

*“In the midst of conflict, education can be life-sustaining and lifesaving. It is the basic right of every girl and boy, vital for their enjoyment of all other human rights and critical to the future of any society.”*

Vernor Muñoz  
UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education



## **The Interactive Thematic Dialogue of the UN General Assembly on Access to Education in Emergency, Post-crisis and Transition situations-caused by Man-made Conflicts or Natural Disasters**

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United Nations Headquarters, New York

The President of the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, at the request of Member States, and in partnership with specialized agencies and organizations, is convening an interactive thematic dialogue on 18 March to examine the most salient issues relating to the right to education in emergencies and to underscore the need to include education as an integral part of humanitarian response to conflicts and natural disasters.

The day's dialogue will be organized into three separate, but interrelated, panels comprised of education specialists, practitioners (including teachers and learners from the field), and representatives of Member States and implementing agencies. They aim at providing Member States a unique opportunity to hear key voices and engage a range of practitioners / actors involved in the delivery of education in emergencies.

The various panels will examine the special educational needs of learners (children, youth and adults), teachers, and education personnel in emergencies; the institutional challenges and hurdles that countries, donors, multilateral agencies and organizations face on the ground; and the emerging trends and 'lessons learned' that can inform international and national efforts to improve humanitarian response and performance **during the period from early response to an emergency through the initial stages of reconstruction**. Experts agree that this is the period when the worst violations of the right to education are most likely to occur.

The day's activities will provide a space for dialogue on how the international community, and in particular Member States, can improve access to and the quality of education during emergencies. It will examine the concepts that underpin the right to education in emergencies and the responsibility of States and other actors in meeting this fundamental right. It will also identify the shortcomings of existing normative frameworks and the work underway to address them.

In addition, panelists will also offer specific recommendations for action by Member States, donors, intergovernmental organizations and civil society to improve humanitarian response, including the protection of children, teachers and schools from attack.

## **BACKGROUND: Education as an integral part of humanitarian response**

Natural disasters and armed conflicts are becoming more frequent around the globe, affecting an increasing number of children and families, and the education community. Of 75 million children out of school worldwide, more than one-half -- live in countries affected by armed conflict. This population represents the single largest gap towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal on the right to primary education for all by 2015, a fact that is of growing concern within the international community. Millions more are affected by recurring natural disasters, particularly in impoverished regions, compounding the problem even further. Yet despite these pressing needs, the so-called “emergency-affected States” receive approximately 43 percent less funding than countries with stronger polities and government institutions.

While there has been some progress in recent years, humanitarian aid continues to emphasize the three classic areas of food, health and shelter. Education remains least funded in humanitarian responses, even though it offers both lifesaving and long term benefits. It is increasingly recognized that emergency response must go beyond mere subsistence of those affected. Humanitarian assistance must also seek a return to “normalcy” or, more significantly, ‘life with meaning’. Assuring children and young people hope for a future is an integral component of education.

Access and continuity of their fundamental right to education are essential for children and young people to develop the knowledge and life skills needed for the full exercise of all human rights. Nonetheless, donors persist in their reluctance to consider education as part of aid and humanitarian response, despite the fact that emergency situations can often last for many years or that natural disasters are recurring phenomena in many parts of the world.

States are mandated to meet the right to education at all times and in all circumstances. Yet having the mandate is not the same as knowing the best way to implement it on the ground. This is one of the primary reasons for holding an interactive dialogue on the right to education in emergencies. It is precisely in the immediate aftermath of natural disasters or emergencies that educational systems and opportunities are destroyed. The limited attention to delivery of education as part of the humanitarian response, and the relative absence of clear programmatic principles, indicators or funding, have hindered the ability of national governments to better facilitate a return to normalcy.

Even when education is included in emergency response, it often lacks a rights-based approach that emphasizes quality education and a tailoring of educational services to address the diverse needs of learners in specific emergency situations. The failure to address this gap is having a lasting adverse impact on children and young people, and on the well-being of their communities and societies.

