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Provisional summary record of the 16th meeting (Chamber B)

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 5 July 2011, at 4 p.m.

President: Mr. Kapambwe (Zambia)

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The meeting was called to order at 4.05 p.m.

Annual ministerial review: Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education (*continued*)

National voluntary presentations

1. **The President** invited Ms. Kaag, Assistant Administrator and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to act as moderator for the national voluntary presentations.

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (E/2011/118)

2. **Mr. Reinoso** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), accompanying his remarks with a computerized slide presentation, said that, according to the new Constitution of 1999, education in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was both a fundamental human right and a public good. The Constitution stated that education must be free, compulsory and liberating. One of the main problems facing the country had been social exclusion, and education must act as a mechanism for promoting social inclusion and development. A number of strategies had been implemented to achieve those aims: the abolition of enrolment fees in State schools; the expansion of the school meals programme in primary schools; the provision of computers to all primary-school children; and the introduction of intercultural and bilingual curriculums in accordance with the new legislation on education in areas with indigenous populations.

3. The Government had launched several initiatives to tackle long-standing structural problems in the education sector: the Robinson I, Robinson II and Ribas missions to promote adult literacy and education; the Simoncito programme to expand education for children under the age of 5; the establishment of "Bolivarian" primary and secondary schools, which offered comprehensive all-day programmes, as well as meals; and the Robinson technical schools, which provided vocational training.

4. At the tertiary level, the gratuitous nature of undergraduate education at State institutions had been reinstated. Also, 25 new institutions of higher education had been established in more remote parts of the country under the Government's "municipalization" strategy, which aimed to reduce migration from the countryside to the cities and impart education that was

relevant to regional development goals. In addition, 32 national university-level training programmes had been implemented. The programmes focused on different subjects, but included the same core citizenship courses in sustainable development, environmental conservation, intercultural development and national and Latin American identity.

5. Considerable achievements in education had been recorded over the period 1999-2010: literacy had risen from 97 per cent to just over 98.55 per cent; school enrolment had increased by 24 per cent; participation in early childhood programmes, which was key for subsequent academic success and consequently considered fundamental, had risen from 43 per cent to 71 per cent; primary-school attendance had risen from 86 per cent to 93 per cent; the proportion of children who completed primary school within the stipulated six-year time frame had risen from 85 per cent to 92 per cent; and the dropout rate had fallen by 4.3 percentage points. Over the same period, secondary-school enrolment had risen by 24 points; the number of students in special education programmes had increased from 67,000 to over 207,000; and, thanks to the municipalization strategy, the number of students in tertiary education had risen from about 530,000 to over 2.2 million.

6. The results in primary-school education had, in part, been achieved through the expansion of the school meals programme, which enabled children from low-income families to remain in school. Over 4 million children now received three free meals a day (breakfast, lunch and snack) at school.

7. The Canaima Project was part of the Venezuelan Government's strategy to incorporate information technology into education. The project was being implemented through a cooperation agreement with the Government of Portugal and aimed to provide every child in primary school with a computer and to establish the necessary surrounding pedagogical framework to ensure that information was transformed into knowledge. Government efforts to meet the needs of indigenous populations and reaffirm their cultural traditions had included the introduction of intercultural bilingual education programmes in which subjects were taught in indigenous languages.

8. Cooperation with other countries had contributed to the achievements recorded in education. Cooperation with Cuba had included advice on the

development of primary and university education and teacher training initiatives, such as exchanges. A key outcome of cooperation with China had been the launch of the Simón Bolívar telecommunications satellite, which had been instrumental in expanding education to remote areas and developing distance-learning programmes. Cooperation within the framework of the Grand National Education Project of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America — Peoples' Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP) focused on developing common undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various fields, such as hydrocarbons, education, community medicine and tourism. For its part, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had sent literacy teachers to work in other countries and had granted scholarships to foreign students from 42 different countries, many of whom came to learn about the Venezuelan integral community medicine programme, which emphasized preventive medicine and encouraged communities to develop their own health mechanisms.

