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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Impact of Foreign Debt on the Right to Education in Africa

Executive Summary

In the beginning, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association congratulates the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Mrs. Farida Shaheed, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of founding the mandate, and thanks her for the efforts made since assuming the position of Special Rapporteur on Education in August 2022.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, it is time to identify the main challenges that impede the work of the right to education, particularly in countries where the right to education is declining, including African countries.

In fact, there are currently about 244 million children and youth deprived of education all over the world as a result of social, economic and cultural factors, including more than 98 million children and youth in Africa, where the right to education in most of its countries declines remarkably due to several factors, including the exacerbation of external debt and the lack of financial materials allocated to education and its high costs(1). In this regard, the external debt that burdens most African countries constitutes a critical problem and a difficult and long-term future challenge, that hinders the right to education in most African countries burdened with these debts. In Egypt, for example, the rise in external debt posed a serious challenge threatening the progress that the Egyptian government is working to achieve concerning the right to education in Egypt, which has been affected remarkably with the increase in the burdens of Egypt's foreign debts, this was evident in the Egyptian government being forced to reduce government spending on education to provide the necessary financial resources to service debts, which negatively affected the realization of the right to education in Egypt, which requires a rapid global treatment of this difficult problem, where addressing the impact of external debt on education in all African countries, including Egypt, requires a global approach based on human rights that takes into account material disparities and the difficult economic crises that most African countries are going through, as well as concerted international efforts at the level of governments, international organizations and other stakeholders.

In light of the foregoing, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association presents in this intervention an overview and detailed observations about the impact of foreign debt on the right to education in African countries, focusing on Egypt as a case study. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association also makes appropriate recommendations to address this problem, which will be discussed in some detail as follows:

Impact of External Debt on the Right to Education in Africa (Egypt as a Case Study)

External debt, burdening most African countries, is a critical problem and a long-term future challenge that impedes the right to education in most African countries burdened with these debts. In Egypt, for example, external debt is a major challenge. According to the latest official statistics issued in this context, Egypt's external debt amounted to about \$155 billion, equivalent to 32.4% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP)(2). In fact, the rise in external debt in Egypt constituted a serious challenge threatening the progress that the Egyptian government is working to achieve in the field of the right to education, as the right to education in Egypt was affected remarkably with the increase in the burden of external debt to Egypt, this was evident in the Egyptian government's necessity to reduce spending government on education to provide the necessary financial resources to service the external debt, which negatively affected the realization of the right to education in Egypt. In this context, we tackle the impact of external debt on the right to education in Egypt as follows:

Reducing Spending on Education

The high levels of external debt in Egypt imposed great pressure on the state budget, as a large part of the government budget was allocated to servicing the external debt, which resulted in limited financial resources available to the education sector, and led to a lack of funding and financial allocations for education, which ultimately led to the lack of adequate educational infrastructure, including schools and classrooms, insufficient educational materials, and a shortage of qualified teachers. According to statistics issued by the World Bank in this regard, spending on education in Egypt reached 2.5% of GDP in 2020, which resulted in the low quality of public education in Egypt(3).

Insufficient Teaching Staff

External debts have greatly affected the financial resources allocated to the education sector. As a result of the scarcity of financial resources allocated to education, public schools are facing a severe shortage of teachers. According to official statistics issued in this regard, the shortage of teachers in Egypt is estimated at more than 320000 teachers, which negatively affected the quality of education given to students and overall learning outcomes(4).

Lack of Schools and Educational Infrastructure

The high foreign debt hindered Egypt's ability to invest in building, developing and maintaining the educational infrastructure. According to World Bank estimates, Egypt needs to build about 117,000 classrooms within 5 years to relieve pressure on public schools.

Tuition Fee Increase

Due to the lack of financial resources allocated to the education sector with the increasing burden of external debt to Egypt, many Egyptian universities have had to increase tuition fees to compensate for lost government funding, which would make it more difficult for low-income students to access higher education.

Impact on Higher Education

External debt has also affected higher education in Egypt, as Egyptian universities and colleges face challenges in funding research programs and attracting qualified faculty members, which hinders Egypt's ability to provide high-quality education and produce skilled graduates who can contribute to national development and innovation.

Recommendations on Measures to be Taken to Address the Impact of External Debt on the Right to Education in Africa

As previously mentioned, external debt has negatively affected the realization of the right to education in Africa. Therefore, it is necessary to search for the best possible means to address this thorny and complex problem. In fact, addressing the impact of foreign debt on the right to education in all African countries, including Egypt, requires a global approach based on human rights that takes into account material disparities and the difficult economic crises experienced by most African countries, as well as concerted international efforts at the level of governments and organizations. In light of the above, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association submits the following recommendations to the Human Rights Council, regarding the measures that can be taken to address the impact of external debt on the right to education in Africa:

- Debt cancellation: Institutions, creditor countries and other stakeholders should be encouraged to cancel the debts that burden African countries, which would lead to the

provision and liberalization of financial resources that can be allocated to education and other social sectors.

- Debt restructuring and relief: Creditor institutions and countries that refuse to give up their debt should be encouraged to ease and restructure debts for heavily indebted African countries. This could include renegotiating debt repayment terms, lowering interest rates, extending repayment periods, or cancellation of part of the debt, which would lead to the provision of the necessary financial resources for the education sector.
- International cooperation and support: Work should be done to encourage international cooperation and support to address the impact of external debt on education in Africa, and to call for a global commitment to give priority to education and debt sustainability, as well as to strengthen partnerships with international organizations, donor countries and development agencies to mobilize the necessary financial resources to improve the quality of education in Africa.
- Converting debts into educational investments: Institutions, creditor countries and other stakeholders should be encouraged to adopt initiatives aimed at converting the debts owed by African countries into investments in the education sector, which would contribute to improving the quality of education in African countries.
- Concessional financing for education: Concessional financing and grants targeting education should be encouraged in African countries specifically, including low-interest loans, technical assistance and teacher training.

(1) What you need to know about the right to education, UNESCO, 27 April 2023, link: <https://bit.ly/425VjaW>

(2) Egypt External Debt: % of GDP, CEIC, link: <https://bit.ly/430KTL4>

(3) Egypt Public Expenditure Review for Human Development Sectors, World Bank, SEPTEMBER 27, 2022, link: <https://bit.ly/3BQUKas>

(4) Ibid.