States and donors may feel reluctant to implement a rights-based approach to education in emergencies believing emergency situations offer little certainty in way of sustainability or a return on their investment. Some States may feel they lack the resources and conditions to ensure their adequate delivery. However, recent trends offer new points of reference, including minimum standards, guidelines and indicators, as well as operational and funding options, and perhaps most importantly, ‘success stories’ from around the globe on how educational goals can be set and achieved under even the most daunting of circumstances.

These examples showcase key elements of good policy, program design, delivery and evaluation necessary for success and offer States, donors, multilateral agencies and organizations insight on how to define ‘success’, and equally important, *how* to achieve it.

## **PANEL ONE : Education in Emergencies –Why We Need to Act Now**

For a large part of the international community, education is a facet of development rather than a humanitarian activity, and much less, a human right. Even the "Sphere Standards", which codified a system of principles of humanitarian aid, referred to human rights but left out education. As a result, some countries are falling short of the responsibility enshrined in numerous international instruments which define the nature and the content of the right to education.

Although UN agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF are committed to a rights-based approach to education, large sectors of the international community, including other UN agencies, intergovernmental organizations, development banks, the private sector and civil society are not. Funding levels for education in emergencies remain low and insufficient. Few development partners include education as part of their humanitarian policy, and the 35 Conflict Affected Fragile States (CAFS) receive only 14% of the total aid to education. Moreover, donors are not meeting previous commitments and the global financial crisis makes it more likely that this trend will continue. Yet time lost and opportunities missed today will have a lasting impact on the lives of learners, affecting their ability to fully exercise other human rights, and to a life with dignity and purpose.

This first panel will set the stage for dialogue by examining education in emergencies, including the conceptual, institutional, operational and normative gaps that hinder the effectiveness of the humanitarian response. It will examine the legal and political frameworks that drive international response to emergencies, including the priorities of States, donors and multilateral agencies, as well as clarify the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders.

Special attention will be given to the critical and multiple dimensions that education in emergencies have for children, adolescents and young people in crisis situations, including the need for psychosocial support to cope with and overcome trauma, as a pre-requisite for other learning to occur. The panel will draw upon the work and cutting-edge research of independent experts, special rapporteurs and education specialists relating to the right to education in emergencies and the impact of armed conflict on children.

The need for and the significance of education in emergencies is analyzed in detail by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Mr. Vernor Muñoz in his June 2008 general report on education. Muñoz urges the international community to commit more wholeheartedly to the implementation of the Right to Education in emergencies and recommends as a first step that **this Right should be recognized by States, donors, multilateral agencies and organizations as an integral part of the humanitarian response to conflicts and natural disasters.** He also recommends that States include as part of their emergency preparedness plan, concrete measures to guarantee the continuity of education during emergencies.

Key questions that panelists will address include:

- What makes ‘education in emergencies’ different than education in general, or in situations of ‘normalcy’?
- How soon should educational services be resumed or offered in emergencies?
- Why is continuity, permanency and predictability in education so critical?
- What practical measures can education stakeholders undertake to further a rights-based approach to education in emergencies?

*"If children do not get the opportunity to continue their schooling immediately following an emergency, they are being denied the knowledge and opportunities that education provides. A good school offers a physical safe space for learning and the hope for a brighter future. Being in school protects children from further harm that may follow an emergency, such as the risk of trafficking, child labour or being recruited as child soldiers."*

Charlotte Petri Gornitzka

## **PANEL 2: How to Make it Work – Investing in Learners, Investing in Success**

This panel will examine the elements and role of good design, and proper monitoring and evaluation of education during emergencies. Often countries facing armed conflict or humanitarian disasters (both man-made and natural) may find the challenges to be overwhelming and insurmountable. While the challenges can appear daunting, in particular for States with scarce material and financial resources, practitioners and implementing agencies will share what they are learning on the ground through the delivery of programs in a wide range of settings. In particular, they will demonstrate *how* it is possible to develop innovative, flexible and strategic responses that afford opportunities not only for continuity in education, but in some cases, even enhance the quality of education.