9. Current challenges included completing the transformation of public schools and reducing class sizes. Although sufficient teachers had been trained, not enough classrooms had been built. More progress also needed to be made towards achieving universal university education, and the postgraduate education segment needed to be developed to support the country's regional development plans.

10. To sum up, as a result of the Government's education policies and strategies, over 10.5 million Venezuelans, or almost 40 per cent of the population, were studying, making the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela the world's largest classroom.

11. **Mr. Qian Bo** (China), reviewer, said that the presentation reflected the openness and constructive approach of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. He welcomed the country's progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All. Particularly noteworthy were the improvement in literacy and the increases in enrolment rates at all levels of the education system. Education, together with poverty eradication, was a pillar of the country's national action plan, and the Government was clearly working tirelessly to achieve its goals.

12. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had engaged actively in international cooperation projects

with several countries, including China, and was a strong advocate of South-South cooperation. The Venezuelan State had granted over 2,800 scholarships to students from Africa and Latin America and was currently funding 271 undergraduate scholarships for students from 16 African countries.

13. He wished to know what measures the Venezuelan Government was taking to make full use of information and communication technologies in education and the role that the satellite communications project, in which China had participated, had played in achieving education goals.

14. **Ms. Madrigal Muñoz** (Observer for Cuba), reviewer, said that the information presented by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela clearly showed the positive results achieved in education. Enrolment rates at all levels, as well as for special education, had increased. In 2010 alone, the State had opened six new polytechnic universities. Other notable achievements included the proclamation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as an illiteracy-free territory and recognition by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) of the country's rankings in terms of university enrolment: fifth worldwide and second in Latin America and the Caribbean. Equally important was the Venezuelan State's acknowledgement of the right to free education up to undergraduate level.

15. She would appreciate information on the challenges that the Venezuelan Government faced and whether it had programmes in place to tackle them. She also asked for details on the organization of the literacy campaigns.

16. **Mr. Aguirre** (Chile) asked how the institutional reforms implemented in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had shaped the changes in the education sector.

17. **Ms. Navarro Llanos** (Observer for the Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that the transformation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela into the largest classroom in the world and the establishment of free, democratic and compulsory education as a constitutional right were among the notable achievements that reflected the Venezuelan Government's firm commitment to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goal for education.

18. Several initiatives were worthy of special mention: the Simón Bolívar National Project, which, with education as a key component, aimed to eradicate poverty and address the needs of marginalized sectors; the Education Act, which acknowledged the need for innovative, multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual education; the school meals programme; and the Canaima Project. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had shown great solidarity with the other ALBA-TCP countries and, with Cuban cooperation and methodology, had promoted successful literacy campaigns in other countries, including the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The “Bolivarian” revolution had made great progress towards achieving education that would liberate people, given that an educated people could never be deceived. She would appreciate information on how respect for cultural diversity and non-discrimination were incorporated into the country’s education programmes.

19. **Mr. Reinoso** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that information and communication technologies were being incorporated through three interrelated programmes: Infocentro, which involved setting up computer centres in poor neighbourhoods; the Bolivarian information and communication technology centres; and the Canaima Project. The Simón Bolívar satellite programme was being used mainly to extend education and medical services to remote areas. Efforts were also under way to connect up all the universities in the country. Since educational establishments doubled as polling stations, interconnectivity was important both for democracy and education. Education was key to the country’s development and its competitiveness, which was why the Venezuelan State invested heavily in the sector. The success of the Robinson missions to eradicate illiteracy stemmed from the method used, which had been developed with the support of Cuba, and the scope of the campaign, which had involved even the Armed Forces. Improving education was also a strategy for achieving greater equity.

20. One of the main challenges Venezuela faced was how to diversify its educational system and enhance the quality of education in order to produce professionals who would contribute to the country’s economic development. The Simón Bolívar National Project aimed to reduce inequalities by redistributing the population, through the development of transport infrastructure — such as building a rail network

connecting the north, south, east and west of the country — and housing, education and health infrastructure, to foster the population’s mobility throughout the country. Professionals needed to be trained to implement the project.

21. On institutional reform, he said that the Constitution and the Education Act had helped to promote changes in the educational system. Local communities were able to manage and organize their education and health services using resources transferred to them from the State; the people thus had more direct power over the services they used.

