

# Economic and Social Council

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## **Commission for Social Development**

### **Forty-third session**

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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda

### **Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority theme: review of further implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly;**

### **Statement submitted by:**

**Congregations of Saint Joseph a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and, Christian Children's Fund, Mercy International Association and School Sisters of Notre Dame, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.**

### **Statement support by:**

**Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, International Presentation Association Sisters of the Presentation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and VIVAT International non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.**

### **Education is the Key to Social Development**

Universal access to equitable, quality education is a potent tool for achieving the stated objectives of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme for Action: the conquest of poverty; the attainment of full employment; and the fostering of stable, safe and just societies (A/CONF.166/9). Education creates the mental and physical health, economic, political and social benefits for learners, their families and their communities indispensable to the achievement and maintenance of sustainable social development.

### **Much has been achieved . . .**

The international community has consistently supported the right to equitable, quality education for all, first identified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (GA/RES/44/25). The World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand 1990) and the Dakar Framework for Action (Dakar, Senegal, 2000) placed education high on the international development agenda. The promise of quality education for all was repeated in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action (A/CONF.166/9) and specified in the goals and targets of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (A/56/326).

During the 1990s enrollment in primary education increased in every region of the world. Today in many regions more than 90% of primary school-aged children are enrolled.<sup>1</sup> Fifty-two of 128 countries for which data are available have or are likely to achieve gender parity in both primary and secondary education by 2005. Twenty-two more countries are likely to achieve gender parity by 2015.<sup>2</sup>

The United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development--2005-2014 (GA/RES/57/254) recognizes the critical importance of education as a means to achieving sustainable development. The resolution reminds us that the work of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro,

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations Development Programme, *Millennium Development Goals: A Compact Among Nations Human Development Report 2000*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 92.

<sup>2</sup>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Summary Report Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2003), 8-9.

Brazil and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa must move forward in a cohesive and consistent manner on the local, national, regional and international levels if we are to achieve sustainability. Placing education at the core of the sustainable development agenda clearly demonstrates the concern and commitment of the international community to the economic, ecological and equity crises we face and reconfirms its conviction to bring resolution to these crises.

**Much remains to be accomplished . . .**

While the international community continues to acknowledge the important role of education in addressing the myriad global challenges of the third millennium, there is still no cohesive approach to implementing educational goals. Simply mentioning education in the outcome documents of global conferences, summits and UN meetings does not suffice as an effective implementation tool. The gap between the promises of various outcome documents and their actual implementation continues to widen.

An estimated 121 million primary-school-age children are out of school world-wide.<sup>3</sup> Just over half of the children who start primary school complete it--in Sub-Saharan Africa just one in three persists to grade 5.<sup>4</sup> Most of the 121 million out-of-school children are girls.<sup>5</sup> Almost 60% of 128 countries are likely to miss reaching gender parity at primary and secondary levels by 2005--the first test of the global commitment to the Millennium Development Goals.

Finally, it is clear that access to education is not sufficient. Quality education is critical to overcoming poverty, essential to closing the gender gap and crucial to the establishment of just and sustainable societies. Educational policy which focuses exclusively on access and ignores the social, political, environmental and economic reality of children; teacher training and competence; culturally sensitive curricula; and adequate learning resources will fail to move children and their families out of poverty and toward the achievement of real social development.

**We, therefore, recommend that the review of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme for Action give ample consideration to the following:**

1. Meeting global education goals requires the development of coherence between economic and social policy at the local, national and international levels. Local and national governments must end the direct and indirect costs of basic education to families, if they hope to increase equitable access to education for all. At the same time, the international community must reduce the onerous burden of debt on the world's heavily indebted countries; develop mechanism to ensure fair trade and market access; and increase official development assistance in order to mobilize the resources necessary to achieve equitable, quality education for all.
2. Ending discrimination against girls in education is crucial to social development. Girls' education is both a core human right and a core human development issue. "Educated women are key to breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty."<sup>6</sup> However, despite the scientific evidence documenting the efficacy of girls' education, it is rarely discussed in policy circles as a way to ensure human development and social progress.<sup>7</sup> Education planning, especially education for girls, should be integrated into poverty reduction plans and development policy thus helping to ensure that human rights principles inform economic development programs. Ending gender disparity in primary and secondary education will require the development of a national and international ethos which upholds girls' right to education and secures a strong political commitment to gender equity.
3. Education curricula must be global in scope and informed by the goals of the United Nations Decades for Human Rights Education, 1995-2004 (A/RES/49/184) and of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014 (A/RES/57/254), at the same time addressing the knowledge, skills and values necessary to achieve sustainable development at the local level. It must be delivered by teachers who are committed to human rights, cultural and gender equity and to teaching tolerance and respect for differences.

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *State of the World's Children 2004*, (New York: UNICEF, 2003), 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Human Development Report 2003*, 92.

<sup>5</sup> *State of the World's Children 2004*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Accelerating Progress in Girls' Education* (NY: UNICEF, November 2003), 5.

<sup>7</sup> *2004 State of the World's Children Report*, 9.

4. In many parts of the world non-governmental organizations have a longer history than the state of providing education, particularly for those most in need. Their experience, expertise and participation at the policy-making level are critical to the achievement of equitable, quality education for all.