

Speech of

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of Qatar**

Opening session of the Thematic and

Interactive Debate on Education in Emergencies

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Mr. President of the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin my speech by extending my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to all those who made it possible to hold this thematic and interactive debate within the UN General Assembly.

I would like to particularly thank the President of the UN General Assembly His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann and your Excellencies, the ambassadors of member countries Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Norway and Qatar, for recognizing a child's right to education and lending your support to the protection of education in areas of crisis.

I am deeply appreciative that Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann endorsed the objectives of the Al Fakhoora campaign by participating in one of its functions. This campaign was launched by the students of Qatar in a show of solidarity with their counterparts in Gaza against the latest military invasion which denied them their basic right to education. Mr. Brockmann's support confirmed the commitment of the international community to support just causes all over the world.

I am here today addressing you from this podium due to two factors. First there is my deep belief – despite all the frustrations and disappointments deepened by the war on Gaza – in the sacred nature of this cause to which I dedicate my efforts. The right to a quality education is, I believe, the perfect path to bridge the gap between different cultures and to reconcile various civilizations. Without such a right, the values of liberty, justice and equality will have no meaning. Ignorance is by far the biggest danger and threat to humankind.

The second factor in my presence here today is the subject of this thematic and interactive debate: the dire need to protect the right to Education in Emergencies.

It is my view that the General Assembly's gathering of decision makers and experts to discuss Education in Emergencies indicates recognition by the international community of this problem. I believe it also recognizes the threat this issue presents to the principles

and foundations of society, and reflects that we share a concern about the fragility of the international will and its ability to adequately address it.

I am certain you will grant this sensitive and delicate issue your utmost care, and that your conclusions today will put us on the right track to preserve the principles and regulations of international charters.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education in Emergencies signifies that the right to education is being threatened by natural causes such as tsunamis but also, unfortunately, by man-made causes.

If you will allow me, I would like to shed light on the second aspect of this equation, because this type of interference constitutes a serious danger and requires a clear and substantive response and not just a creative slogan.

And this is precisely our concern. The vision and strategies that we have implemented since the Dakar conference to meet our 'Education for All' objectives today seem very far from being achieved, despite our best efforts and goodwill. And we are only a few years away from our 2015 deadline. In addition, the developmental goals adopted by this Assembly in September 2001 are, unfortunately, out of reach as well.

Therefore, the threat to the right of education stands as a wall between us and the achievement of our objectives, a threat to which no one but we can respond.

Can we, as an international community, truly understand what it means to have students deliberately denied their basic right to education because checkpoints are preventing them from reaching their schools and universities?

When electrical power is purposefully withheld from their institutions, can we truly understand the impact – that this also restricts their ability to learn and benefit from their laboratories and information technology services, causing them to fall decades behind the rest of the world?

Do we realize the danger of losing a society in its entirety when its elite group of writers and academics are targeted and killed in cold blood? How can such a loss be compensated?

Do we realize what we risk when educational institutions bearing the UN flag, a symbol of righteousness and legitimacy, are bombed?

Do we comprehend that what is being built is a culture of despair rather than a culture of hope and life?

How do we feel when we hear about plans for mobilizing children and forcefully preventing them from going to school?

This is a simplified but accurate description of the current situation. And indications are that it is worsening rather than improving.

We acknowledge that it constitutes a denial of the right of education. However, in the best of scenarios, we only voice our condemnation. And sometimes we even hear people trying to justify it, hoping that the primordial cause will be put on hold while we address other important issues or become obsessed over a detail.

Sadly, our will to rebuild areas torn by crisis and war will never compensate for the loss of one human mind, and neither will it compensate for the lost opportunity to secure an education.

As such, when we talk about the right to education, we cannot neglect our duty and commitment to uphold this right by merely expressing sympathy or making only a symbolic gesture that fades with time. We must live our belief that the values of justice and equality still rule.

Mr. President of the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today, full of hope, to build a better future for our children and the generations to come.

We share the same concerns and, even though our analyses might differ, our goals are the same. Our collective aim is to preserve and protect the sacred cause of education in all its aspects, in accordance with the rules and foundations of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And because we believe in the value of life and appreciate the culture of peace, we have a duty to save our children from frustration and despair. That is why we must make sure, through accountability, to combat anyone who fails to show respect for life and humankind and who does not treasure the right to education.

Upholding this right also requires protecting educational institutions and personnel from attacks during times of conflict. This can only be ensured through the presence of two essential elements: sanctions and punishment.

To that end, existing international conventions must be activated and their content enhanced. We must establish, through profound and serious reflection, a practical and operational international mechanism to prohibit attacks on the right to education, punishing the perpetrators and obliging them to appropriately compensate for any losses, human and otherwise, that result from their actions.

That is why I would like to call on this debate to pave the way for an executive work plan under the auspices of the United Nations, with the participation of all countries. Let us put in place a mechanism for the protection of educational institutions in areas of conflict and crisis, making them a safe haven.

I would suggest that we accomplish this by organizing regional conferences with the participation of decision makers, alongside experts on this issue, in order to deepen the discussion and prepare studies and reports. These efforts must then culminate in an international conference which Doha is willing to host, and where all the results and conclusions can be presented.

Thank you very much. May we have a fruitful and productive discussion.