



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

24 November 2008

Excellency

Following the initiative by Member States in document A/63/500, and in keeping with the priorities of the sixty-third session outlined in my inaugural address, I will be convening an informal General Assembly thematic debate on access to education in emergency, post-crisis and transition situations-caused by man-made conflicts or natural disasters at a date to be determined in the Spring of 2009 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

I have repeatedly urged Member States to devote special attention to those most vulnerable. The rights and needs of children, youth and adults, and in particular girls and women, in situations of armed conflict and humanitarian disaster must not be limited to the provision of shelter, clothing and food, but rather afford special attention to their right to education.

In 2000, at Dakar, the global community committed itself to achieving education for all, including those affected by conflict and disaster. In emergency and reconstruction situations, education saves lives and helps to sustain the quality of life. Failure to address this most fundamental of rights is to deny to a generation of children that today live in adversity, the free exercise of their future rights, as adults, to full participation in our human community.

The right to education was established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Convention on the Rights of the Child further obliges States parties to ensure, without discrimination of any kind, access to education for all children living in their territories at all times. Article 28 of the Convention defines the right to free and compulsory primary education, urges States to develop accessible secondary and other levels of education, and encourages international cooperation in educational matters.

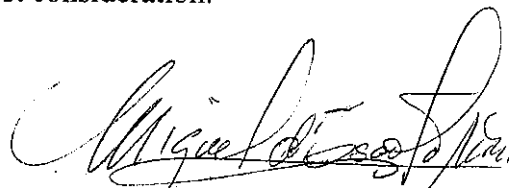
A thematic debate at the General Assembly on education in situations of armed conflict and humanitarian disaster would address the largest gap in fulfilling this right, and allow for improved coherence and monitoring of current work and dialogues. By safeguarding the right to education in emergencies, Governments and the international community will send out a forceful message about its commitment to ensure a future of promise to those most vulnerable.

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

The upcoming panel will bring together Member States and representatives from civil society, the United Nations system and other international organizations to promote partnerships and explore options the UN system might take to effectively address this important issue.

A detailed program of the event, including a background paper, will follow shortly with a tentative list of special invitees to address the debate. I look forward to your cooperation and personal participation.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann', written in a cursive style.

Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann