



44th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to education

Item 3 – 03 July 2020

Ms Koumbou Boly Barry – Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. Presentation of the report:

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the right to education

Summary of the report:

_ **Past failure** to build strong and resilient education systems and to fight entrenched inequalities has opened the door for **a dramatic impact on the most vulnerable and marginalized**, to which no temporary measure adopted in haste could have fully responded.

_ **Online distance learning** should only be seen as a **temporary solution** aimed at addressing a crisis. The **digitalization of education** should never replace **onsite schooling with teachers**, and the massive arrival of **private actors through digital technology** should be considered as a major **danger for education systems** and the right to education for all in the long term.

_ Acting within a **human rights framework** is crucial to ensure that responses to the pandemic do not jeopardize the right to education and do not increase the suffering of the most marginalized.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, **1.5 billion learners have been affected by school closures** in 194 countries. This crisis taught us fundamental lessons.

Countries working hand in hand with trade unions, teachers' associations and genuinely using technologies, managed to ensure a continuity of education throughout the crisis.

The **private sector** will play an increasing role in education. We need to prevent education from being **commercialized**. The **Abidjan principles** are fundamental guidelines in this regard.

There were already more than **700 million illiterate children prior to the pandemic** and 50m people did not have access to education before the pandemic. Inequalities and denial of the right to education are problems that **pre-date the Covid-19 crisis**. As we re-open schools, we need to consider **all the potential learners** who have already been missing out their right to education.

With Covid-19, we have the impression that all efforts should be focused on one area, to the detriment of all others. But **all human rights are interconnected**. We cannot forget one right to protect the others. There must be a **continuity in funding education when we build back better**. We cannot separate educational goals from health, water, sanitation, and economic issues. It is this multi-dimensional aspect that we need to focus on.

Remote learning and teaching are raising major issues. It is a great short-term solution during the pandemic. Platforms must be public and free of charge. **No one can replace a teacher, not even remote technologies**. They are the most important ingredient of education. We need to listen to them and ensure that they have skills and competencies useful for remote teaching. We need thereby to **focus on training for teachers**. The Covid-19 liberated the potential of teachers, they played a crucial role throughout the crisis.

We have many examples proving us that **education can continue despite the Covid-19 pandemic**. In the recovery from the crisis, we need to look at these examples to build back better.



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INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH STATES (52 states):

The interactive dialogue was consensual, as the **right to education was widely and deeply affected by the Covid-19 crisis.**

States shared their **support for the work of the Special Rapporteur** and commended her for the recommendations issued in her report.

The main issues raised by states concerning the impact of the Covid-19 on the right to education were:

- The **negative impact of school closures** on the right to education.
- The topic of **remote schooling**: a long-term solution for some and a short-term response to the crisis for others. While some countries affirmed that remote learning constitute the **future of education**, a vast majority of countries observed that **on-site schooling is the best way** to ensure education and that we should go back at it as soon as possible.
- The need to **bridge the digital gap** in order to **implement remote schooling** through new technologies, especially in low- and middle-income countries.
- The **exacerbation of inequalities** touching vulnerable populations, including their enjoyment of the right to education.
- The **role of teachers** throughout the crisis and the need to train them in order to adapt their skills in providing remote schooling.
- The need to **continue funding the education sector** when building back better.
- The **risk of privatization of education.**

States also shared the view of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of **inequalities pre-dating the Covid-19 pandemic**. Problems such as **school drop-out, illiteracy, access to education, discrimination**, and the enjoyment of the right to education should be addressed when building back our societies. **The Covid-19 is an opportunity to address past weaknesses.**

Webcast can be accessed here:

- Part 1: <http://webtv.un.org/live/watch/id-sr-on-education-7th-meeting-44th-regular-session-human-rights-council-6169110472001/?term=#player>
- Part 2: *Soon available on UNTV*

States and International Organizations that took the floor during the discussion (52 states):

Qatar (country concerned), Tunisia (country concerned), Estonia (one behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries), State of Palestine (on behalf of the Arab group), European Union, Burkina Faso (on behalf of the African group), Togo, Holy See, Malaysia, Russia, Djibouti, Sierra Leone, Libya, China, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, France, Pakistan, Senegal, Armenia, India, Portugal, Iran, Malta, Jordan, Indonesia, Botswana, Morocco, El Salvador, Iraq, Sudan, Egypt, Maldives, Nepal, Marshall Islands, United Arab Emirates, Georgia, Bahamas, Ecuador, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Ghana, Paraguay, Nauru, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Cambodia, Tanzania, Cuba.

International Organizations: UNESCO, UNICEF