22. Venezuelan legislation upheld the cultural values of the population, which had a mixture of indigenous, African and European origins. Whereas, in the past, its educational model had been based on a European model and tended to favour the whiter segments of the population, the new Constitution addressed the need to draw on the cultural values and knowledge of indigenous peoples and peoples of African descent. That had led to the development of an educational model which reflected the country’s ethnic diversity.

23. **Mr. Kawambwa** (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania) asked what share of Venezuela’s annual budget was allocated to education and what role parents played, if any, in financing their children’s education.

24. **Mr. Reinoso** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that about 8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) was spent on education — 6 per cent through the education ministry and 2 per cent through the ministry of science and technology, which received a small percentage of oil company profits, in keeping with the national policy of the country’s oil wealth benefiting one and all.

25. He noted that, historically, more women than men were enrolled in schools in Venezuela, a trend which had become even more pronounced since the Bolivarian Revolution. Consequently, women played a leading role in social movements in the country, and in the development of the Venezuelan educational system. Education was highly valued in the country and was the starting point for climbing the social ladder.

26. **Mr. Sequeira** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that his organization commended and supported the efforts made in Venezuela to reduce inequalities and

ensure lifelong learning for all its people, as well as its efforts to foster South-South cooperation. In support of higher education initiatives, UNESCO had established the International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) in Caracas, which could be extremely useful for the training of teachers and other professionals. Also, in order to tackle the growing phenomenon of violence in schools, it had programmes in place to promote harmonious relations in schools.

27. **Ms. Kaag** (Moderator) asked what challenges Venezuela faced in ensuring the employability of young people once they had completed tertiary education.

28. **Mr. Reinoso** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that Venezuelan graduates had a good record of finding jobs. Nevertheless, employment in certain sectors, the service sector in particular, remained problematic, and efforts were being made to ensure that students were adequately trained to meet present labour market demands, including through a new job creation programme called *Misión Trabajo*. There was also a programme in place to help students make the transition from secondary to university studies.

29. He drew attention to joint projects being carried out with UNESCO and IESALC, and highlighted a joint programme with Chile for combating school violence.

Bangladesh (E/2011/96)

30. **Mr. Nahid** (Bangladesh) said that it was imperative to provide quality education to the new generation. In that context, the national programme “Vision 2021” sought to establish a “digital Bangladesh”, and his Government had drawn up its first-ever national education policy, the fruit of a comprehensive and inclusive consultative process, which had been adopted by Parliament in 2010. That policy aimed to ensure access to education and to address the issues of equity and quality, and covered all the goals of Education for All and beyond.

31. He reviewed the strategic measures his Government had taken to improve education, including the introduction of a stipend and safety-net programme to increase the participation of students from poor backgrounds, noting that support from the international community was needed to increase that coverage, and the extensive training of teachers and education

officials. His Government had also introduced a competency-based curriculum, with textbooks that had been updated and that continued to uphold the country’s values and describe its history. Some new infrastructure had been built, but there was a growing need for more of the same.

32. Continuous efforts to boost school enrolment had helped to increase the level of education and literacy of the population, and there was a nationwide movement to achieve literacy for all by 2014. In spite of the Government’s many achievements in enhancing access to education, and the achievement of gender parity in particular, other areas remained of concern, such as the school dropout rate, inequities, and shortcomings in the quality of education. Continued cooperation among development partners, NGOs and the private sector, nationally, regionally and globally, would help to expand and improve the quality of education. His Government was fully committed to gradually increasing its budget allocation for education to 6 per cent of GDP, or at least 20 per cent of the national budget. He thanked donor countries for their continued support and called on them to fulfil their commitments under the Dakar Framework for Action.

33. **Ms. Alsulaiti** (Qatar), reviewer, asked what measures the Government of Bangladesh had been taking to limit the negative consequences of high tuition fees on parents’ ability to send their children to school, and to combat drug abuse among students. She also asked how it went about ensuring schooling in disaster situations when schools were being used as shelters. She wished to hear more about education on matters of reproductive health and hygiene, and about the use of technology in schools. Lastly, she asked what specific mechanisms were in place to assess teacher performance.

