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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 China Soong Ching Ling Foundation, 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.

[27 May 2024]

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



The Development of Education and the Protection of Educational Equality Rights in China

Introduction: China Soong Ching Ling Foundation is a non-governmental organization focusing on the growth of young people and the welfare of women and children. Our members come from institutions and academic groups engaged in related research across China. We are deeply concerned about the development of education in China and the protection of educational equality rights. We believe that in recent years, China's education has developed rapidly, and educational equality rights have been well protected. Relevant data show that education at all levels in China has made significant progress and almost all children in China have received compulsory education, special education being safeguarded, secondary and vocational education forming a "dual-track" system—one track is regular high school, and the other track is vocational high school, higher education quality improving effectively, and private education diversifying. Education at all levels have achieved high-quality gender equality, with female enrollment rates being effectively guaranteed, and female higher education enrollment rates surpassing those of males. Additionally, high-quality ethnic equality has been realized, with the enrollment of minority students being ensured. However, we acknowledge the practical challenges that China, as a vast and regionally unbalanced developing country, faces in educational development and the protection of educational equality rights. We believe that China's education should continue to encourage the development of private schools and meet the individualized educational needs of more students.

I. Rapid Development of Preschool Education and Increase in Enrollment Rates of Low-cost Kindergartens

Low-cost kindergartens refer to kindergartens that charge childcare and accommodation fees at government-guided prices, including those run by the education department, other public kindergartens, and low-cost private kindergartens. According to the "National Education Development Statistical Bulletin 2022" there were 289,200 kindergartens nationwide, of which 245,700 were low-cost kindergartens, an increase of 1,033 compared to the previous year, growing by 0.42%, accounting for 84.96% of all kindergartens. There were 41.44 million children enrolled in low-cost kindergartens, accounting for 89.55% of all children in kindergartens, an increase of 1.77 percentage points from the previous year. The gross enrollment rate of preschool education was 89.7%, an increase of 1.6 percentage points from the previous year. In Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China, the gross enrollment rate of preschool education reached 89.52%, meeting the national average, highlighting the current state of educational equality for ethnic minorities in China.

II. Comprehensive Coverage of Compulsory Education with Guaranteed Enrollment for Girls and Ethnic Minorities

According to the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, China implements a nine-year compulsory education system. "Children who have reached the age of six shall be enrolled by their parents or other legal guardians to receive and complete compulsory education; in areas where conditions do not permit, the starting age may be postponed to seven." In China, the "nine-year compulsory education" system generally includes six years of primary school and three years of junior high school. According to the "National Education Development Statistical Bulletin 2022" there were 159 million students and 10.65 million full-time teachers in compulsory education. The retention rate of nine-year compulsory education (i.e. the percentage of students in the graduating class of junior high school compared to those enrolled in the first grade of primary school) was 95.5%. Data from 2022 showed that there were 74.08 million girls enrolled in compulsory education, accounting for 46.74% of the total enrollment; 19.90 million ethnic minority students, accounting for 12.56%.

III. Continuous Improvement of Special Education to Provide Bottom-line Support for Special Families

According to the “National Education Development Statistical Bulletin 2022” there were 2,314 special education schools nationwide, an increase of 26 from the previous year, growing by 1.14%; 335,700 students were enrolled in special education schools, accounting for 36.54% of the total number of special education students.

IV. Increasing Enrollment Rates in Regular High School Education and Improved Educational Equity

According to the “National Education Development Statistical Bulletin 2022”, there were 15,000 regular high schools nationwide, an increase of 441 from the previous year, growing by 3.02%. Regular high school enrollment was 9.4754 million, an increase of 425,900 from the previous year, growing by 4.71%; there were 27.1387 million students in regular high schools, an increase of 1.0885 million from the previous year, growing by 4.18%; and 8.241 million graduates, an increase of 438,800 from the previous year, growing by 5.62%. Data from 2022 showed that female students accounted for 49.85% of those enrolled, ethnic minority students accounted for 11.06%, and children of migrant workers accounted for 7.32%. In 2022, the gross enrollment rate of high school education in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China, reached 91.07%, indicating continuous improvement in educational equity.

V. Rapid Development of Vocational Education with Improved Training Quality

According to the “National Education Development Statistical Bulletin 2022”, there were 13.3929 million students in secondary vocational education, an increase of 274,800 from the previous year, growing by 2.09%. Vocational bachelor enrollment was 76,300, an increase of 34,900 from the previous year, growing by 84.39%; Additionally, there were 33,100 students enrolling in bachelor's programs from associate degree backgrounds. There were 228,700 students in school, an increase of 99,400 from the previous year, growing by 76.91%. Higher vocational (associate degree) enrollment was 5.3898 million (excluding 542,900 students transferring from five-year higher vocational programs to associate degree programs), an increase of 315,900 from the previous year, growing by 6.23%; There were 16.709 million students in school, an increase of 808,000 from the previous year, growing by 5.08%; and 4.9477 million graduates, an increase of 963,600 from the previous year, growing by 24.19%.

VI. Improved Quality of Higher Education Development with Female Enrollment Surpassing Males

According to the “National Education Development Statistical Bulletin 2022” the total number of students enrolled in various forms of higher education was 46.55 million, an increase of 2.25 million from the previous year. The gross enrollment rate of higher education was 59.6%, an increase of 1.8 percentage points from the previous year. Data from 2022 showed that female enrollment in regular undergraduate programs accounted for 52.90%, and female enrollment in graduate programs (including master's and doctoral programs) accounted for 51.22%, surpassing that of males.

VII. “Combined Boarding and Day School” Education Model Ensures Equal Educational Opportunities and Personal Fair Development

The Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China stipulates that county-level people’s governments should establish boarding schools as needed to ensure that school-age children and adolescents living in dispersed areas can attend school and receive compulsory education. This solves the problems of long commutes and difficulties in parental care, thereby maximizing the guarantee of equal educational opportunities and personal fair development.

In every province of China, there are Combined Boarding and Day schools available to all school-age children. Boarding school education is becoming a major form of schooling in China, particularly in extensive rural and pastoral areas. This has long been a natural choice in the educational practices across various regions, aligning with China’s basic national conditions and the geographical realities and educational needs of the people in rural and pastoral areas.

For instance, the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, implements the “three guarantees” policy in boarding schools, which includes free meals, accommodation, and study expenses. The region places great emphasis on the involvement of students’ families in school education by inviting parents to participate in the management and planning of boarding life through parent committees, open days, and other activities. Whether boarding or day schooling, the choice is entirely up to the students and their parents.

Despite the commendable efforts of the Chinese government and social forces, China remains the largest developing country in the world, with significant regional imbalances in development, manifested in the noticeable disparities between the central and western regions and the urban-rural divide. Consequently, China needs to continue investing substantial funds in education to balance regional disparities and promote educational equity. However, relying solely on fiscal support for education is far from sufficient. Therefore, China’s education should continue to absorb active participation from social forces, further encourage the development of private education, so as to meet the individualized educational needs of more students.

Invited Expert at Special External Publicity Team of National Ethnic Affairs Commission of People’s Republic of China NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

References:

1. Statistical report on China’s educational achievements in 2022
2. Educational Statistics Data 2022