

Speech of the Minister of Education, Culture and Higher Education of the Somali Federal Government, H.E. Madame Khadar Bashir-Ali at the UNESCO General Conference – Paris 2015

Mr. President of the General Conference, Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board, Honorable Ministers, Ambassadors, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning and Salama Aleikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatu. We are honored to be here with you today.

Mr. President I bring greetings from the Somali President Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, our Prime Minister Mr. Omar Abdirashid Ali and the Somali people.

Mr. President, let me give you a quick glimpse of the realities of Somalia, (my country). Mr. President, Somalia is a post-conflict fragile nation recovering from 22 years of conflict. We have now moved from a Transitional form of Government to a Federal System of Government.

In Somalia, Mr. President, we are committed to bring change to our nation and to our people. But we all know that change does not come easily. There is tension and resistance to new ideas and systems. In fact, just a few months ago, we have instituted centralized exams in South Central Somalia and as a result, our Ministry was bombed. However, despite all the challenges, we have hope. Coming from the abyss of violence, we cannot have anything but hope.

Mr President, Somalia in a way is a success story. We are a country with great potential and great possibilities.

In the Education sector, Mr. President, our government led by our President and prime Minister, we are committed to provide access to quality education for all Somali children in an equitable manner.

Currently, Mr. President, in some part of Somalia, education is a privilege and not a right. Only children whose parents can afford to pay school fees go to school while a large segment of our children do not attend school. In fact, Mr. President, according to a recent population estimation, conducted by our Ministry of Planning, 70% of our population is under the age of 30; 46% of these are between the ages of 1-14; and 70% of these children are out of schools. Given these figures Mr. President, reform is an urgent mandate for us. We want to provide:

- Good quality accessible basic education
- Economic livelihood and opportunities for our youth through professional Technical Vocational Education (TVET)
- Provide solution and economic opportunities to prevent mass migration to the North by our youth who are dying in the seas.
- Provide a counter narrative to respond to violent extremism and radicalization. Our youth, Mr. President are being radicalized and recruited to join destabilizing activities. We must find a solution.
- Mr. President, girls' education is a personal and professional priority of mine. As a woman, I am committed to increase the numbers of girls in schools.
- As a government, we are also committed to a greater degree of transparency and accountability.

In order to achieve these objectives, we must have:

- A Unified curriculum that will help produce citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens of our country
- Qualified teacher workforce
- Safe learning spaces and school environments
- Effective Teaching and Learning Materials that are socially and culturally appropriate
- We need to restructure our cultural heritage and identity through our language and customs. You see, Mr. President, one of the consequences of war, is the loss of our rich cultural heritage
- We need support to produce good reliable data and statistics through evidence based research and innovation

Mr. President, we all know and understand that Peace and Stability lead to Social and Economic development and these are priorities for our country. We are committed to Peace and Stability despite all the challenges.

However, Mr. President, we cannot embark on this journey without your help. We are grateful for UNESCO and other UN and donor agencies for the good work you are doing to support our people.

Education is an important factor, to eradicate poverty and radicalization. We must collectively respond to these needs.

Mr. President, an African proverb says a journey of 1000 steps begins with the first one. We are committed to take that first step with you.

Thank you very much.