34. **Mr. Kawambwa** (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania), reviewer, commending the Government of Bangladesh on the clear national development strategy set out in, Vision 2021, said that its national education policy was aimed at equipping the people of Bangladesh with the skills needed to build national capacity and integrate the country into the global economy. Bangladesh’s direct achievements in the education sector included an increase in the number of free textbooks distributed to primary and secondary schools, the use of information and communication technologies to promote good governance, the provision of stipends and social safety

nets, extensive training for teachers and the improvement of infrastructure. Indirect achievements attributed to the Government's focus on education included the modernization of the agricultural sector, a decrease in child and maternal mortality, increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation, community-managed disaster risk reduction and the empowerment of women. Its emphasis on more accessible and higher-quality education had also led to significant advances in meeting internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of Education for All.

35. While the Government had thus done much to improve the lives of people, it continued to face many challenges. Bangladesh would need more resources for its initiatives on teacher training, textbooks and infrastructure, among others. He urged development partners to increase their support for those initiatives, for the recent global financial crisis must not be allowed to undermine sustainable investment in education in developing countries.

36. **Mr. Yamahana** (Japan), reviewer, said that his Government welcomed the national education policy and commended the increase in the school enrolment rate, progress towards gender parity and equal access to education, the increased distribution of free textbooks, the improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio, the reduction of the dropout rate, the increase in teacher training and other achievements. There was a need for a policy to raise the social status of the teaching profession. Technical and vocational training must seek to instil the skills needed by companies in Bangladesh. His delegation also commended Bangladesh's multisectoral approach to education and the incorporation of the environment and disaster management into its education programmes.

37. He would like clarification of the roles played by the two Government ministries responsible for education and the way in which they coordinated their efforts. He would also welcome further details on the steps being taken to address the problem of vulnerable children who remained outside the educational system.

38. **Mr. Sahay** (India), congratulating Bangladesh on its educational reforms, which had brought about an improvement in primary education and made school environments more child-friendly, asked what plans or strategies were in place to bring dropouts back into school. Noting that attracting the most talented people

to the teaching profession remained a considerable challenge, he wished to know what efforts were being made by higher educational establishments to prepare young people to become teachers.

39. **Mr. Quintanilla Román** (Observer for Cuba) enquired about the challenges to the programmes, strategies, measures and plans for the fulfilment of the right to education still facing Bangladesh.

40. **Mr. Nahid** (Bangladesh) said that the questions raised would serve not only to guide Bangladesh's future national education policies but also to encourage it to continue its efforts at reform. Educational reform was aimed at bringing about comprehensive and deep social and economic change such as the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and corruption. Furthermore, the Government had carried out nationwide consultations and enjoyed broad public support for its programmes.

41. Improving the quality of education was a high priority and recruiting and training highly qualified teachers remained a major objective. Bangladesh had also raised education standards by introducing examinations at the end of class V and class VIII. Furthermore, the curriculum had been changed and new textbooks were being developed to reflect the changes in science and technology that had occurred since the previous curriculum was drafted in 1995.

42. While the gross enrolment rate stood at 99 per cent, keeping children from dropping out was still a challenge. The Government had therefore increased assistance to students from needy families and elicited local community support for its efforts to ensure that those children stayed in school.

43. **Mr. Mazumder** (Bangladesh) said that although the Ministry of Education, which dealt with secondary, technical and higher education, and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, which dealt with primary and non-formal education, had separate budgets, they cooperated closely with each other. Turning to the issue of drug abuse, he said that, although it was not a major problem in Bangladesh, information on its effects had been incorporated into the school curriculum and there were rehabilitation and treatment centres for victims. He concurred with other speakers that the biggest obstacle to implementing educational reform and promoting high education standards was funding. Bangladesh was therefore seeking increased assistance and technical cooperation from its development partners.

44. **Mr. Nahid** (Bangladesh) said that he wished to thank all Bangladesh's development partners, particularly Japan, for their contributions and commitment to education in Bangladesh.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.