

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 47th SESSION

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (24-25 June 2021)

Ms. Koumba Boly Barry, Special Rapporteur on the right to education:

- The report [A/HRC/47/32](#) explores the cultural dimensions of the right to education and, more specifically, **the right to education as a cultural right**. In this sense, it specifies that countries **must adopt this approach** as it makes the right to an inclusive and quality education more substantial. The report also highlights that the **lack of cultural relevance of education systems hinders the realization of the right to education**. Hence, the challenge is to provide **inclusive and quality education, which allows the development of cultural diversity and individual cultural rights, reflects this development and builds on it**.
- In addition, the report details the main principles to restore education to its full cultural relevance and emphasizes that the key element is **to see educational life as a living relationship between actors (students, educators, organizations and other associated actors) and sets of knowledge that form common resources**. It also enumerates the key values of educational life and stresses **the importance of the Abidjan Principles on the right to education**.
- The report concludes that **cultural diversity should be recognized as a fundamental characteristic of contemporary societies** that must not only be reflected but also valued in the education systems, formal and non-formal.

During the presentation of the report, the SR stressed that States must **ensure that the sociocultural dimension is present in all education systems**, and that cultural diversity should be understood in the broadest sense, not only linguistic or religious but also in the social sense which **includes poverty and gender**. Regarding implementation, **States should decide what societies they want to achieve**, if it is a peaceful and resilient society, **education systems must be linked to the cultural dimension**. **Laws within countries must also reflect this approach**. Countries should also invest in **training teachers and families to follow this approach**. Moreover, States should install **open pedagogy** systems which make it possible to harness the potential of each individual.

Finally, the SR called on countries to **focus on resolving inequalities in their education systems, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic**. States should address the **non-participation of key actors and players like trade unions and teachers in the education discussions**. They should not be seen as adversaries and instead, **teacher networks, apprentices and students should be listened to** in order to build peaceful and resilient societies.

In response to **China's statement about the report's false information regarding the absence of minority languages in the country**, the SR highlighted that the **principle of integration of all diversities needs to stand out for each social group by using their cultural values**. Additionally, the SR mentioned she is open to receiving from China the corrected information.



Interactive Dialogue

The majority of the speakers commended the report presented by the Special Rapporteur and highlighted that education systems must reflect **learners' identities and lived realities in all their diversity**. **School curricula and activities** should reflect and be adaptable to diversity, too. Many speakers expressed their countries' commitment to making **efforts to promote a multicultural education system** by introducing measures to support students from multicultural backgrounds and by **maximizing education support** that meets the **needs of the most marginalized, especially women and girls, children in crisis, and persons**

with disabilities. Even though the COVID-19 has taken a toll on education systems worldwide, **education must be prioritized in national recovery plans**.

Portugal agreed with the SR that schools needed to have **adequate levels of autonomy** to adapt their specific activities to the cultural diversity of their constituency. **Egypt (on behalf of the Arab Group)** said that the pandemic had affected the efficiency and effectiveness of educational systems in **developing countries in particular, including a number of Arab group countries**. The **Republic of Korea** agreed with the SR that **cultural diversity should be understood in a broader perspective including diversity linked to specific situations such as poverty or disability**. The **USA** emphasized the country had championed international basic education and was the **largest bilateral funder of international basic education**.

Nigeria (on behalf of the Geneva Core Group on the Safe Schools Declaration) and **Iraq** called on States to endorse the **Safe Schools Declaration** as it is a **pivotal initiative to change the serious trend of constant attack on schools**. **Libya** called on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Educational, Learning and Cultural Organization to intensify their cooperation with the country in order to **improve capacity-building in Libya**. **Cuba** emphasized that the **State must be the sole responsible for providing education**. **Armenia** said that **Azerbaijan exploited education to cultivate anti-Armenian hatred**. **Azerbaijan** argued that this hatred was also promoted in the **Armenian education system** and mentioned that schools were attacked by Armenia hindering the right to education of many.

