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Provisional summary record of the 20th meeting (Chamber B)

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 7 July 2011, at 3.30 p.m.

President: Mr. Kampambwe (Zambia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

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

National voluntary presentations: Mauritius, Belarus and Senegal

1. **The President** invited Mr. Watkins, Director of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report for 2011, to act as moderator for the national voluntary presentations.

Mauritius (E/2011/94)

2. **Mr. Bunwaree** (Mauritius) said that, in Mauritius, the importance of education was deeply ingrained in the national culture and several of the targets associated with the Millennium Development Goal for education had already been achieved. Ensuring equal opportunities so that all pupils could become full-fledged learners was key to success. Free education meant more than free access, it meant the removal of hurdles that caused children to lag behind in their studies. Therefore, in addition to free education from pre-primary to tertiary level, the State provided free transportation for all students to and from school, which had proved to be particularly effective for ensuring that adolescents stayed in school. Other equal-opportunity measures included the provision of primary-school textbooks and other materials free of charge, coverage of health and nutrition needs and the opening of primary schools near to where people lived. Providing equal opportunity also meant remaining abreast of technological developments, and the Government had recently launched a digital revolution in schools, which would mainstream technology use in the classroom and introduce new hands-on learning methods.

3. The education system had its weaknesses: it was highly competitive and had a strong academic bias. Greater emphasis was therefore being placed on values-based education and on co- and extra-curricular activities to promote a more holistic approach and cement multiculturalism and interculturalism as core values. Education policy rested on five pillars: widening access, improving quality, increasing relevance, promoting greater equity and ensuring learning achievement for all. The aim was to transform Mauritius into a regional hub for education and

position the country as a knowledge economy and a gateway between Asia and Africa.

4. **Mr. Dansinghani** (Mauritius), accompanying his remarks with a computerized slide presentation, said that Mauritius' development policies were anchored in a vision of future prosperity and focused on social welfare and inclusion. Poverty-eradication strategies included the establishment of a trust fund and an empowerment programme for vulnerable groups, and, in 2010, the creation of the Ministry of Social Integration. Encouraging entrepreneurship was a key component of the empowerment programme as Mauritius needed workers who could not only fill, but also create jobs and enhance the country's competitiveness. Poor families also received additional support in the form of grants to cover pre-primary school fees, and their children received free lunches, transportation, school materials and medical examinations in primary school.

5. Coherence and synergies among ministries were essential because traditional safety nets were disappearing and the State had to fill the gap and create the social conditions in which education could take place. Innovative measures were being introduced, such as crèches and after-school care programmes to enable parents, especially mothers, to work.

6. Policy successes in education included an enrolment rate of 47 per cent in tertiary education, with girls far outnumbering boys. The literacy rate had risen to 85 per cent according to the 2000 census and would certainly be higher once the results of the 2011 census had been analysed. The main challenge was lowering the dropout rate and ensuring that all children completed secondary school successfully. Programmes also needed to be put in place for gifted students.

7. Government policies focused on promoting sustainability and corporate social responsibility. To transform Mauritius into a knowledge economy, a culture of lifelong learning and tertiary education must be developed and the skills gap must be closed. Various measures were being taken to address those challenges. Support from international development partners was coordinated in a coherent and rational manner and channelled through the budget to avoid duplication.

8. **Ms. Tan Yee Woan** (Observer for Singapore), reviewer, said that, despite being a small-island State with limited natural resources, Mauritius had made significant progress since independence and had

always recognized the importance of education in achieving its social and economic goals. Both literacy and school enrolment rates had increased. The key issue was the shortage of skilled workers now that economic policy was focused on the development of agri-business, services, including financial services, and the information and communication technologies sector. To ensure that the workforce had the required skills, it was essential for the Government and businesses to work together, and she would therefore appreciate more details on joint public-private efforts to upgrade workers' skills. She also requested information on vocational training and on what steps, if any, Mauritius had taken to raise the status of vocational training.

