



### 3<sup>rd</sup> Standing Committee on Dialogue between Civilizations and Human Rights

Special Task Force on Gender Issues and Equality

#### “Education”

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1. The finest asset of a country is not its natural resources or its geographical location or the power of its companies. It is its citizens, the people who make it and contribute to its prosperity every single day

2. These people should be the main concern of the Government. They create wealth, attract investment and fight for a fairer society. It is for them, above all else, that the State should function: keeping in mind their social and economic well-being, their basic rights and, of course, their education.

3. Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that education is a basic human right and emphasises that primary education should be free and compulsory. Technical and professional education should be widespread and access to higher education should be open to everyone, completely equally.

4. But the fundamental principles of education should be the expansion of human personality, the strengthening of Human Rights and basic freedoms, and to increase understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations, races and religions.<sup>1</sup>

5. Principle VII of the *Declaration of Children's Rights* stipulates the right of free, compulsory education in at least the first stages of their schooling, to ensure that the child's subsequent development will produce a useful member of society.<sup>2</sup>

Both Declarations stress that the parents are responsible for choosing their children's education.

6. The *United Nations* initiatives involving programmes linked to education/literacy have been launched in recent years, led by *UNESCO*:

<sup>1</sup><http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Language.aspx?LangID=por>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.cirp.org/library/ethics/UN-declaration/>

- The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012)
- The United Nations Decade for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)
- The United Nations Global Initiative on Education and HIV & AIDS.

These are three fundamental areas that are interconnected for shared goals. The success or failure of one impacts on one or both the others.

7. One of the *Millennium Development Goals* concerns the attainment of universal primary education for all children by 2015, i.e. to enable all young people to complete the primary studies cycle. This goal includes people in the 15 to 24 age group who have either not attended or not finished their primary education<sup>3</sup>

8. According to the relevant figures, in 1998 around 84% of the world's population had attended primary school. In 2008 the figure was 90%. In the developed countries, 97% of the population had undergone primary education in 1998, and 96% in 2008. North Africa recorded the best improvement: from 86% to 94%.<sup>4</sup>

9. The success of this goal will directly affect the other Millennium Development Goals, in particular the eradication of poverty and hunger, gender equality, maternal health, and the fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

### **I. Education and Poverty Eradication**

10. Improving these indicators is vital to better social development since access to education, primary and beyond, generates wider knowledge in more areas. More and better education produces economic development and reduces inequality among people.

11. It is well known that the more developed countries have higher literacy and education levels and that there is less internal social inequality. This is due, above all, to investment in the education and training of their people, who are then equipped with the means to create more knowledge, and wealth, for them and also for the society to which they belong.

12. A higher education index enables better understanding of our surroundings. It relaxes social, ethical and religious tensions and combats ignorance and prejudice. It reduces social conflict, works as a measure to cultivate security and trust and, at the end of the day, it is an element in conflict prevention.

13. Considering that the gains, the common advantages, of education - primary and beyond - influence society as a whole, we must regard it as an essential factor of development. A general expansion of education and literacy in a given region/country can help lead to significant social change: examples are the reduction of child mortality and greater equality between the sexes.

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.mdgmonitor.org/goal2.cfm>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202010%20En%20r15%20-low%20res%2020100615%20-.pdf>

14. For this to happen, governments must invest in the education sector, in the form of appropriate infrastructure and human resources, materials and funds. Any investment in this area will have an almost guaranteed return, since it will yield public benefits for society as a whole.

15. As Adam Smith said: “for a very small expense the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education.”<sup>5</sup>

16. As far as the Mediterranean basin is concerned, especially in the Member States of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, this matter extends beyond primary education. The large majority of countries already has relatively high literacy rates (over 90%). The challenge before us involves consolidating already-existing indices, increasing the level of compulsory schooling, encouraging vocational training, tackling school drop-out rates and boosting university and post-university education, and research and development.

17. We must also raise the profile of teachers, through their working conditions, a range of incentives and their training. The teaching system must also be suited to local needs and circumstances. But school curricula must bear in mind the universal values in terms of human rights, tolerance and discrimination.

18. In the context of PAM, and considering the example that have been implemented in Europe, it will be important to expand the *Erasmus Programme* - which promotes the exchange of university students between the various European countries - in the southern Mediterranean. This programme would offer a true cultural exchange in the field of education, since the students on both sides could finish one year of their undergraduate degree in a university of another country, with all the ensuing benefits.

