



The President
of the
Economic and Social Council

Opening Address

**H.E. Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe
President of the Economic and Social Council
Permanent Representative of Zambia to the United Nations**

**2011 High-Level Segment
Geneva, 4 July 2011**

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HE Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the General Assembly
Madam Deputy Secretary-General,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to extend to you all, a warm welcome to the opening session of the Economic and Social Council's 2011 High-Level Segment.

It is particularly poignant for me, coming from Africa, that ECOSOC is focusing on the theme of education this year which resonates with my country, the continent I represent and with me personally.

The word education itself derives from the Latin *educere* — “to bring out potential” — and *ducere* — “to lead”.

Potential and leadership: two ideas at the heart of the education development agenda. Admittedly, there is much work to be done to realize the potential of every child, woman and man through their right to quality education.

This, ladies and gentlemen, will require far-ranging reforms. ECOSOC can help by adopting a Ministerial Declaration that puts education high on the policy agenda and by bringing governments together to share their best practices and experiences.

This week's Annual Ministerial Review will once again provide a unique occasion for countries to do this.

Starting with this morning's keynote addresses, we are very fortunate to have some of the world's preeminent policy makers and experts leading our discussions. Eleven of our Governments have engaged a range of stakeholders in preparing their National Voluntary Presentations.

On Wednesday and Thursday, these presentations will take place parallel to the 'General Debate' sessions, which will be informed by the Secretary-General's new education reports.

In addition, a series of special dialogues starting later this morning will address some of the most topical aspects of the education debate: mobilizing resources and partnerships; education and sustainable development; the special challenges of Africa and the LDCs; and education for the future.

How has ECOSOC been preparing for this year's Review on education? Let me begin with the regional meetings.

Doha was the site of the first such meeting back in December, where regional experts focused on novel approaches to expanding education opportunities for females and other marginalized groups in the Arab states.

In February, Chonburi played host to the regional meeting for Asia and the Pacific. A key message from this meeting was that advance on the education goals will lead to progress on all other development goals of poverty, health, gender equality and the environment.

Reinforcing equity in education was the main emphasis at ECOSOC's April preparatory meeting for Africa, held in Lomé. Boosting access to basic education remains a high priority on my home continent, particularly in war-torn areas.

The year's final preparatory meeting was held in May in Buenos Aires. Latin America has made strong strides towards universal enrollment in primary education, but quality remains a major concern.

Later this morning, education ministers from these four host countries — Qatar, Thailand, Togo and Argentina — will highlight the outcomes of their respective meetings, and offer their own invaluable perspectives.

Inter-governmental forums of this nature are central to our work, but so, too, is engaging civil society and the private sector.

This past February, the Council held its third annual philanthropy event in support of the Education for All goals. Turnout was outstanding and the message clear: the time has come to embrace the private sector as full partners in development — and with it, the expertise, capital and creativity necessary to achieve better education results.

ECOSOC also strives to stay current with the latest forms of communication. Earlier this year, for example, it harnessed the power of social media with two lively internet "e-discussions", attracting education experts, policymakers and youth from dozens of countries.

Distinguished ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

We are not shy to embrace new or challenging issues, for that is the nature of our remit. At the national, regional and global levels big issues confront us in the quest to make education a reality for all.

Issues such as expanding access: in the decade to 2008, an additional 52 million children enrolled in primary school, and yet, some 67 million still remain out-of-school.

Poor quality is another concern. Standardized tests in numerous countries reveal a significant number of students lacking basic reading, writing and math skills — even after years of formal schooling.

Secondary school graduates themselves are often ill-prepared for the workforce; witness the stubbornly high levels of youth unemployment across much of the world. The skills mismatch between graduates and employers is partly to blame. Over-regulated labour markets, it is also true, have priced many youth out of jobs as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, continued progress in education will require many things:

Recruiting, training and retaining good teachers; embracing cost-effective technology; and improving accountability, to name just a few.

Doing this will necessitate raising new resources — and spending them more wisely.

Fundamental education reform of this sort is certainly ambitious, but the potential for success is very much alive. With the Council's help, political leadership can, and must be mustered. We must build a workable consensus for action.

A consensus in which Ministers of Education involve the Ministers of Planning and Finance, Youth, Gender, Health and Labour, among others, to design curricula that teaches skills that are relevant and needed by the economies and private sector job markets.

A consensus that brings innovative solutions to challenges of access to education, particularly, to the girl child in developing countries — especially the least developed.

A consensus that acknowledges that basic education is no longer enough. We need to provide tertiary and technical education if we are to develop our youth into employable and/or economically viable citizens.

A consensus that begins to discuss the post - 2015 MDG framework in education.

A consensus, ladies and gentlemen, that acknowledges that there should be greater burden sharing between the developed and the developing countries and between the private sector and governments in the education efforts of developing countries as a way to alleviate the negative effects of brain drain on the latter, particularly, the least developed.

Is such a consensus beyond our reach? I don't think so. Is it too big a task? Certainly not bigger than the power of the collective force of the political will of our governments, the private sector and our civil society. It can be done, it must be done. I invite you to join hands and make a difference in the lives of millions.

I thank you.