9. **Mr. Mattéi** (France), reviewer, said that by placing education at the heart of its national development strategy, Mauritius had built up an exemplary education system in many respects, as reflected in the progress achieved. The efforts to include the most vulnerable segments of the population were particularly commendable. He enquired about the language of instruction in schools and the digital revolution in the education system, specifically the lessons that could be drawn from the application of technology. He also requested information on Government policy on the recruitment, training, continuous development and appointment of teachers.

10. **Mr. Combrink** (Observer for South Africa) said that he would appreciate knowing what specific practical measures Mauritius had taken, as a country with people of very different backgrounds, to ensure that education was provided to all without discrimination. He would also appreciate more information about the challenges involved in ensuring accountability in the use of resources and the Government's response to those challenges. Given that population growth might alter the gender balance, he enquired about the measures being put in place to address possible future gender gaps. He also enquired about the causes behind the high school dropout rate and the action taken to lower it.

11. **Mr. Bunwaree** (Mauritius) said that expanding public-private partnerships had been a major objective for some time. The economy of Mauritius was driven by the private sector, and private-sector representatives had therefore been invited to sit on many education and training boards. As to vocational training, the system has been under review since 2008, and a new institute,

the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development, had been established. Since it had become necessary to diversify the economy, the Government was training workers to help them develop multiple, transferable skills. Women in the clothing industry, for example, were receiving computer literacy training.

12. Prejudices against vocational training were not really a problem, although it was commonly believed that those who took vocational courses must have failed academically. Measures had been taken to protect students' self-esteem. The students in the vocational stream still attended secondary school and received qualifications at the end of their training. The Ministry of Education's website provided detailed information on vocational training.

13. English was the official language in Mauritius, although French was spoken more widely. Instruction in Mauritian Creole was being introduced to help children adjust and perform better in primary and secondary school. As of 2012, Creole would be an optional subject, like Hindi and other languages, and in the medium term it would become a language of instruction.

14. The digital revolution in the education system was an ambitious project that involved connecting up schools through computer networks, transferring all the information in primary- and secondary-school textbooks to digital formats and retraining teachers to switch from the "chalk and talk" method to working with laptops and screen projectors. The interactive approach was more dynamic than the traditional one and expedited learning. Having been implemented in one primary class in 2011, the project was due to be extended to every school in Mauritius within four years.

15. As to teacher training, the primary-school teacher training system was highly effective. High-school graduates were selected through a transparent selection process and trained for two and a half years to impart both the regular curriculum and extra-curricular subjects. They were also trained to identify children with special education needs. Graduates received the equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts degree.

16. Poverty-alleviation efforts in Mauritius included affirmative action for poor children. Action included offering balanced meals at schools and remedial support. The fact that children came from different backgrounds was never a problem. All children studied

the same curriculum, and there were no schools for particular communities. Schooling was compulsory up to the age of 16, and attendance had been facilitated through the construction of schools in areas where people lived and the free transport scheme for students. As to gender gaps in education, girls were outperforming boys in Mauritius, and the challenge lay in achieving equal success rates for both sexes.

Belarus (E/2011/98)

17. **Mr. Maskevich** (Observer for Belarus) said that raising the level of education and functional literacy had been a high priority of the State during the past two decades, as it sought to form a socially oriented market economy. In keeping with international trends, Belarus had pursued a course of high-quality, lifelong learning, which extended to all segments of society. As a quarter of its population received varying types of instruction at the nearly 10,000 educational establishments throughout the country, Belarus had reason to refer to itself as a country of pupils and students.

18. The Government had in place a solid legal framework in the field of education, including the Education Code and Constitution, which enshrined the inalienable right to education. Funding for the education system was stable and was projected to reach the level recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) by 2015. Considerable efforts had been made to update school textbooks and curricula and widely integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) into the classroom.