19. It would also be useful to start a more structured programme of cooperation between universities and research institutes, a twinning, which would improve abilities and knowledge and enable broader regional cooperation.

20. At this point we should draw attention to the Fez Programme, which was set up by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean in 2008. The programme builds on a series of actions in the field of education aimed at fostering cooperation and understanding amongst member states of PAM and the Mediterranean region as a whole. It refers to the promotion of higher education, the organization of meetings between the PAM MPs and students, and the setting up of a “Summer School”. This document, which serves as a guideline, has to be revised and further consolidated. (See Annex 1)

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<sup>5</sup> SMITH, Adam, *Wealth of Nations* (1976 Campbell and Skinner), volume I, book 2, p. 27.

## II. Education and Gender

21. One of the biggest benefits of a more inclusive and rounded education system is linked to gender equality. In some countries - some of which are regarded as 'developed' - women still play a minor role in nearly all areas of society.

22. The integration of young women as full equals of young men into the education system, from the earliest years of schooling will create clear benefits for the former, and for the whole of society.

23. In the first place, these benefits are expressed as increased information in areas such as mother and child health, family planning and the eradication of endemic poverty. These young women acquire new abilities and develop others that enable them to make a more substantive contribution to their society.

24. This *empowerment* comes from a higher rate of literacy; it will enable women to aspire, on an equal footing with men, to any profession, to attend any higher education course they want or to take top jobs in the public or private sector.

25. According to the 2011 UNESCO report 'Everyone has the right to Education'<sup>6</sup> over 1.5 million children and young people are attending various levels of education (from pre-primary to university); access to education is getting easier; more and more young people are getting to university in developing countries; and access to education and literacy is transforming the lives of people who did not have the chance to go to school or finish a particular level of education when they were younger.

26. But it is still not entirely plain sailing: poverty stops nearly 67 million children from going to primary school, and 53% of these children are girls. The number of registrations has also been declining and dropping-out is a threat to children who live in more precarious societies, in particular those affected by armed conflict. It is reckoned that in poor countries affected by conflict, 28 million children of primary school age are not at school, a figure which is 42% of the world total.

27. Gender issues still prevent progress in various areas of education: about 17% of the world's adult population (793 million people, around one third of whom are women) are regarded as illiterate.

28. In this context we must call attention to the words of UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova: "secondary education offers countless benefits to young people: higher incomes, better agricultural productivity, lower child and maternal mortality, lower fertility, delayed marriage and better HIV-AIDS protection."<sup>7</sup>

29. Two out of three countries in the world are facing problems of disparity of access to primary and secondary education. About half these countries will fail to meet the goal of having equality in education by 2015.

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<sup>6</sup><http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002127/212715e.pdf>

<sup>7</sup><http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001914/191457e.pdf>

30. UNESCO developed a range of tools that aim to incorporate gender equality measures in government policies and programmes, and to improve the awareness and training of teachers in this field.

31. With respect to HIV-AIDS, the Organisation has made considerable investment in the area of reproductive health to prevent this disorder, with training and information programmes that target young people of both sexes.

32. Education to combat discrimination and promote human rights has also taken all forms of gender-based violence into account, including domestic violence.

### **III. Education and Inequality**

33. Millions of children still have to travel dozens of kilometres to get to school, where they find overcrowded classrooms and poorly qualified teachers. It is calculated that about two million teachers (half in Sub-Saharan Africa alone) will have to be recruited by 2015 to achieve the goal of universal primary education for all.

34. In this context, the six UNESCO goals in the Education for All programme (EFA) should be realised<sup>8</sup>:

1. Expanding child care and education
2. Providing free compulsory primary education for all
3. Promoting learning and other skills for young people and adults
4. Improving adult literacy
5. Achieving gender equality
6. Improving the quality of education.

35. These goals are the basis for any good state education programme. They provide the foundations of the system, they help the underprivileged, they consider gender equality and they stimulate quality.

36. It should be noted that two studies on education have recently been published under the EFA Programme:

- In 2010 on the effect that the world financial crisis has on millions of children who live in the world's poorest countries and who are at risk of being deprived of education. The combined effect of the slowdown in economic growth, increased poverty and the additional pressure on budgets could well destroy the advances made in the last 10 years.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2011 on the consequences of armed conflicts on education. Over 40% of the children who are not at school live in conflict zones. These countries have some of the largest gender inequalities and the lowest levels of literacy in the world. First, we must fight the constant violations of human rights in conflict-ridden

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/>

<sup>9</sup><http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2010-marginalization/>

countries. Second, the humanitarian aid system must be altered, since only 2% of that aid goes to the education sector.<sup>10</sup>

37. The problems of inequality in education are not only found in gender issues, but in ethnic, religious and social minority groups, too. The fight for a more equal and fairer education also involves these issues. We cannot allow the discrimination of minorities. Their rights are exactly the same as those of the majority, whatever it is.

