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**REMARKS TO HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

Geneva, 4 July 2011

Your Excellency Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe, President of
ECOSOC,

Your Excellency Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the General
Assembly,

Honorable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you at this high-level segment of
the Economic and Social Council. I especially welcome your
decision to focus on education this year.

Let me begin with a story from rural Kenya, as reported
by UNESCO last year.

Ibrahim Hussein, 19-years-old, teaches at a school in
Aqualaar, a village in the country's arid north-east. As the
morning sun edges over the horizon, his class of 30 pupils,
mostly children of Somali herders, listens attentively to his
opening lecture.

The classroom, little more than a barren patch of grass under a shady tree, offers neither desks nor chairs. A small blackboard hangs from the branches. The pupils scratch out lessons in the sand with sticks.

What is unusual about this scene is not the rugged, no-frills schooling — a familiar sight to students from poor countries.

Rather, what is distinct is simply the fact that Mr. Hussein, and his fellow teachers, were actually present and teaching when UNESCO visited the school.

Recent research suggests that teacher absenteeism is a severe yet under-reported problem throughout the developing world, especially in rural areas. One study by the World Bank found that nearly one-in-five public school teachers was likely to be absent on any given day.

Why the dreadful numbers? The causes are many and varied.

But if we can succeed in explaining teacher absenteeism — which is linked to poor resources and even poorer incentives — we can simultaneously unlock the riddle to many other education woes.

News on the education front is hardly all gloom and doom. Primary enrolment has expanded dramatically.

Still, the general education momentum appears to be stalling in many ways.

For example, early enrolment gains at the start of the decade were large. But progress has since slowed measurably.

Moreover, the pervasive nature of poor-quality education in rich and poor countries serves up additional notice that getting kids into school is only half the battle.

This is why this High-Level Segment is so critical.

It offers an opportunity to assess progress on both positives and negatives.

On the positive side, net enrolment of the world's primary school age population rose from 82 per cent in 1999 to 88 per cent a decade later.

But on the negative side, roughly 67 million children remain out-of-school today.

This high-level segment plays an important role in channelling ideas and resources to where they are needed most. You can, for example, advise governments on how to close the global primary education financing gap, estimated at \$16 billion.

This segment also keeps pressure on stakeholders to bring about positive change.

You can boost productivity by drawing attention to the ways education funds are spent and monitored. You can point the way toward better integrating education into national development strategies. And you can encourage the conditions that allow innovation to flourish.

Our immediate goals are to widen access, improve quality and harness the power of education to generate gains elsewhere — on health, poverty, gender equality, the environment and all the other Millennium Development Goals.

ECOSOC must continue its strong leadership in this effort.

Encouragingly, 34 countries have already delivered National Voluntary Presentations over the past four Annual Ministerial Reviews; eleven more will do so this year. I salute them all and encourage others to step forward to share their own development wisdom.

With 2015 fast approaching, and with our efforts badly off-track towards some of the MDG targets, ECOSOC should consider ways to accelerate progress and prepare for the period beyond 2015.

We must work together, Member States and the UN system, towards more practical policy recommendations, to better implement existing mandates and towards synergies that will enable us to “deliver as one”.

This is true for our broad development efforts, and it is what we must do to achieve our education goals.

Progress on education demands particular fortitude. Unlike investments in vaccines, which pay instant health dividends, education investments typically take years to mature.

With resources stretched and budgets tight, political commitment will be tested more than ever. Together, we can see the job through.

Thank you.
