

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT THE 56TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

10 April 2023

**Ambassador Gheorghe Leucă, Chair of the 56th session of the Commission on Population and Development and PR of the Republic of Moldova to the UN,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,**

It is a pleasure to address the Commission at the opening of its 56th session.

Over the week ahead, you will address a topic of great urgency: population, education and sustainable development.

We cannot speak on education without first raising one of the gravest educational challenges of our time, the plight of Afghan women and girls. It's essential that we stand united in our call for the de facto authorities to reverse their bans on education and employment, while continuing to support women's movements and innovative solutions.

Just as in Afghanistan and everywhere, quality responsive education is a human right and a source of personal dignity and economic empowerment.

It is critical to realizing the full potential of our communities and to advancing sustainable development.

Yet today, progress towards SDG 4 is seriously off track, and we face a triple crisis in education – one of equity and inclusion, quality and relevance to equip current and future generations with the skills they need to thrive in a fast-changing world.

Despite many promises and some advances, there are 263 million children and youth out of school - 60% of them between the ages of 15 and 17, a critical age for preparing young people for adulthood.

It is just as concerning that many of those in school are not learning – nearly 70% of children in poorer countries are unable to understand a basic text by age 10, many due to the effects of poverty and malnutrition.

Ultimately, we need to reimagine and transform our educational systems if they are to be fit for purpose. We need to learn how to learn throughout our lives, and learn to live in peace with one another and with nature.

Education is a crucial long-term investment for sustainable development but to succeed decisions must be informed by an understanding of demographic trends and as the World Population Report tells us “we must radically rethink how we talk about population change”.

Key to our discussion is the link between education, technology and demographic trends. These are central to the acceleration of the SDGs and the issues we want clear commitments to at the SDG Summit this September.

Our ability to understand such trends and to act upon the opportunities and challenges they represent is essential: ranging from the opportunities that come from the demographic dividend in Africa to the shifts that societies with ageing populations will need to make in their education system, labour markets and health systems. With the ultimate goal being increasing prosperity and well-being for all, strengthening people’s ability to be agents of their own lives will be central, we must empower, and support women and girls achieve their reproductive goals.

Excellencies,

Last September, the Secretary-General convened the Transforming Education Summit to shine a spotlight on this global crisis.

The message was clear. We cannot do more of the same.

We need initiatives to get every learner climate-ready and connect them to the internet and digital innovations – this is especially important for our young women and girls from the global south who are most excluded. As we heard during this year’s Commission on the Status of Women, digital poverty is the new face of gender inequality.

We need to enable crisis-affected children and youth to access quality education, empowering all young people to be effective contributors to our collective future.

To this end the Transforming Education Summit generated new resources to support education in lower-middle-income countries and created new momentum for a youth-led global movement.

It helped advance commitments for a new vision for the future of education that Member States can build upon and advance in the context of the 2024 Summit of the Future.

Our meeting today is part of our efforts to keep a strong momentum.

This includes targeted actions to deliver quality early-childhood education and lifelong learning for all.

We also need to consider how best to make the most of our demographic diversity.

Of the 8 billion people on our planet, two-thirds live in a place with below-replacement level fertility (around 2 children per woman), while a smaller number of countries are still growing vigorously.

Some countries have a median age of around 50, others around 15. And countries with the highest fertility rates contribute the least to global warming yet suffer the most from its impact.

Technology is dramatically changing the nature and availability of employment. Its potential to financially include women from the informal sector remains unrealized.

Older persons will form a majority of the global population by 2050, and that technology has the potential to help us address their needs and optimize their contributions to society. This is the same for persons with disabilities.

We need clarity on how to proceed despite some unknowns and we need to connect the dots.

Education inclusive of women and girls helps lower risks of child marriage, female genital mutilation and gender-based violence.

It contributes to lower fertility rates, better outcomes during childbirth; greater autonomy for women and girls in decision-making, and increased access to employment.

And it helps tackle patriarchal systems and prejudices that are deeply rooted in unequal systems of power – and have a detrimental impact on women, men and society.

When gender bias is present from the start, girls are more likely than boys to never be enrolled in school at all.

They are also less likely to complete upper secondary school and account for one-third of graduates in STEM-related fields.

We urgently need more girls in STEM education and to build pipelines for their advancement in the science and technology sectors.

In support of this, we need deliberate interventions through research and development, and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms, to spur young women's access to relevant technology and technical skills so that they may continue their education and have equal opportunities to contribute to science and innovation.

Without the skills and ideas of half our world's population, we cannot find solutions to global challenges that work and benefit all.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,**

2023 is a pivotal year for the Sustainable Development Goals.

As we look forward to the SDG Summit this September, we know we need to optimize the demographic dividend, close the digital divide and ensure quality future-oriented education.

We also know that harnessing technology is key to all of this. to

Your continued leadership is invaluable.

The adoption of an action-oriented outcome by this Commission can galvanize action towards the full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development's Programme of Action – and help us maximize our human potential, with equality and dignity for all at the centre, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

In that spirit, I count on you and you can count on us. I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.