China said that countries should increase their support for the educational resources of **developing countries**. Also, it expressed its concern about the systemic racial discrimination faced by **African American and Asian groups in the allocation of educational resources**. Finally, it mentioned that **the report was inconsistent** when it said that China reduced the use of minority mother tongue learning, as the laws that in China guarantee and respect the rights of ethnic minorities. **Venezuela** highlighted the **negative impact that UCMs** on the realization of the right to education and asked the SR to consider this in the next report. **Pakistan** asked the SR what the logic and consequences of imposing alien cultural values on local education was **regarding sex, identities and sexual orientation**. The **Holy See** raised its concerns regarding the **recurrence of the concept of "cultural diversity" in the report as it did not yet enjoy international recognition**. Also, a commitment to sincere dialogue among stakeholders, that **goes beyond the approach of the proposed Principles of Abidjan**, was necessary to attain a robust and holistic approach to education.

Russia said the report expanded the interpretation of the Special Rapporteur's mandate which automatically **lowered the coefficient of its efficiency**. The SR should turn her attention to the **discrimination suffered by the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic republics and Ukraine**. **Ukraine** mentioned that the Russian occupation administration in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine prohibited **crossing the checkpoints to those who wished to enter educational institutions** in the Government controlled territories of Ukraine, and that It continued to ignore the ICJ Order to ensure availability of education in the **Ukrainian language in the occupied Crimea**. **Iran** said that the report inserted a **totally false claim about the country in its paragraph 40**.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (58 country delegations):

European Union, Finland (on behalf of Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden), Egypt (on behalf of the Arab Group), Nigeria (on behalf of the Geneva Core Group on the Safe Schools Declaration comprised of 22 endorsing States), Qatar, Sierra Leone, France, Paraguay, Indonesia, Libya, Portugal, Cuba, Israel, Czech Republic, Republic of Korea, United Arab Emirates, Senegal, Bahrain, Iraq, Armenia, Burkina Faso, China, India, Maldives, Morocco, Algeria, Venezuela, United States of America, Egypt, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Malaysia, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Pakistan, Timor-Leste, Georgia, El Salvador, Croatia, Mauritania, Djibouti, Holy See, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Yemen, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Gabon, Malawi, South Sudan, Iran, Cambodia, Mauritius, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Other observers: **UNICEF:** More than 900 million children are still affected by full or partial school closures, and many may never return to school. Children **should be allowed to resume in-person learning** as soon as possible. **Member States should prioritize the re-opening of schools to fulfil their obligation to realize the right of every child to education.**

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (10):

Association apprentissage sans frontières, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, EDMUND RICE INTERNATIONAL LIMITED, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Instituto de Desenvolvimento e Direitos Humanos – IDDH, International Humanist and Ethical Union, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEL), Instituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco, Rutgers.

The majority of the NGO representatives highlighted the negative socio-economic impact that COVID-19 had over education systems and called on States **to take on measures aimed to solving inequalities**. Education systems should recognize that **cultural diversity should be reflected at all levels of the education system**. States should **avoid using cultural diversity as a pretext for violating or limiting the scope of international human rights law**.

Some NGOs referred to specific cases: **Pakistan** was mentioned to have schools that **still followed a biased education system towards religious minorities**; The **Indian Government** was called to make necessary policy changes to make the education system more inclusive; Regarding how the **Tibetan language** has been marginalized in **China**, the Chinese government was called on to **respect its obligations according to the Child Rights Convention and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**; **Brazil** was called to listen to the input of young diverse groups in the education programs that are implemented in the country; Obstacles to cultural diversity, freedom of thought and intellectual honesty were identified in schools in some parts of **Africa, Latin America, Hungary, Russia and India**. Finally, an NGO emphasized that States must **ensure the health and well-being of adolescents** by respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to sexuality education by providing and implementing **rights-based comprehensive sexuality education in and out of schools**.

To watch full ID with the SR on the Right to Education, refer to UN Web TV [part 1](#), [part 2](#)