

4th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED2030) 12-14 July 2018

Karin Hulshof, UNICEF Regional Director East Asia Pacific

Date: Thursday, 12 July 2018

Time: 08:45 – 09:30

Location: Landmark Hotel Bangkok

- **Ms. Watanaporn Ra-Ngubtook**, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Thailand;
- **Mr. Yosuke Kobayashi**, Deputy Secretary General, Japanese National Commission for UNESCO;
- **Ms. Stefania Giannini**, Assistant Director General for Education, UNESCO and **Mr. Shigeru Aoyagi**, Director, UNESCO Bangkok;
- **Excellencies** from participating countries and organizations,

On behalf of my colleague, Jean Gough, Director of UNICEF South Asia Regional Office and myself, I would like to welcome you all to the 4th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED2030), co-organized by UNICEF and UNESCO.

When Malala Yousafzai received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 she challenged us.

She said: *“the world can no longer accept that basic education is enough. Leaders must seize this opportunity to guarantee a free, quality, primary and secondary education for every child. Some will say this is impractical, or too expensive, or too hard. Or maybe even impossible. But it is time the world thinks bigger.”*

The challenge launched by Malala was to think against the odds. This dream was formalized in SDG 4, and in particular in Targets 4.3 and 4.4, which aim to support adolescents and youth to have better lives through improved education and training

opportunities at technical secondary and higher education levels. That is why I would like to congratulate all of us today for choosing these SDG Targets as the focus of this year's meeting.

UNICEF embraces the focus on adolescents and youth. Their full development and potential features prominently in our Strategic Plan and regional priorities. With governments, the private sector and civil society partners world-wide, UNICEF is launching the Young People's Agenda to guarantee that by 2030, all adolescents and youth are learning in school, or in technical education programmes as active apprentices, or in productive and decent jobs.

We believe that this is the right way to forge ahead in our region. Over 60 per cent of the world's youth live in Asia-Pacific. This translates into more than 750 million young women and men aged 15 to 24 years (ESCAP 2012). Young people can drive our economies and societies to be more vibrant and productive. At the same time, their potential can only be realized if they benefit from quality education from early childhood to adolescence.

A key finding of the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity shows that by 2030, only one of two young people in middle-income countries, and only one in 10 people in low-income countries, will be on track to achieving basic secondary education. This will stunt economic growth with far-reaching social and political consequences.

The complexity of the present and future world means that children and adolescents must be equipped to navigate unexpected challenges. In this context achieving basic education is necessary, but far from sufficient. The dynamics around globalization, new technologies, accelerating migration, rapidly changing labour markets, and transnational environmental and political challenges will demand children and youth to have skills adaptable to the 21st century economy and societies.

This meeting is about accelerating positive trends and policies to build better education and skills development options for our adolescents and youth to face these challenges. In this context, I would like to briefly suggest three principles with the aim of improving the effectiveness of our joined efforts.

- **Firstly, put equity as the number one priority.** Let's improve education, skills and labour market opportunities, but especially for the most excluded. This is urgent since, accordingly to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics estimates around 128.7 million of children and adolescents are still out of school¹!
- **Secondly, let's invest smartly.** This can be interpreted in many ways, but you may agree that there is some global consensus around investing smartly: invest early, invest holistically, eliminate corruption, and invest to get results.
- I would like to emphasise one of these aspects: investing early to build cognitive capital. Quoting the preliminary analysis of the World Bank Development Report 2019: The Changing Nature of Work, *"The most direct way to provide fairness is to support early childhood development. Guaranteeing that every child has access to adequate nutrition, health, education, and protection in early years ensures a solid foundation for skill development in the future. As skills acquisition is cumulative, returns to early investments is the highest"*.
- **Lastly, let's continue building education systems that aim at the holistic development of children and youth.** Kailash Satyarthi in his Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech reminded us: *"the biggest crisis knocking on the doors of humanity today is intolerance. We have utterly failed in imparting an education to our children. An education that gives the meaning and objective of life and a secure future. An education that builds a sense of global citizenship among the young people"*.

¹ 128.7 million for primary to upper secondary (60.9 million or 47% are girls). UIS data, consulted in 2018. Includes Central Asia, South Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, and Oceania

- That is why I would like to remind all of us, that our effort to improve vocational and higher education opportunities should be strongly linked to the aims in Target 4.7 around global citizenship, sustainable development and peace education; and to Targets 4.1 and 4.2, on learning and ECD, to get the foundational skills right.

These principles are easy to highlight, but difficult implement. UNICEF in partnership with the JustJobs Network, ILO, UNESCO and the World Bank recently produced the report “From Education to Employability: Preparing South Asian Youth for the World of Work” which explores how secondary education and skills development can contribute better to the employability of young women and men. This builds on earlier work we have done with the UN Girls’ Education Initiative on the gender dimension of the school to work transition across East Asia and the Pacific.

In a few months, with ASEAN, the Singapore authorities and partners and other regional partners, UNICEF will co-organize a forum promoting *resilient adolescents and youth to lead 4th Industrial Revolution* in the region. The discussion will focus on youth entrepreneurship, 21st century skills and young people’s participation. These initiatives involve Governments, private sector, academic and youth and aim at informing new and innovative partnerships and solutions.

Dear guests, every year since 2015 UNICEF and UNESCO have worked together to organize this meeting and to work with you, to make SDG 4 a reality. We are doing our best, but we want to do better...time is going fast, and 2030 is just around the corner. As Ms. Giannini mentioned just now, our region will formally assess the progress of SDG4 targets at the 2019 High Level Political Forum. My hope is that we will have some good results, and an accurate diagnostic on how to accelerate results on education.

We are committed to working with all of you as critical and constructive partners, to achieve the SDGs vision and a prosperous society for all. Developing capacities of young people at the critical juncture in their lives, is essential to harnessing their

potential as economic and civic agents, and building more just and equitable societies. It is also crucial that this be a mission led by the young people themselves as they are an incredible source of energy and ideas in driving change.

Nelson Mandela, said: "Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that the child of a farmworker can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another." Investing in quality education is transforming the future.

I wish you all a productive, challenging and rewarding discussion in the coming days.
Thank you for listening.