Panelists will identify critical elements for better policy design, implementation and delivery of education programming. The speakers will propose indicators for measuring success and practical ways to ensure the medium and long term impact and sustainability of the education achievements obtained during emergencies. They will also suggest ways to meet the challenges of securing adequate funding and technical assistance to implement quality education in emergencies.

Particular attention will be given to the international efforts to advance a rights-based approach to education in emergencies and to improve coordination, data collection and information sharing through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Education Cluster (IASC) and the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE).

The INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction, launched in late 2004, represent a major development in the approach to education in times of crisis. Together they articulate a minimum level of educational quality and access for those affected by crisis. Panelists will show how these standards can be used to improve existing programming, and in particular, how they can contribute to more strategic interventions in

complex and chronic emergencies, where the effects of insecurity and violence on children and the education system are multifaceted.

Lastly, speakers will address how institutions and individuals responsible for early response to emergencies can work with and in support of victims rather than acting for them, including school age children; and provide examples for promoting greater community involvement in meeting educational goals.

Key questions that panelists will address include:

- How do we define “success” and how do we measure it?
- How can Member States, donors, multilateral agencies and organizations ensure a good return on their investments in education in emergencies?
- In the absence of longitudinal studies, what does literature on education reveal in terms of emerging trends and “lessons learned”? What ‘good practices’ can be identified?
- What key education components should we include in early response to emergencies? During which stage should education programming include conflict resolution, critical thinking and respect for universal humanitarian principles and rights?

### **PANEL THREE** Shared Accountability: Ways to Move Forward

Indiscriminate or direct attacks on children attending school or school facilities are common around the world despite the fact that schools are protected under a range of international conventions and international humanitarian law. Students, teachers and administrative staff frequently become targets of intimidation, recruitment and indoctrination, and school premises are often damaged, destroyed or occupied --by fighting forces in conflict areas. The number of reported assassinations of academic staff, and the bombing and burnings of school buildings has risen dramatically in the past three years.

If this trend is to be reversed, more decisive and concerted action by Member States and the international community must be taken to reduce the incidence of education-related attacks and to end impunity for persons and armed groups, including regular armies, that attack schools, students, teachers and humanitarian aid workers. In addition, resources must be allocated to create more sophisticated and publicly accessible databases in order to examine trends in the scale, nature and targeting of attacks, as well as qualitative research into their motives; and to bring education-related crimes to trial. Achievement of Education for All goals by 2015 will remain at risk until concrete and effective measures are taken to put an end to attacks on schools and to guarantee the quality of and sufficient resourcing for education in emergency contexts.

Panelists will identify gaps in existing regulatory frameworks and monitoring arrangements to address the issue of violent attacks, press for an end to impunity for such attacks and extend the application of human rights instruments to cover violence against education.

The panel will review current practice in monitoring and reporting under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 of the six grave violations of the rights of children affected by armed conflict, including attacks on schools and violation of the right to education.

Speakers will suggest ways Member States and the international community can strengthen enforcement mechanisms, as well as supplement them with specific measures of prevention and protection.

The panel will also examine how the work of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Armed Conflict and UNESCO can contribute to strengthening reporting and follow-up actions regarding attacks on students, teachers and schools. Particular attention will be given to the role of the UN General Assembly in ending impunity and ensuring that monitoring mechanisms are applied systematically and on a non-selective basis.

Panelists will also explore ways local governments, organizations and communities, can develop effective strategies to guarantee access to education during emergencies. Drawing on concrete examples, panelists will demonstrate how children can act as advocates in defense of their right to education.

Key questions that panelists will address include:

- How can State and non-State actors be held accountable for violent attacks on schools?
- Whose responsibility is it to protect civilians—particularly learners and teachers—in situations of armed conflict?
- What practical steps can the broader international community take to protect school children, education personnel and schools during emergencies?
- What is the role of the UN General Assembly in addressing impunity?

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