

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 53rd SESSION

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

27 June 2023

In her opening remarks, **Ms. Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education** presented her report titled: “Securing the Right to Education: advances and critical challenges”. She reviewed the achievements of the mandate over the years. She stressed that the right to education is a right to life-long learning and to free quality education, regardless of circumstances, location, or other identities. She urged governments to commit to inclusion, modifying educational content, teaching methods, approaches, structures, and strategies. She highlighted that the participatory approach is crucial to ensure that education is inclusive. She focused on the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, supported by UNESCO, calling for a new social contract for education. She encouraged States to guide their thinking and action with UNESCO Commission’s recommendations. She deplored the gender apartheid and the denial of the right to education for girls and women in **Afghanistan**. She was concerned about restrictions and violations targeting education, academics, and scientists, and about the impact on educational systems of increased societal polarization as well as the rapid commercialization and digitalization of education. She also highlighted protection frameworks must be enhanced in the context of emergencies, including conflicts and climate change.

Regarding her visit to **UNESCO**, she commended the alignment of thinking between the mandate and UNESCO on the right to education as a right to life-long learning. UNESCO has been very active in leading the discussions on the future of the right to education. She considered that for UNESCO to deliver its mandate, Member States need to guarantee core funding. She highlighted that UNESCO monitoring mechanisms are too weak and the need to open discussions to reinforce these with a view to strengthening its independence. She was concerned about UNESCO’s engagement with commercial sector entities, as underfunding opens the door to more partnerships with private actors and carries a risk of undue influence on the education agenda, both at the international and national levels. She encouraged UNESCO to ensure more transparency about its partnerships with private actors.

Mr. Gwang-Chol Chang, from **UNESCO**, commended the SR’s report and highlighted several challenges that lie ahead regarding the right to education, including the need for better investment in early childhood; climate change; and digitalization which has exacerbated inequalities. He remarked UNESCO has been strengthening the lifelong learning dimension of education and advancing the rights agenda in the context of a series of inter-governmental meetings. He expressed that UNESCO shares the SR’s suggestion that each incoming mandate holder for the right to education would benefit from the opportunity to conduct an initial visit to the organization. He commended the SR’s support of the Evolving Right to Education Initiative. Finally, he remarked UNESCO aims to reinforce the visibility of the right to education globally and advocate for its enforcement.

Interactive dialogue

The majority of the country commended the work of the Special Rapporteur and highlighted national initiatives to advance the right to education in their territories. They concurred on the importance of developing education systems that can respond to modern challenges such as climate change and the digital revolution, including artificial intelligence. The most vulnerable populations encounter the most problems accessing the right to education, in particular women and girls, children with disabilities, and children in conflict and rural areas. **Afghanistan** denounced the **Taliban** for denying women and girls the right to education and promoting radicalization and terrorism in school curricula.

Luxembourg and Brazil emphasized that conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the global education crisis and the need to redouble efforts to guarantee full free secondary and at least one year of free pre-primary education, and to achieve universal access and quality education for all, as it represents the basis for achieving sustainable development. **Namibia and Brazil** underscored the importance to consider a new international legal instrument to formally guarantee this. The **EU** stressed that human rights education is an integral part of education. States must consider the unintended negative effects of digital education tools, such as disinformation, bullying, abuse, and hate speech. All forms of violence and abuse in schools must be prevented. **Benin** highlighted the importance of technical and vocational education and training as an integral part of lifelong learning. **Côte d'Ivoire** considered education to be a key component in the fight against poverty. **Timor-Leste** highlighted that environmental education should be a priority.

Costa Rica joined the SR's call for a new social contract that strengthens the commitment of States and other parts of society to guarantee education as a public good. The **UAE** called upon the Council to strengthen cooperation between all stakeholders in the education sector at various international, regional, and national levels. **Armenia** condemned the six months long blockade of the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijan which continues to affect the safety, availability, and accessibility of the right to education. **Azerbaijan** denounced Armenia for instrumentalizing education to foster hate and attack the country's education infrastructure. The **United States** condemned China's government-run boarding school program that forcibly separated one million Tibetan children from their families. **China** stressed that boarding schools in **Tibet** are voluntary and reflect the wishes of the people, and condemned the United States for not guaranteeing low-income people equal access to higher education institutions and for the low numbers of people of African descent that can access the education system.

Iraq highlighted the importance of the mental and physical health of children. **Venezuela** called upon the SR to investigate the devastating effect of illegal UCMs on the right to education. **Yemen** denounced the Houthi militia for violating the children's right to education. **Lao People's Democratic Republic** encouraged the international community to strengthen cooperation and provide support to developing countries in the field of education. The **Holy See** stressed that educators and educational institutions should not seek to erase or discredit their community's culture and values.

Ukraine condemned Russia's war of aggression which has affected the education system in the country and disrupted thousands of children and teachers. **Georgia** denounced the Russian Federation for violating the right to education of children in the occupied territory of Ossetia. **Poland** condemned Belarus authorities' repressions against the Polish minority by reducing the possibility of education in the Polish language. The **Russian Federation** condemned Western countries for the scale and depth of discrimination against Russians and Russian-speaking children in educational institutions. **Bangladesh** expressed concern about the privatization trend in the education sector. **Ghana** and **Pakistan** were concerned about the impact of digitalization on the right to education.

NGOs highlighted the importance of access to quality education for all and, for the most vulnerable populations. NGOs urged the SR to consider the crucial role of communities, civil society, and parents, especially mothers, in shaping children's educational journey. Another NGO urged the international community, to provide financial and other support to faith-based schools.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (85 country delegations):

Luxembourg, European Union, Oman, Lebanon, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Pakistan, Timor-Leste, Qatar, Kazakhstan, El Salvador, Lithuania, United Arab Emirates, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Israel, Sierra Leone, Egypt, Czechia, Armenia, Italy, Burkina Faso, Viet Nam, Slovenia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Spain, Costa Rica, France, United States of America, Mauritius, Indonesia, Iraq, Maldives, Brazil, Malaysia, Morocco, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Venezuela, Cameroon, Ireland, South Africa, Togo, Jamaica, Gabon,

Namibia, India, Malawi, Oman, United Republic of Tanzania, China, Gambia, Djibouti, Libya, Niger, Senegal, Yemen, South Sudan, Jordan, Afghanistan, Georgia, Holy See, Mali, Benin, Cuba, Russian Federation, Romania, Algeria, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Bolivia, Poland, Thailand, Nepal, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Suriname, Ghana, Ukraine, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Chile, Azerbaijan, Cambodia.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie – OI, Commission Nationale Indépendante des Droits de l'Homme du Burundi, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education - OIDEL (Joint Statement), Catholic International Education Office (Joint Statement), Society for Threatened Peoples, Centre d'Etudes Juridiques Africaines (CEJA), Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women - ARROW (Joint Statement), International Catholic Child Bureau, World Jewish Congress, Instituto de Desenvolvimento e Direitos Humanos – IDDH, Make Mothers Matter, Instituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco.

International organizations (2): UN WOMEN, UNICEF.

To watch the full meeting refer to UN Web TV [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).