
- the fact that education today accounts to only 2% of all humanitarian aid,
- the idea that governments spend billions of dollars on military, while forgetting to put proper funding into advancement of education around the world, etc.

Many presenters talked about the devastating consequences of sexual violence, which has had a degrading impact on education. The report clearly underscored that sexual abuse impairs

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victims' learning potential, creates a climate of fear that keeps girls at home and leads to family breakdown that deprives children of a nurturing environment. All of the delegates of the panel prioritized education as the most essential and important right that all children should be entitled to.

Mr. Watkins, for example, in his speech highlighted the incomparable value of education, stating that "education expands horizons and transforms the future of countries." He noted that countries, which fail to provide proper education to their people and children, never succeed economically.

In her presentation, Ms. Mary Robinson underscored the importance of promoting gender equality as a means to advance education, and encouraged the Security Council to take very seriously the recommendations proposed by the EFA Global Monitoring Report and try to implement them as soon as possible.

Ms. Michelle Jean also affirmed that education is a catalyst for world peace, security, tolerance and harmony. In more detail, she spoke about the current educational crisis in Haiti, as over 5,000 schools had been destroyed during the last year's earthquake there. She passionately emphasized that education in Haiti is the biggest aspiration for many, which is seen as the prior key to freedom and poverty reduction. Ms. Jean encouraged IOs, NGOs, and other humanitarian agencies to take immediate action in helping children trapped in armed conflicts around the world to get back to schools.

Mr. Jeffrey Sachs expressed a very strong and critical stand towards America's blind desire to spend billions of dollars on useless financing of American soldiers in Iraq, while millions of children around the world are prevented from having the most basic human right – education. Because of that, America today does not really have much to do with a financial crisis, it is drained in an absolute moral crisis. Thus, American people have to restore their values and make new priorities in the appropriate provisions and distributions of financial aid in order to be able to lead again.

Finally, the concluding speech of Ms. Michelle Bachelet touched upon the role of MDGs and obstacles the world faces in achieving those, particularly in regards to education for children. She also spoke about the role of the UN bodies in tackling many problems related to human rights of children and education. Ms. Bachelet called for the provision of special schooling for children caught up in armed conflict. She affirmed that education must prevail for all.

The report overall encourages the international community to get much more serious about stopping the egregious violations of human rights at the heart of education crisis in conflict-affected countries and take appropriate actions; fix the humanitarian aid system; unlock the full potential of education for it to be the constant force for peace; and become far more effective at exploiting windows of opportunity for creating a world in which every child and every parent can live in freedom from fear.