

Video Statement by President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinistö at the Leaders Roundtables of the Transforming Education Summit on 19 October 2022

Mr President, Secretary-General, Distinguished Delegates,

I want to thank the Secretary General for convening this first-ever Summit on education. I also thank Sierra Leone for their leadership.

Education is a fundamental human right. It is also indispensable for the exercise of other human rights. Access to quality education for all is pivotal for building peaceful, democratic societies. It is the best guarantee for our common future.

Humanity is faced with compounding threats to peace, security and stability. The climate crisis, Russia's illegal invasion on Ukraine, rising food insecurity and energy prices have devastating impacts globally. Innovation and skills are needed if we are to tackle global challenges. Therefore, we need to strengthen education systems. We also need to foster critical thinking and media literacy skills to safeguard our democracies.

Our message today must be very clear: Education is an investment. It is an investment in equality and peaceful, democratic and resilient societies.

Education is a necessary building block for any prosperous society. It is not a luxury you can only afford after crises have passed. In Finland, we have invested in education even during the most difficult times. This has been our recipe for a better future. In 1921, shortly after our independence and a brutal civil war, Finland passed a law on compulsory education. In 1943, in the middle of the Second World War, we were the first country to guarantee a free school meal. Today, Finland is a proud advocate for the Global School Meals Coalition.

Our comprehensive school system, considered one of the best in the world, was established in the middle of the first oil crisis. Last year we extended the compulsory education to 18-year-olds.

In transforming education, Finland commits to raising the level of education among the population and strengthening equity, quality and wellbeing in education. We also commit to investing in teachers. They are the key to improving education.

Finland commits to an active global role in advancing the right to inclusive, equitable and quality education, including comprehensive sexuality education. This is our priority in the UN human rights council and in our international partnerships. Gender equality and the right to education for the most vulnerable, especially persons with disabilities, is at the core of all our efforts.

Secretary-General,

Finland fully supports your vision for transforming education towards the UN Summit of the Future.

Thank you.