



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Permanent Representative of  
the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, at the 2011 High-Level Segment  
of the Economic and Social Council  
Geneva, 6 July 2011

Mr. President,

1. The theme of this Annual Ministerial Review, "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education," is of urgent importance to the overall achievement of integral human development well into the future of the human family. Education is, first of all, a fundamental right of the human person and the validity of all development policies is measured by their respect of the human right to education. In fact, education plays a fundamental role in achieving sustained and equitable economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development and reducing inequity and inequality. It is indispensable to protect and affirm the transcendent dignity of every man and woman.

The international community has made significant progress in reducing the number of children without access to primary education. However, as of 2008, some 67.5 million children remained out of school, and according to the 2011 Global Monitoring Report, if the current trajectory is maintained, the international community will not be able to attain the goal of universal primary education by 2015. Among the Least Developed Countries, three countries report enrolment rates below 50 per-cent, and only 17 countries report rates above 80%.

This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Declaration of the Right to Development. On this occasion, we should recall that a more just social context, including deeper commitment to efforts at the eradication of poverty, will positively influence access to education, most especially for children living in low-income, rural, and marginalized circumstances. However, the quality of life depends not only in the overcoming of economic poverty, but on the cultural level, the quality of human relations, and the quality of inter-personal relationships among people, goals that could be achieved only through education.

Also to be noted is that some 28 million children not attending school live in countries affected by conflict. In addition, many people live in environments affected by political

violence, organised crime, exceptionally high murder rates or low-intensity conflicts. Such forms of so-called "lesser violence" can cause as much, if not more, destruction than more formal wars and civil conflicts. People in such situations are more than twice as likely as people in other developing societies to be malnourished, three times as likely to be deprived of primary school attendance, and almost twice as likely to die in infancy. Thus, a deeper commitment by the international community to peace, reconciliation and solidarity can exert a positive influence on the enjoyment of the right to universal education.

Fundamental human rights are inter-related and require respect of one for the other. In particular, the right to education cannot be isolated from the promotion and implementation of greater justice and equity within and among societies. As the ECOSOC Committee has stated, the right to education "is the epitome of the indivisibility and interdependence of all other human rights."<sup>1</sup> In accord with the U.N. Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, primary education must be obligatory and freely accessible to all (art. 13, 2-4).

2. The State has an essential responsibility to assure the provision of educational services. At the same time, the right to educate is a fundamental responsibility of parents, churches and local communities. Thus public institutions, especially at the local level, organizations of civil society and also the private sector, could offer their unique and respective contributions to the attainment of universal access to education. In this context, civil society should also be able to provide alternative services, implement innovative actions, and even exercise a critical function that can mobilize social forces to assist the State in carrying out its overall educational responsibilities by respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Moreover, the critical role played by civil society educational programmes should be recognized and encouraged. In fact, the educational system functions correctly when it includes the participation, in planning and implementation of educational policies, of parents, family and religious organizations, other civil society organisations and also the private sector.

For centuries, religious groups have supported basic education and, in fact, were the first institutions to provide basic education to the poorest populations. We may look, for example, at the experience and the direct contribution of the Catholic Church in the area of education. There are some 200,000 Catholic primary and secondary schools located in every continent of the world with some 58 million students and 3.5 million teachers. They are characterized by an open and comprehensive approach without distinctions of race, sex or social condition. The human person always remains at the centre of the educational endeavour, since education is genuine when it humanizes and personalizes so that, in turn, the person may humanize the world, shape culture, transform society, and construct history. In close contact with the students' families, whose freedom to decide the education of their children is a natural right, Catholic schools accompany students toward

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, 1999, par. 2.

maturity and the ability to make free, reasoned, and value-based decisions. While safeguarding their identity, these schools welcome students from every ethnic and religious background and socio-economic class.

3. In our global world, the key role of education becomes even more essential to enable the peaceful coexistence and mutual appreciation among all sectors of society. The simple transmission of technical information is inadequate. The goal of education has to extend to the formation of the person, the transmission of values, such as a sense of individual and social responsibility, a work ethic, a sense of solidarity with the entire human family.

In this educational process, the State should respect the choices that parents make for their children and avoid attempts at ideological indoctrination. The Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights says that "The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, ... to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities ... and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."<sup>2</sup> And this includes the right to make moral judgments on moral issues. Religious organizations are uniquely positioned to promote equitable outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families. Moreover, such educational institutions often reach those communities, for example, in rural and remote areas, that remain uncovered by governmental policies. The continuing engagement of religious organizations in advocating for and implementing the right of every person to basic and good-quality education enhances the achievement of the authentic education-related objectives of the Millennium Development Goals. For the best educational results, a close cooperation between parents and schools must be fostered.

Mr. President,

4. As proposed in the Outcome Document, my Delegation believes that the whole educational effort should be socially contextualized within a spirit of justice and through practical measures that make education better suited for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to accomplish this, for example, the State and civil society must assure high-quality formation of teachers so that they recognize their role as a special mission and so that their service is recognized accordingly. To reach the desired goal of universal access to education, all elements of society must participate. Civil society, especially religious organizations and parents associations, stands ready to offer its contribution, but public financial resources must be made available in order to assure fairness for its strong engagement in educational processes in line with parents' choices. With regard to children and young people who already have been excluded from the educational system, society can and must ensure a "second chance"; once again, religious organizations are well-

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<sup>2</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted 16 December 1966 and entry into force 3 January 1976, Art. 13, 3.

placed to offer sensitive outreach through programmes for drop-outs, children with special needs, and other vulnerable children. This extra effort renders future benefits to society in terms of productivity of beneficiaries from such special programmes that pay off in prevention of crime, disordered behaviour, and high unemployment rates. Information and communication technology, kept at low cost, can open a new chapter in training possibilities, mobile education as well as in education management.

5. Policymakers tend to see education as mainly a key to economic survival. Learning skills such as good literacy and numeracy combined with habits of the mind such as creativity makes education functional to the economy. But the horizon needs widening. As Pope Benedict XVI observes: "...the person grows to the extent she experiences what is good and learns to distinguish it from what is evil, beyond the calculation that considers only the consequences of a single action or that uses as a criterion of judgement the possibility to doing it." The educational responsibility of all who have at heart the city of man and the welfare of future generations requires both a continued engagement for a free and accessible primary education as well as for its quality. Secondary and higher education should also be made available and accessible. Education, in fact, is not only "directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity," but it is also a means for the participation of the individual in a free society and an instrument that promotes mutual understanding and "friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups".<sup>3</sup> No less fundamental aim of education is the transmission and development of common cultural and moral values in whose reference the individual and society find their identity and worth.

Mr. President,

Meeting the international goal of education that boys and girls everywhere be able to complete a full course of primary schooling is therefore an ineludible requirement. The imposition of economic conditionalities that hurt this objective would be miscalculated solidarity. Openness to partnerships from civil society and the private sector can effectively contribute to the common objective when fairness in the sharing of resources is taken into account. In conclusion, it is the same concern that moves all stakeholders to action in our rapidly changing and interconnected world, to make children and young people the best hope for the future.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., art 3, 1