
Educate to Increase Hope and Decrease Fear in a Time of Intersecting Pandemics

Joint Statement on the International Day of Education

24 January 2021

Education is a human right, essential to well-being and dignity, and is key to achieving the United Nations Agenda 2030. Further, an ethos of global citizenship is required in order to fulfil this bold, people-centered, universal, and planet-sensitive development framework. (Gyeongju Action Plan)

*The nexus that joins education and development is critical and must be clarified: what kind of education and what kind of development are we aspiring for?...Education involves appreciation of life and preparation for living in community, taking into account local and global solidarity and diversity of cultures...Curriculum provides the framework for teaching; sustainable development provides the environment for lifelong learning.
(Outcome Document, CoNGO Civil Society Development Forum 2011, Geneva)*

Education is a human right

1. On the occasion of the International Day of Education 2021, we affirm with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Education (UNESCO) that education is a human right, a public good and a public responsibility. This assertion owes from the universal declaration that “everyone has the right to education,” and that it “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

2. Education is an essential element of the economic and social development of individuals and peoples. Quality education is a crucial factor in efforts to reduce poverty, improve the health and living conditions of populations, and build societies that are more inclusive, peaceful and sustainable.

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Inclusion and equity are crucial for transformative education

3. The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration said it compellingly: “Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all. We therefore commit to making the necessary changes in education policies and focusing our efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities, to ensure that no one is left behind.”

4. Quality education enables people to acquire basic knowledge and skills, while promoting creative thinking, understanding and respect for human rights, equity and cultural diversity, all of which are fundamental to more responsible and sustainable human development. Education is a right that must be guaranteed by the state and strengthened by civil society as a whole and apply to the population as a whole, regardless of race, gender, age, class, or ethnicity.

Education as common public good requires public funding

5. Access to resources is fundamental to quality education. Education as a common public good must receive considerable public funding. The COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardized that access and funding. Pre-existing inequalities owing to other social ills of pandemic proportions—racism and xenophobia, climate change, forced migration, violence, including gender violence, and poverty and hunger— have imperiled access to education and the achievement of not just SDG4 but the other 16 goals.

6. Even as we recognize increased pressures upon the public-school system as it operates under already meagre and overstretched education budgets, we worry about a policy to succumb to the push of subsidizing private schools that may cause the further privatization and commercialization of education that have been creating inequities and segregation concerns in many countries.

7. The realization of the right to quality education and promotion of transformative adult education and lifelong learning for all is threatened by an increase in the number of learners pushed out of schooling and other learning opportunities because of poverty, loss of incomes and livelihoods, among several of the fallouts of the extended lockdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic.

8. Even before the COVID crisis, the costs of reaching the poorest and most vulnerable learners are higher. Added attention was required to address the many barriers—locational, social, cultural, economic—preventing their participation in education. The challenges to ensuring learning continuity for these groups in the COVID-19 context are multiplied and the cost implications for delivering alternative education modalities for such groups are necessarily higher.

Education at primary and secondary levels is universal and adult education primordial

9. Educating our children and young people must be primordial. We join with the international community in ensuring universal primary and secondary education, aiming for “all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.” Basic education

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must include early education, ensuring that pre-primary aged-children have access to early learning opportunities to give them a fair start. Parents, families and guardians must receive as much support as they need to make the learning process and environment viable and sustainable, both for the education of children and for transformative adult education and lifelong learning.

10. Young people must have the means and conditions to attain professional and social integration. We must develop interdisciplinary strategies to increase the participation of young people in civic life. Such strategies require financial, social, and political investments, and the inclusion of civil society organizations, families, teachers and employers as active participants. Research shows that young people and marginalized learners deserve second-chance education, including gender-just skills education to provide decent work and psycho-social support and safe spaces for learning and interactions.

Online education has blessings and perils

11. Education is key to sustainable development. But the pernicious COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted both sustainable development and education, and increasingly relocated familiar education venues like the school classrooms into online learning. The blessings as well as the perils of technology-induced teaching, learning and communication has exposed the wide digital divide.

12. We take note that a reliance on on-line learning exposes learners far more than earlier to online sexual abuse and cyberbullying. Monitoring and responding to these will need the active intervention of the school system and definitely entails added financing.

13. We join in this statement that digitalization and the internet “have brought false facts and new dangers, but they have also made possible new ways of teaching and learning. One area affected by these changes is non-formal education, where the majority of training programmes for young people have moved away from physical encounters and on to the Internet.” We also agree that digitalized education (in schools, universities, youth activities, and training) “may offer a path to the future, if the actors involved can guarantee that such structures are available to all and that the rights of participants are respected, even in a digital environment.”

Safety and wellbeing is crucial at education venues

14. Education is about both the learner and the teacher. To enable education systems to deliver quality education, we must ensure adequate financing for teacher training, digital support, as well as ensuring their safety and well-being during the pandemic and when school reopens.

15. We advocate equally and urgently for the insurance of school safety, physical distancing, smaller classes, provision of enhanced sanitation and hygiene facilities, psychosocial and remedial support, alongside the restoration of other services, such as school feeding programmes, will all entail additional investments on top of the regular capital expenditure in order to respond to the pandemic.