19. The vast majority of children under 6 years of age attended preschools and all children aged 5 received free preschool education. Belarus was building new schools to meet growing needs and provided rural and urban children alike with equal education opportunities from the start. It had also substantially modernized and improved its system of compulsory general basic education, which covered all citizens. The education system offered advanced courses and other support for talented students. Courses in the language, culture and history of ethnic minorities were taught in school and entire classes were conducted, for example, in Polish or Lithuanian. Every citizen was required to study, in addition to Belarusian and Russian, a foreign language of their choice. Much attention was given to the study of economics, business, computer science and other

subjects to prepare school-leavers for life and work in an open information society.

20. Education in Belarus was non-discriminatory and inclusive. Priority was given to remedial and special-needs education and children with disabilities had access to instruction at centres for remedial and developmental education and rehabilitation. Great strides had been made in the development of specialized secondary education, which was received by one in every four school-leavers. Higher education was steadily developing. There were 45 State and 10 private university-level educational institutions in the country, with almost 450,000 students.

21. Belarusian educational establishments took a competency-based approach to higher education and professional training. Priority had been given to training specialists in such sectors as mechanical engineering, energy — including nuclear energy — construction, health, agriculture and information technology. Belarus also cooperated with foreign partners on scientific projects. The quality of higher education would be improved with the completion of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001 certification process for Belarusian university activities and the Bologna process and Belarus called on the international community to support it during that process. Postgraduate and doctoral studies in Belarus fully met the educational needs of its scholars and researchers. Adult education also played an important role. Particular attention was given to managers and specialists working in business, trade, information security and other areas.

22. Belarus also had an extensive system of extra-curricular education for young people, including youth centres and clubs for various forms of physical and cultural activities. More than 90 per cent of all students received a stipend and were provided with low-cost room and board and other assistance.

23. The country hosted more than 10,000 foreign students from over 80 countries around the world and cooperated closely with other States on education through bilateral agreements. Following the example of many countries that held competitions for the best teachers to enhance the status of the profession and raise awareness about the need for excellence, a similar competition sponsored by the United Nations would draw international attention to the crucial role that they played in the modern world. The United Nations

should also consider launching an international programme for the development of teacher education. Lastly, Belarus proposed to proclaim 2015 as the Year of Francisk Skorina, a scholar and educator who had printed the first book in the Belarusian language.

24. **Ms. Jia You** (China), commending Belarus on its educational achievements and its legislative framework on education, asked whether the Education Code marked a new phase in the country's education policy or a reform of the education system as a whole. Her delegation hoped that Belarus would share its experiences at the UNESCO meeting on vocational training that China would be hosting in Shanghai in 2012. She would welcome further details of the role of lifelong learning in ensuring open access to education in Belarus.

25. **Mr. Birichevsky** (Russian Federation), reviewer, noting that meeting internationally agreed goals required political will, said that his delegation welcomed Belarus's National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-economic Development for the period up to 2020, which would prepare young people for life and work in a civil society with a sustainable socially oriented market economy. As the report of Belarus showed, it had an adequate legal and regulatory framework and stable financing in the field of education, including for intensive construction of educational infrastructure, from preschools to universities, and the publication of textbooks. As the coverage of preschool education in Belarus was very extensive, his delegation would like to hear more about the country's experiences and the measures it had adopted in that area. Further information on the steps taken to develop ICT in rural areas to avoid a digital divide would also be helpful. He wished to have further details of Belarus's policy of inclusive education, the integration of children with special needs in preschools and secondary schools, opportunities for lifelong education of persons with disabilities and cooperation with the private sector to help such persons find work after they left school. More information on plans for the development of higher education would also be welcome. Lastly, he would appreciate more detailed information on the challenges facing Belarus in meeting its development goals.

26. **Mr. Alimbayev** (Observer for Kazakhstan), noting that Belarus, a multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic country, had made considerable progress

in its efforts to ensure equal and socially oriented education for all, said that he wished to have more information on the Education Code.

