

**CLOSING REMARKS****MR. THOMAS STELZER****Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Co-ordination and Inter-Agency Affairs
Department of Economic and Social Affairs****REGIONAL MEETING FOR WESTERN ASIA
FOR THE 2011 ECOSOC ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW****Doha, Qatar, 9 December 2010**

Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to use this opportunity to again express our special thanks to the Government of Qatar and the Qatar Foundation for their gracious hospitality. This meeting would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of the WISE Secretariat.

Our candid discussions today have produced a wealth of ideas. Qatar will present a summary report to Ministers for their follow-up at the 2011 Annual Ministerial Review of ECOSOC next July.

While I will not attempt to capture the full scope of our discussions, allow me to share with you some of the main messages which I will take back to New York with me.

Firstly, it is increasingly recognized that education for all is not only a goal and a right in itself, but an essential condition to achieve all other Millennium Development Goals. We must reflect better this reality in our policies.

Secondly, there is a significant diversity in education progress in the region, with some countries having achieved remarkable progress, including in girls' enrolment, and others being held back by several factors, from poverty to conflict and occupation, from culture and gender stereotypes to displacement and disability.

Thirdly, in several countries in the Arab region, high fertility is often associated with poverty and marginalization, which lead to lower educational attainment and lower quality of life for women.

Fourthly, in many Arab states, access to quality education is lacking particularly for special needs children and those living in rural areas, slums, mountainous regions.

What I found particularly encouraging is the optimistic tone of our discussion and the “can do” mentality that underlined many of the interventions.

The education goals remain achievable, even in the poorest countries. Yes - our scorecard is mixed and Yes - we will need to redouble our efforts especially in increasing access to quality education for marginalized groups of society. But, as we heard from several speakers, we know what needs to be done, and there are many examples of interventions that work, like the Friendly School Initiative in Egypt, which provides mobile schools to reach out to street and working children, or the Literacy and Life Skills Development Programme in Iraq, which combines literacy training for girls and women with income-generation and life skills that will lead to job creation and self-confidence, and other initiatives in Jordan and several other Arab countries, just to mention a few.

While there are no ready made solutions, the different threads of our discussion suggest that countries which have integrated some of the following five policies have provided greater learning opportunities, leading to positive education outcomes.

Firstly, removal of financial barriers to education, whether direct or indirect costs of learning;

Secondly, provision of gender-friendly basic services in teaching and learning environments, such as food, water, sanitation, safety;

Thirdly, increased national and international funding for education, and better targeting of resources towards the most vulnerable;

Fourthly, eradication of gender stereotypes in curricula and teaching practices.

Last but not least, innovative use of information and communication technologies, especially for reaching the marginalized.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

At WISE opening session, His Excellency Dr. Abdulla bin Ali Al-Thani explained that the Qatar Foundation does not see WISE as a standalone event but rather as an effort to establish a network of education experts and innovators. Similarly, we see the work of ECOSOC on education not as a one time event, but as a continuous effort to support countries in achieving their education goals. We therefore hope that you will remain engaged with us beyond this regional meeting and will join us for the Ministerial Review in July 2011 in Geneva.

Mr. Minister, we look forward to your presentation in Geneva, where Qatar will share the highlights of today’s discussion with the Members of the Council.

Thank you very much.