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Education must be portable and transferable across borders

16. Educational portability, whether for economic migrants, international students, displaced persons, or refugees, is now a requirement for our increasingly globalized world. Education and training that can be qualified and quantified is the currency for mobility of global citizens and the standards upon which workforces sustain themselves around the world.

17. Within the context of the International Day of Education and the raging COVID-19 pandemic, we jointly recognize the importance of education, especially for health and allied professions, to promote the development of global citizens and to allow their education to be verified and recognized across borders. Cutting-edge technologies to restore and store the credentials of qualified health professionals are crucial today especially given the shortage of health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

18. Access to health and health education are therefore crucial if we are to sustain life and livelihoods. What the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us in real time is the true determination and commitment of nurses and healthcare professionals around the world. This of course is a product of their lifelong learning continuum from initial education to licensure and practice to continuing education, professional development, and revalidation.

19. As we look beyond the pandemic, the global migration of health workers will likely increase. Within this context, public education efforts around the benefits of global health migration may yet increase hope and decrease fear around foreign-educated nurses and healthcare workers. Research and consultations, and advocacy around the benefits of global health migration are encouraged and some are well in place.

Global citizenship education is critical to multilateral collaboration

20. Central to the educational enterprise is academic freedom and academic excellence. Such freedom and excellence should be protected at all times to ensure the integrity, relevance and capacity for innovation of educational institutions and academia itself. In the wake of increased assaults on institutions of democratic participation and discourse in our communities, and the imposition of ever more authoritarian policies, we must persist in the advocacy for increased education budgets and people's participation and transparency in public policymaking and governance.

21. Globality and citizenship are crucial in the conception of global citizenship education. Globality assumes not just the universality of the right to education but to the right to national belonging which citizenship traditionally is about. These assumptions are not always self-evident. Because the local and the global are simultaneous realities, they implicate each one of us in the specific locales where we do our share of bettering our world and planet. Global citizenship education makes that awareness easier to realize and act upon. It is worth noting here the importance of the use of one's mother tongue or indigenous language, in basic educational instruction, favoring "education for global citizenship in a linguistically diverse world."

22. Education is a means to equitable and just access to knowledge; indeed, access to life and resources for living and livelihoods. We must ensure that all peoples, irrespective of citizenship or national belonging, have access to education and knowledge to pave the way for them to act collaboratively across national boundaries in addressing the challenges they face and that of the planet.

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23. Education must foster civic engagement, democratic participation and social innovation. Now is the time to develop global civic consciousness and innovate on a global civics education that fosters global citizenship and multilateral collaboration. Each of our countries, our people and the planet will be better for it.

Educate to increase hope and decrease fear

24. Education must be about hope, especially because of a surplus of fear in our communities today. It must be invested in the yearning of every person to realize who they want to be, what they want to become, and with whom they want to belong to. Such yearning is already emblazoned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Education can empower human agency and voice and prepare each one not just for survival but for the flourishing of life and living in community with others.

25. Education must expose fear brought about by threats to and violations against the dignity and human rights of persons, such as those generated by increasing racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that alienate and divide people and communities from one another. These, on top of fears and anxieties resulting from intersecting crises of pandemic proportions—health crisis, racial crisis, climate crisis, migration crisis, economic crisis, violence, and more.

26. In the end, education is empowerment and capacity building so that people have the wherewithal of hope, and the capacity to not succumb to fear's excesses. Advocacy and partnerships for education among civil society organizations, and among NGOs, the UN System, and States arising from the above points are urgent.

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The four organizations joining in this statement are NGOs in consultative status with the United Nations. ASPBAE, CGFNS International, and Dianova International, Inc. are full members of CoNGO.

The **Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO)** is an independent, international membership association founded in 1948. As a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the UN, its work relates to the entire United Nations System. CoNGO is a strong advocate for multilateralism to resolve global political, economic, environmental, health and other threats challenges. It encourages NGOs around the world to consult, collaborate and cooperate systemwide with the United Nations to promote and support its work and to draw civil society into an enduring partnership with the world body. CoNGO has a little over 500 member organizations and 37 substantive NGO committees spread across New York, Geneva, Vienna and other regions. For more information, see ngocongo.org.

The **Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)** is a regional network of more than 200 civil society organizations and individuals operating in around 30 countries of the Asia-Pacific. ASPBAE works towards promoting the right to quality education and transformative and liberating lifelong adult education and learning for all. ASPBAE is an NGO in official relations with UNESCO (Associate) and on Roster Status with UN ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council). It works closely with several UN agencies such as UNESCO, especially its offices and institutes in Paris, Bangkok, and Hamburg, with UNICEF, UN ESCAP in Bangkok, and UN DESA in New York. For more information, see aspsbae.org.

CGFNS International, Inc. is a multinational NGO headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. CGFNS is a global standards-setting organization and the world's largest credentials evaluation organization for nursing, helping internationally-educated healthcare professionals live and work in their country of choice by assessing and validating their academic and professional credentials. CGFNS International is an NGO in Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and serves the international community as an expert on health worker mobility and credential evaluation. For more information, visit cgfns.org.

Headquartered in Switzerland, **Dianova International** is an NGO dedicated to supporting and liaising between a network of 25 organizations operating in 20 countries and 4 continent to help vulnerable populations, primarily in the health and social fields. Additionally, Dianova endeavors to promote progress within international organizations and forums addressing social policies. For more information, see dianova.org.

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