27. **Mr. Maskevich** (Observer for Belarus) said that the Education Code marked an important new phase in educational policy, reflecting the establishment of a sustainable educational system and legal framework for all actors involved in the education process. It did not constitute a reform as such but rather set the course for further improvements in the system without bringing about radical change. Turning to the UNESCO meeting, he said that his delegation looked forward to sharing his country's experiences and best practices on vocational training. Concerning the role of higher and adult education, some 14 per cent of the workforce each year benefited from professional training, continuing education, internships and retraining. Belarus had focused in recent years not only on improving preschool education infrastructure but also on making the environment for children of preschool age conducive to learning and development. The institutions were run by highly qualified professionals and the children were provided with nutritious food. The Government had recently adopted a programme on higher education based on European models, which focused on the priority economic needs of the country, such as energy. Belarus also cooperated closely with the Russian Federation and other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the area of higher education. The biggest challenge facing Belarus was funding, especially for training high-level specialists. Nevertheless, it was seeking resources, including from industry, to fill the shortfall in public funds and to bring the level of such training up to international standards.

Senegal (E/2011/126)

28. **Mr. Diallo** (Senegal) said that all stakeholders in Senegal's education system had been involved in drafting the report for the national voluntary presentation. Current education policy drew its inspiration from the conclusions and recommendations of international conferences and national consultations. The national education programme aimed at greater access to education, higher quality education and improved management of the educational system. Among the challenges were the high costs of school construction and teachers' salaries, low efficiency, the rejection of the current model of education by some

people, particularly within religious communities, regional and gender disparities and the low level of involvement in education by non-State actors.

29. Several strategies had been adopted to cope with those obstacles, including the recruitment of teachers at a lower salary, bigger class sizes and classes that covered several grades. Several factors had improved efficiency, such as the prohibition against keeping students down a year and social measures such as an increase in school meals, more diverse courses and enrolment campaigns for girls and other vulnerable children. Furthermore, the increase in the time spent on learning, the availability of textbooks, the establishment and funding of school projects, new construction and testing of a new curriculum had significantly improved the quality of education.

30. Among the achievements made in meeting international commitments in the area of education was the increase in the number of children receiving preschool education, which, nonetheless, had fallen somewhat short of the goal of 10 per cent coverage of children of preschool age. Progress had been made on high-quality primary education for children between the ages of 7 and 12, much of which could be attributed to the high level of enrolment of girls in school. Vocational training and skills acquisition for young people and adults had also improved in recent years. Senegal remained below the average of other countries in the subregion, however, and did not provide for adequate training to match the needs of employers.

31. The targeted 50 per cent increase in the adult literacy rate had not been attained, although adult literacy among women was above target, at 85.7 per cent. Enrolment figures could therefore not be viewed as reliable indicators of improvements in literacy. Although gender-parity indices in middle school and secondary school were 0.91 and 0.74, respectively, gender parity had been achieved in primary education in 2006. Efforts to keep girls in school continued in partnership with the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was also building water pumps in schools, as well as separate bathroom blocks for girls, and school canteens were being set up with aid from Italy and the support of the World Food Programme. In terms of education quality, only minimal improvements had been recorded in performance in mathematics and French.

32. The establishment of new administrative structures and the implementation of a sectoral action plan under the Ten-Year Programme of Education and Training had facilitated the participation of civil society organizations in a number of areas, including inclusive education and education in emergency situations. The Coalition des Organisations en Synergie pour le Développement de l'Éducation Publique (COSYDEP), supported by Save the Children, was developing strategies for identifying and addressing the needs of those excluded from the education system; while the organization Sightsavers was promoting schooling for blind children and Handicap International was supporting pilot projects in flood zones and areas of socio-political unrest.

33. Despite some positive gains, education in Senegal still faced major challenges, which included addressing the needs of excluded children, increasing completion rates, enhancing teaching quality, improving education management, upgrading vocational training, promoting national languages and reducing illiteracy. Bold innovations were needed to improve quality. The complexity of educational needs in the country and financial limitations placed strains on public administration. The dynamic response of civil society organizations and other partners was therefore viewed positively. Given national budget constraints, additional support from the international community would be required, however, to carry out the investments needed in the years ahead if Senegal was to meet its international commitments in regard to education.

