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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the opening of the PGA High-Level SDG Action Event  
on Education SDG4**

**New York, 28 June 2017**

H. E. Peter Thomson, President of the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,

Dear friend Ms Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Mr Saul Mwame, Founder of the *Building Africa's Future Foundation*,

Excellencies Ministers,

Civil society groups and all advocates present here today,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last Friday, I had the honour to receive Nobel Peace Laureate President Manuel Santos of Colombia to UNESCO.

He is a leader who has put education at the heart of peacebuilding after decades of war.

Free, inclusive, quality education at all levels -- measures for the most disadvantaged from early childhood to university -- education for global citizenship.

For the past three years, education receives the highest share of government spending – higher than defence and security; this is a first in Colombia's history.

His words were clear:

*“More resources for education means less for war. An educated people is a peaceful people.”*

With this vision in mind, I welcome, Mr President, this debate.

Ask any family anywhere what they want, and the answer is clear.

Ask any young girl or boy across the world what she or he hopes for, and the answer is clear.

In developed countries, in least developed countries, in small island developing states, in conflict situations, after disasters, in refugee camps... the answer is always clear.

It is education.

Because education is a basic human right.

Because education is the foundation for inclusive, sustainable development.

Because education, fundamentally, is a wellspring of hope and peace.

This is why education is at the heart of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

Education is a transformational force that cuts across all of the Sustainable Development Goals, making progress sustainable across the board -- and I wish to thank H.E. Peter Thomson for his powerful vision of education and for convening this important meeting.

The 2030 Agenda promises to leave no one behind.

This must start on the benches of schools.

For the moment, this is not happening.

264 million children, adolescents and youth are out of school – most of them girls.

If current trends continue, 17 million of the 61 million children of primary school age out of school will *never* set foot in a classroom.

Girls and women face the steepest challenges -- two thirds of the 758 million of illiterate adults in the world are women – as eloquently stated by the President of the General Assembly and the Deputy Secretary General.

Children and youth in conflict situations carry the heaviest burden -- 50% of refugees have no access to secondary education.

Beyond basic education, by 2020, the world could have 40 million *too few* workers with tertiary education relative to demand.

If all adults completed secondary education, 420 million people could be lifted from poverty, reducing the number of poor people by more than half globally, by almost 2/3 in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia -- and yet aid to education has fallen for the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year.

This cannot go on.

Education must become a priority for every government.

Not just any education.

Education that reaches every girl and boy.

Education that is relevant for societies and economies, today and tomorrow.

Education for skills, lifelong learning.

Education for sustainability, education for global citizenship.

This calls, first, for new financing.

Governments must allocate 4-6% of their gross domestic product and/or 15-20% of total public expenditure to education.

Donor governments and multilateral donors should increase the education share of development assistance, supporting countries most in need.

I would like to recall the relevance of the Report of the Education Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, led by Special Envoy Gordon Brown and supported by Norway, and encourage you to look again at its conclusions.

Bilateral and multilateral donors should lift the share of humanitarian aid allocated to education to reach the target of at least 4 % -- and UNESCO reaffirms its full engagement with supporting the *Education Cannot Wait Fund*.

Second, this calls for transforming education itself, to empower everyone with the values and skills they need for resilience, for sustainability, for dialogue and peace in societies of rising diversity.

Teachers are essential here -- they must be recruited and supported across the board, to enable them to catalyse positive change.

This calls, lastly, for nurturing and harnessing innovation, to increase the reach of education and enhance its quality.

This is the importance of new information and communication technologies -- not *bolting them onto* education, but *building them in* from the start, in curricula, in teacher training, to bridge old divides and prevent new ones.

The digital revolution must be a development revolution for everyone -- especially girls and women, especially the most marginalised.

Moving forward means crossing policy lines, catalysing new synergies, between health and education, between schools and work places.

It means galvanising old and new partners -- many of them are here today, *Education International*, *Education Above All*, the *Varkey Foundation* -- including young people themselves, to whom I am deeply grateful.

For its part, UNESCO will continue to lead from the front and in partnership -- the *SDG-Education Steering Committee*, meeting tomorrow, has been running since Day One, we are already supporting implementation processes across the world, at national and regional levels.

This must continue, this must accelerate -- the stakes are too high for 'business-as-usual' to go on.

In this spirit, I thank you all for your commitment -- I thank the President of the General Assembly once again for his outstanding leadership in organizing a series of events, and most particularly this one on education, for it cuts across all the SDG agenda.

Thank you for your attention.