In this context, special attention should be given to the need of people with disabilities, especially disabled women and girls. It is imperative to have inclusive education for young disabled people, as they tend to have fewer opportunities in accessing education and integrating productive processes.

Furthermore, young people coming from migrant families and ethnic minority background are more likely to have limited access to education and vocational training. Therefore, to address this issue, financing and support mechanisms should be improved. Moreover, young disabled people, their parents and representative groups, should be involved at all levels of educational policy-making both, at the local and national level.

38. So that these inequalities are really combated, each and every State must make very effort, but so must the respective civil societies (which cannot remain detached from this problem) and the international community. In relation to the last, the donor countries must pay more heed to the matter of education. International investment in this area will almost certainly yield more than any other help and contribute crucially to building up abilities and skills.

#### **IV. PAM-UNESCO Partnership**

39. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and UNESCO have long established a cooperation in the field of Education, Science and Technology. Most recently, it was agreed to establish a Task Force dedicated to the Mediterranean.

40. The first joint activity took place in November 2010, when PAM and UNESCO organized the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of Science, Technology and Innovation for the Mediterranean region, which was held at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France. The forum discussed the need for closer co-operation between policy-makers, scientists, parliamentarians, journalists, industry (public and private) and civil society at the Mediterranean regional level. It proposed the establishment of a regional Science Policy Forum with the objectives of exchanging experiences and information on, science, technology and innovation policy-making and in supporting the strengthening of the capacity of parliamentary science and related committees.

41. A further step was achieved on the occasion of the Conference “Beyond North-South for a sustainable development and a new Mediterranean Renaissance” held in Turin on 26-27 November 2011. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and UNESCO announced the setting up of a new Mediterranean Chair at the University of Turin, aimed at facilitating, through summer school projects, the training of public

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<sup>10</sup><http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2011-conflict/>

officials in order to promote better governance in the sustainable development of the region.

42. The focus on the Mediterranean region gained further momentum with the “VADEMECUM for sustainable development and a new Mediterranean Renaissance”, a PAM /UNESCO initiative to launch a roving school of governance through a series of training courses and summer schools for senior officials, in the southern shores of the Mediterranean, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and to assist in the democratic processes that are taking place in these countries.

43. The UNESCO Division of Science Policy and Capacity-Building contributed to the establishment of this partnership with the UNESCO Education Sector, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, and several Mediterranean universities, drawing on the UNESCO Chairs network for the sustainable development of the region.

44. Education continues to be considered a high priority, and with reference to its role in the process of economic and social development, PAM, within its Panel on External Trade and Investments in the Mediterranean, will organize a debate to discuss issues related to this strategic area, including professional training in the Mediterranean countries, aimed at improving the opportunities for commercial and cultural exchanges.



*The following measures comprise what will henceforth be known as the Fez Programme; a series of actions aimed at fostering mutual cooperation and understanding amongst the Member States of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and the Mediterranean region as a whole.*

- I. The encouragement of parliamentary visits to PAM countries to foster understanding and partnership;
- II. The setting up of a PAM “Youth Assembly” to be hosted on rotation by PAM national parliaments;
- III. The organization of a University Summer School for meetings and exchanges with PAM national parliamentarians, academics and important figures from civil society;
- IV. The creation of a “PAM Prize” or “Scholarship for Dialogue” to be awarded to academic research or theses on subjects relating to PAM initiatives;
- V. The promotion of educational activities for primary school children;
- VI. The celebration of the “Mediterranean Day” with the collaboration of all PAM national delegations, including visibility and awareness activities for the promotion of dialogue and understanding;
- VII. The establishment of teaching programs for teachers on cultural awareness and inter-religious dialogue with the aim of promoting the knowledge and the history of religions and not dogma in schools;
- VIII. The responsible involvement of the media by organizing encounters to develop awareness and sensitivity;
- IX. The organization of meetings of the Special Task Forces with students and religious representatives in the principal cities of the region.
- X. The launching of a regional competition on “Dialogue among Cultures” in the fields of literature, cinema, arts, sciences.