34. **Mr. Pellet** (France), reviewer, recalling the close ties that existed between France and Senegal in education, including in the context of the Conférence des ministres de l'éducation des pays ayant le français en partage (CONFEMEN), said that, in addition to the constraints faced, the report had highlighted the good practices associated with the improvement in the attendance rate for girls and the involvement of civil society. He asked for information on how Senegal participated in the Education System Evaluation Programme (PASEC) established by CONFEMEN and how the results of evaluations were incorporated into national policy. He also asked whether any public-private partnerships had been set up to help mainstream the latest information technologies in education programmes.

35. **Mr. Grinius** (Canada), reviewer, said that Senegal had made great strides, particularly with regard to primary-school enrolment, which had mainly benefited girls. The associated good practices needed to be continued to ensure that girls stayed at school and to combat violence. Several Government initiatives, including the implementation of the Ten-Year Programme and the introduction of the new competency-based curriculum, had achieved notable results. The involvement of civil society in education management and the diversification of education supply to address different needs nationwide were equally welcome developments. Quality of education remained a significant challenge, however, as reflected in the low completion rates and high dropout rates for both sexes. Teacher training was often inadequate, and most schools suffered shortages of water, electricity, latrines, fences and textbooks.

36. The report presented by Senegal stated that 40 per cent of the State budget was allocated to education, and he wished to know what measures had been put in place to ensure that the funds were managed in an efficient and transparent manner. He also asked for more details on the lessons learned from the partnerships established with technical and financing agencies and to what extent civil society organizations could be involved in the implementation of education policy in Senegal.

37. **Mr. Suganuma** (Japan), reviewer, said that despite the improvements recorded in access to primary education, additional measures were needed to incorporate children currently still excluded from the education system. The efforts to increase the income of poor households through rural development and improvements in the agricultural sector had been noted, and the comprehensive approach was highly commendable. Measures to improve children's health and access to drinking water had been proven to help increase school attendance rates, and the creation of school canteens was another excellent initiative in that regard.

38. In addition to improving the learning environment, Senegal needed to improve the quality of education. Qualified and motivated teachers played a key role in quality, and Japan was therefore providing assistance for the construction of a teacher-training college and for the training of secondary-school mathematics and science teachers. The integration of primary-school teacher-training colleges with

continuous professional development centres should improve both teaching and learning.

39. The regional administrative framework for education needed strengthening now that, with decentralization, the role of regional inspection bodies was becoming increasingly important, and cooperation between administrators and local schools must be promoted. Japan had launched the "School for All" project in Senegal to promote the development of community-run schools, since community involvement had been shown to improve both access to education and quality.

40. Given the substantial financial resources required to attain the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of Education for All, the use of the resources provided by international organizations to Senegal should be reviewed. An exchange of experiences and good practices would be beneficial.

41. Those working in basic education and vocational training needed to work together to address the shortage of secondary-school classrooms and the high youth unemployment rate in Senegal; he wished to know what measures the Government had taken in that regard. He also requested information on any successful experiences or lessons learned with regard to providing quality education to children who had been left out of the education system.

42. **Mr. Mbow** (Save the Children and Coalition des Organisations en Synergie pour le Développement de l'Éducation Publique (COSYDEP)) said that Senegalese civil society was highly appreciative of the exemplary and constructive approach adopted by the Ministry of Education in its collaboration on education issues. Significant progress had been made in terms of increasing gender equity, school attendance and the education budget, but many challenges remained: gender equity had yet to be attained in preschool, middle school and secondary school; over 40 per cent of the children enrolled in primary school never completed the cycle; over 70 per cent of the children not enrolled had no opportunity to attend school whatsoever; over half of Senegalese adults were illiterate; and the administration of the education system and the distribution of the budget needed to be effective, efficient and fair.

