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Statement by
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At the General Debate of the
High-Level Segment of the
Economic & Social Council (ECOSOC)
Substantive Session 2011

Geneva, 06 July 2011

**Statement by Dr. Nafisa Shah, Member National Assembly and Chairperson of
Pakistan Commission on Human Development at the General Debate of the High-Level
Segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Substantive Session 2011
(Geneva, 1500 hrs 6 July 2011)**

Mr. President

ECOSOC High-level Segment plays an important role in providing opportunity for informed and in-depth discussions on the themes of great significance to all of us. It is, therefore, a privilege to participate in this year's General Debate on "Current Global and National Trends and Challenges and their Impact on Education".

The development commitments we made at the turn of the century have attained iconic identity in the shape of Millennium Development Goals - the MDGs. These goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Achieving goals in the field of education, therefore, is not only intrinsically important but also is a must for accelerating progress on all other MDGs.

Education is the starting point for development of human personality, for a dignified life, for reducing social as well as economic inequalities and discriminations and for creating environment for accountable and transparent governance. Achieving universal primary education is the first step on the way to stable, prosperous and progressive human society.

The deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals is fast approaching. Our progress, however, falls short of what is required. The global financial and economic crisis has further limited the pace of progress towards achieving the MDGs and in certain cases reversal of the gains made in the last decade is very likely.

The high unemployment, a direct result of the crisis, has devastated livelihood of many households in the developing countries and unfortunately the first impact of decrease in household income is most often on family's education expenditure. The crisis has also reduced developing countries' fiscal space which in several cases has resulted in lowering of social sector development budgets including allocations for the education sector.

The food and energy price hikes has further compounded the problems, especially of poor households. Any increase in food expenditure, which on average constitutes 50-70% of poor household's income, reduces money spent on education.

The increased frequency of climate related emergencies are adding to the misfortunes of the most vulnerable segments of society. The devastations caused by floods, as seen in my country last year, as well as other natural disasters in other developing countries have destroyed the development gains made over years including education related infrastructure. The damage to livelihoods and education facilities has pushed many out of schools putting the achievement of education goals at a great risk.

Mr. President,

Though children enrolment improved in the previous decade yet the quality of education in many developing countries does not meet the requisite standards. Moreover, the current model of top down, supply driven education is not producing the desired results. There also is

a mismatch between the education provided and the market requirements. Education systems are not tuned to the knowledge based, information technology driven 21st century market environment.

Mr. President,

The resource availability is one of the biggest challenges to the prospects of realising Millennium Development Goals on education. Our inability to address the resource constraint in developing countries will have far reaching consequences for the attainment of education for all goals.

The World has resources, financial as well as technical, to address the challenges. What we require is the political will. What we need is a strong conviction that educating our future generations is our moral duty. We need to act now. We must go beyond the business as usual approach.

It is a fundamental duty of national governments to overcome the weaknesses and deficiencies of their education systems and redouble their efforts to provide quality education to their children. And it is equally essential that commitments of assistance made by developed countries are honoured. The developing countries not only need financial assistance for improving their education sector infrastructure but also need technical assistance particularly for improving quality of education and teacher training.

Mr. President

Pakistan's education sector is also facing the challenges I have just outlined. We have been successful in increasing the gross primary school enrolment as well as gender equality. We are, however, making efforts to bring down the dropout rates. Similarly the quality and relevance of education needs improvement. The high poverty and unemployment rates have further exacerbated our challenges with regard to universal primary education.

Cognizant of these challenges, the Government of Pakistan has not only introduced a new education policy in 2009, with specific focus on the issues of access to and quality of education, but has also strengthened constitutional provisions on right to education. We have also granted autonomy to our federating units on all aspects of education policy.

Incentives in the shape of direct payment of fees to schools or provision of in kind assistance such as edible oil/flour to households in adverse circumstances to reduce dropouts have been introduced. These initiatives have built in preference for girl students. The Government of Pakistan has also started extensive teacher training programmes to ensure quality education to our children. Moreover, an effort is being made to align the learning experience of students with domestic market demands as well as of global economy. In this regard, special internship programmes have been launched with focus on priority industries.

We are encouraged by the results of these policy interventions. I take this opportunity to thank our development partners for joining us in these efforts. Government of Pakistan is committed to educate each and every one of our children to enable them lead lives they aspire and contribute to economic growth and social cohesion in their country.

I thank You