

Global Education & Skills Forum, Dubai, Saturday 16 March

ADG/ED Welcoming statement

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Global Education and Skills Forum, which UNESCO is co-organizing together with the Government of the United Arab Emirates, VARKEY GEMS FOUNDATION and the Commonwealth Business Council.

This Forum is being organized as a contribution to the United Nations Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative, which was launched in September last year in New York. This important Initiative aims to strengthen international commitment to education by emphasizing three main areas of action: putting every child in school, improving the quality of learning, and fostering global citizenship. The Global Education First Initiative complements the Education for All movement by bringing its advocacy messages from the United Nations Secretary-General to the world's leaders, and I am very pleased that this Forum is one of the first major events being organized under its umbrella.

Here with us today, we have participants from different sectors of the labour market: from government, from the private sector, from civil society. Yet all of us share a common goal: to improve education and training in our communities.

Until now, we have too often worked separately: each of us bringing to bear our unique competencies. There is no denying that significant progress has

been made in education worldwide. But I am sure that by pooling together our collective knowledge and resources, we can multiply our results.

This is why we have gathered you here in Dubai, so that we can figure out how we can mobilize all stakeholders around a collective 'big push' to accelerate progress towards the Education for All goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Less than three years remain until 2015, the deadline for achieving EFA and the Millennium Development Goals.

These goals are not just nice ideas, they are basic principles for the effective functioning of society, for the empowerment of women and men, girls and boys across the world.

UNESCO's position is clear: education is a human right and a public good that must be made available to all. The State plays an essential role as defender of this principle, setting standards and norms that guarantee quality and equality of opportunity.

However, in delivering education, the State should not be alone: it does so together with families, communities, civil society organization, the private sector and others.

We need to do a better job of harnessing all of these stakeholders, to improve the delivery and financing of education.

This comes with some specific challenges.

First, markets in educational services are likely to grow as parents choose to spend more money on their children's education, and as both employers and those in the labour market recognize the benefits of lifelong learning. We must ensure that this rise in spending does not widen inequalities. Educational systems must continue to cater to a wide range of goals, including the fostering of global citizens who respect human rights, promote sustainable development and are actively engaged in public affairs. This means that we must assess education quality in terms that go beyond measuring cognitive development alone.

Second, dynamics between partners today look very different than they did ten or twenty years ago. The twenty-first century world is characterized by the emergence of new partners, new cooperation modalities and new forms of engagement. The Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Korea, on 29 November to 1 December 2011, agreed to establish a Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation that recognizes the essential role of emerging economies, civil society and the private sector in the aid landscape. This is very relevant for work in the education sector.

UNESCO's Director-General, Ms Irina Bokova, has advocated firmly for increasing the private sector's contribution to education efforts. After all, the private sector cannot thrive without a good quality education system. This is why UNESCO has entered into a number of innovative partnerships in education with entities such as Procter & Gamble, the Packard Foundation and the Varkey GEMS Foundation.

Through the research and innovation they sponsor, the private sector can often bring a new dimension to education programmes. UNESCO recently organized the Second Mobile Learning Week at our Headquarters in Paris, during which participants discussed the contribution of mobile technologies to improving literacy rates and educational outcomes. Our organization is working closely with companies such as Nokia, Intel and Microsoft to put these ideas into action.

We cannot overestimate the importance of civil society in delivering quality education. Civil society organizations that are active in education range from local groups working on a single issue, such as the involvement of parents in schooling, to large international bodies that run networks of schools and training institutions. UNESCO's Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA is made up of almost 300 national, regional and international member organizations, all of which respond to different community needs. In this regard, I would like to make a special mention of our close partner Education International, with whom UNESCO shares a strong commitment to the advancement of quality teaching.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I hand over to I would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners in organizing this event: the UAE Government and the Commonwealth Business Council. Without their dedication, knowledge and funding, it would not have been possible to organize this event.

Over the next two days, we will have the opportunity to hear a rich and varied debate, bringing in voices from different parts of the education spectrum. Our common aim to spark more constructive partnerships to ensure equitable access to quality learning opportunities for all.

I am sure you will agree with me that no investment has higher returns over the long-term than education. Our common interest is to ensure that Education for All becomes a reality.

Thank you.