43. About 2.7 million children in Senegal were not attending school. They included street children, girls, children with disabilities and children living in conflict

or disaster zones or areas beyond the reach of the formal education system, none of whom figured in education statistics. Yet only five pilot schools, all in Dakar, established at the initiative of Save the Children and COSYDEP, were applying inclusive education methods. Both Save the Children and COSYDEP invited the Ministry of Education to actively promote inclusive education as a radical strategy for integrating children with special educational needs and ensuring quality education for all. To achieve that end, the Ministry of Education should take the following measures: obtain statistical data to identify, locate and assess special needs; convert all schools into friendly learning environments for children with all types of needs; insert a module on inclusive learning in all teacher-training programmes; decentralize and reinforce the capacity-building programme for inclusive education; create a specific budget item to cover the requirements of students with special needs; and develop a disaster prevention strategy that included emergency plans for schoolchildren.

44. **Mr. Feyder** (Observer for Luxembourg) said that he would like to have an assessment of the progress made in technical and vocational training, as Luxembourg had been a partner of Senegal in that area. Technical education and vocational training were particularly important in light of the increasing number of young people entering the labour market who had difficulties finding employment. It was important to give young people the skills necessary to set up their own business, with the help of microfinance if necessary, so that they would not be forced to leave the region to earn a living and would be able to build a future in their own country.

45. **Mr. Diallo** (Senegal) said that his Government was grateful to the reviewers, who represented countries that were among the development partners that contributed most to Senegal's education system. Senegal had carried out evaluations of its educational system in conjunction with international partners in 1996, 2003 and 2006, and had in place a Government body to coordinate national assessment activities. Those evaluations enabled Senegal to adjust its policies to ensure a proper level of education in mathematics, science, French and other subjects. Senegal had also begun a campaign to bridge the digital divide, with assistance from Switzerland, including remote learning and increased use of ICT tools. France had also

embarked on a digital classroom project for Africa, which had been launched in Senegal as a pilot.

46. Turning to the management of funding for education, he said that all spending on infrastructure, operating expenses, grants, subsidies and other outlays was regulated by the new Procurement Code and a Government monitoring body ensured that the relevant regulations were observed. Senegal was thus in the forefront of countries in the region in terms of accountability and transparency. Despite those internal controls, however, many donor countries had their own auditing procedures, which Senegal was required to take into account and which at times slowed down the procurement process. The Government worked closely and had excellent relations with civil society in educational matters, as was shown by the statement made by the representative of Save the Children. Senegal had a unique tradition of engaging in a national dialogue every April involving the Government, civil society, trade unions, parents, technical and financial partners, the private sector and local authorities to identify future education needs and assess progress made. It was regrettable, however, that in primary education alone there were 43 trade unions that competed with one another and were a source of instability. He therefore launched an appeal to civil society and unions to declare a moratorium on strikes until 2015 so that students could attend school without interruption.

47. There was no systematic policy linking basic education to vocational training. That shortcoming would be addressed, however, with the institution of 10 years' mandatory basic education. The introduction of a system of national certification of competence would also help to address the problem. Concerning vulnerable children excluded from the education system, he noted that the Government took into account not only children with disabilities but also children placed in Koranic rather than regular schools and children from conflict areas who often ended up as street children.

48. **Mr. Diouf** (Senegal) said that since 2000 his Government had made technical and vocational training the second-highest priority in its educational policies, after primary education. Consequently, the Government had established a ministry devoted entirely to technical and vocational training. With the invaluable assistance of donors such as Luxembourg, vocational training centres had been established in the

north of the country. A recent 10-year national assessment of the country's vocational training had found that some progress had been made despite limited domestic resources. The technical and vocational subsector was undergoing an assessment with the assistance of the World Bank. Senegal would certainly benefit from giving technical and vocational training the resources and attention they deserved. Turning to the question of children excluded from the education system, he said that it was crucial first to gather information on those children. Only then could an appropriate response be made by the Government, civil society and international partners to meet the needs of all the children concerned.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

