



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
5 December 2017

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-sixth session

31 January–7 February 2018

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all

Statement submitted by Education Above All Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Realizing the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities as a Strategy to Eradicate Poverty

“The chance of education is a chance to escape poverty, to improve health and to enhance opportunities” states Her Highness, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Founder of the Education Above All Foundation (EAA). Our mission in EAA is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for vulnerable and marginalized people especially in the developing world, as an enabler of human development. By improving access to education and bringing marginalized children, youth, and adults into Education, our programmes contribute to increasing opportunities for higher level of educational attainment.

In the context of the discussion around “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all”, it is important to remember that one of the most vulnerable and marginalized group affected by poverty is persons with disabilities. Education Above All Foundation stresses on inclusive and equitable access to quality education for persons with disability as a strategy to lift this group out of poverty.

Access to Education: A barrier to Eradicating Poverty

Education Above All Foundation has a portfolio of programs which address various barriers to education. Educate a Child (EAC), Reach Out to Asia (ROTA) and Al-Fakhoora address the issue of access to education at different educational level. Educate a Child, for example, focus on providing primary education for those most vulnerable and marginalized in the world by removing barriers that limit or hinder access to education. Specifically for people living with disabilities, EAC has partnered with UNICEF, to establish a project in Sudan to improve access to education for out of school children.

Education Above All argue that facilities, cultures, policies, curriculum, teaching method, seating arrangements and form of interaction are some examples of barriers that may hinder the school life of any student, not only those with some kind of disability, to minimize such barriers, resources - physical, human, political, etc. — need to be mobilized in schools and communities.

Another programme of EAA Foundation, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC) advocate in defense of the right to education during insecurity and conflict. The core components of the right to education may be identified through the so-called ‘four As’ framework: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability. One aspect of physical accessibility is that the implementation of policies on access to education shall support the principle of equality and not discriminate against any group, including persons with disabilities.

Education Above All Foundation is committed to the protection of the right to education of persons with disabilities, by undertaking advocacy on their behalf. For example, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict have undertaken projects in Palestine with OHCHR from 2015 until 2017 that included advocacy on behalf of Atef. His access to education is hindered by the fact that he is obliged to use a wheel chair.

It remains a challenge to establish and enforce disability-based discrimination laws governing education. In 2013, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities referred widely to education when considering the reports submitted by its State parties. The Committee recommended that each State party to CRPD include explicit prohibition of disability-based discrimination in laws governing education and also provide specific training on disabilities for education staff.

The accessibility of schools for students with disabilities was also stressed in the draft General Comment on Accessibility which highlighted the plight of those living with disabilities in situations of armed conflict:

‘Living in the midst of conflict is physically and emotionally distressing, but all the more so for persons with disabilities who face the same if not greater barriers in times of armed conflict.’

The Way Forward: Recommendations and Conclusion

Persons with disabilities are particularly at risk and more vulnerable to human rights violations in situations of insecurity and armed conflict. Such situations are often the cause of disabilities, whether physical or mental. States have to take into consideration children’s special needs that might result from a physical or mental disability or from trauma caused by armed conflict. Education Above All Foundation expects that positive measures, in accordance with the principle of reasonable accommodation, are taken by member States to ensure that education, is also accessible to persons with disabilities and adjustments that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden must be taken if they are necessary and appropriate to ensure them equality of enjoyment or exercise of their human rights.

In order to ensure that persons with disabilities benefit from the same educational opportunities as others, Education Above All recalls the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) adopted on 13 December 2006 which provides specific protection and seeks to ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities are met in both insecurity and armed conflict. As of today, 175 Parties have ratified the Convention. This clearly demonstrates almost universal support of the principles and norms the treaty introduced. Last year, we commemorated the 10th anniversary of its adoption; on 3 May 2018, we’ll celebrate the 10th anniversary of its entry into force. We further recall Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which requires parties to ensure the safety and protection of persons with disabilities during both armed conflict and situations of insecurity:

‘States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.’

In order to ensure that persons with disabilities benefit from the same educational opportunities as others, States should have a clear policy on persons with disabilities within schools and a flexible curriculum which can be adapted for students with disabilities. This includes taking positive measures to reduce all structural disadvantages. If persons with disabilities are not able to attend the general school system, special education may be provided with a view to integrate the students with disabilities in the general system as soon as possible to achieve inclusive education, unless it is deemed best for the person with a disability to follow a special education program.