

ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review 2011

Statement by
H.E. Mr. Kristinn F. Árnason
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

High Level Segment



Permanent Mission of Iceland
to the International Organizations in Geneva

Geneva 6 July 2011

Mr/Madame chair,

Education is a basic human right. Education is a key driver of economic growth and social change. Education holds the key for future generations.

As the recent report of the Secretary General clearly demonstrates many challenges exist to ensuring all the world's children an education. These are currently exacerbated following the global financial crisis, armed conflicts, the effects of climate change and other current global and national trends. The international community must seek ways to address these challenges.

Girls are particularly vulnerable in this regard, especially those in conflict areas or rural areas in the developing countries. Fortunately, educational opportunities have improved, generally speaking, in the last decades. The enrolment of girls and women in schools and educational programs has steadily increased, although worrying gaps remain, especially as regards access to post primary education.

There is however a risk that the advances made in the last years will be lost as a result of the combined financial and food crises and other international trends. Global unemployment remains at record highs for the third year since the start of the global financial crisis. During economic downturns girls' access to education and health services can deteriorate much more rapidly than the progress made during periods of economic growth.

Another important factor undermining the progress in ensuring girls' access to education is climate change and environmental crises that disproportionately affect sectors and activities associated with women in rural areas in developing states and emerging economies. As a result, women face greater hardships associated with household activities and the daily struggle for survival. This can lead to children, especially girls, being taken out of school to help with domestic work which locks families into vicious cycles of poverty as children fall behind.

In a recently adopted Strategy for Iceland's Development Cooperation, education is identified as a key priority sector. Through development cooperation, Iceland has for many years emphasised increasing education opportunities for women in developing countries through adult literacy training. An emphasis has been given to building schools where children can grow and develop in a proper learning environment and the retention of girls is a strong focus. Literacy is crucial for the economic empowerment of women, and is key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family as well as to increasing women's participation in society and decision-making.

Mr/Madame chair,

The international community must seek innovative ways to ensure that all children receive education. School feeding and nutrition programs have proven very useful, not only do they reduce drop out rates but also further contribute to children's learning capacity once they are in school.

Education is fundamental in the quest for gender equality. Providing better access to education for girls will advance women's rights, increase economic growth and reduce poverty, and thus contribute to a more just and better society. It is my Government's strong conviction that gender equality and the empowerment of women are a prerequisite for sustainable development, peace and security in the world.