

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting UNESCO to this extremely important, etc, etc. As Director for the Division of Basic Education at UNESCO, it is my privilege to address this session on such a crucial topic as eliminating violence against children, specifically highlighting the importance of promoting integrated national strategies on the rights of the child and the role of education in promoting a peaceful and non-violent society.

Peace and non-violence are fundamental to UNESCO's constitutional mission. UNESCO is the lead agency within the UN system for the *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)*. The culture of peace consists of a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and aim to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes through dialogue and negotiation between individuals, groups and nations.

UNESCO's approach to educating for peace and non-violence is holistic and multidimensional. It promotes the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that reflect and inspire the values of human rights, intercultural understanding and tolerance. It links education with a range of activities that address the root causes of violence, from human security to sustainable development. Education for peace and non-violence includes training, skills and information directed towards cultivating a culture of peace based on human rights principles. This education not only provides knowledge about a culture of peace, but also imparts the skills and attitudes necessary to defuse and recognize potential conflicts, and those needed to actively promote and establish a culture of peace and non-violence.

UNESCO holds a key responsibility for ensuring the access of all children to quality education. Violence in schools remains a major obstacle to the achievement of

the goals of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both sets of goals include promoting the right to quality education for all the children of the world.

International research reports that schools may be breeding grounds for violence, a concern shared by UNESCO's partners and Member States. Although schools can be part of the problem, they can also provide the solution. Through school reform and the introduction of policies and curricula that foster tolerance and mutual respect, violent contexts can be transformed. The *UN World Report on Violence against Children (2006)* emphasizes the importance of developing rights-based and anti-school-violence policies and programmes. It underscores that "schools are uniquely placed to break the patterns of violence by giving children, their parents and communities the knowledge and skills to communicate, negotiate, and resolve conflicts in more constructive ways."

As part a follow-up to this report, UNESCO organized '*Stopping Violence in Schools: What Works?*' in June 2007, an expert meeting with an aim to strengthen the integration of school violence prevention strategies into policy and practice. The meeting provided the opportunity for experts, policy makers and practitioners to share experiences and good practice from different regions and countries. Pertinent themes included: the dilemma between the universality of human rights/child protection and the need for cultural specificity in addressing the varying manifestations of school violence; the need for a holistic approach to school violence and cooperation amongst families, teachers, administrators, communities, etc; the importance of children's participation; the need for collaboration and pooling of research and good practices to avoid repetition; gaps between policy/legislation and practice; and the impact of a school's physical environment. UNESCO's concern with the issue of corporal

punishment is also reflected in the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2008) in the context of the safe and supportive school environments for both boys and girls.

In 2009, UNESCO published a guide, '*Stopping Violence in Schools: A Guide for Teachers*' which examines various forms of violence that take place in schools, and offers practical suggestions as to what teachers can do for prevention. It seeks to assist school communities and the broader international community to respond to violence in schools through actions that promote an understanding of the manifestations of violence, the development of capacities to respond constructively to that violence and specific knowledge of alternatives to violence.

It is clear that the key to achieving both the EFA Goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in turn eliminating violence against children in schools involves international collaboration. UNESCO is working with Member States in their efforts to achieve quality basic education, which should encompass values such as peace, non-discrimination, equality, justice, non-violence, tolerance and respect for human dignity. Education should aim at achieving and maintaining a genuine universal human rights culture in our society, and a major challenge is how to ensure the quality of both contents and process of education. Quality education based on a human rights approach means that rights are implemented throughout the whole education system and in all learning environments.

UNESCO's response to violence against children is to promote human rights education, which fosters an inclusive learning environment free from fear. In close coordination with the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), other UN agencies and the Council of Europe, UNESCO plays a major role in the implementation of the *World Programme for Human Rights Education*, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2004, which provides a common framework for action

based human rights education principles. It aims at supporting existing initiatives, building upon the achievements of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) and providing an incentive to further develop and consolidate this long-term commitment made by the international community. The first phase of the World Programme (2005-2009) was dedicated to the integration of human rights education into the primary and secondary school systems. This phase aimed at strengthening the child's capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights, and promoted a culture infused by human rights values. As a follow-up, UNESCO collaborated with the Council of Europe, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to collect good practices on human rights education.

Additionally, the issue of child-centred and safe teaching and learning environments is a key aspect of a human rights education framework. Violence against children was a main concern raised by UNESCO partners, who believe that in order to effectively promote human rights education, human rights principles and values must also exist outside of the school context, in a child's family and community life. For this reason, the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the World Programme (2010-2013) involves human rights education for community guardians of power, including: teachers; civil servants; police officers; government officials; etc. Partners and Member States recognise that there is a need throughout society to create a culture of tolerance and peace, of solidarity and exchange worldwide.

In conclusion, the elimination of violence against children is an international challenge which requires international solutions. Education plays a role in eliminating this violence, through good practices such as teaching communication skills,

providing tools for students to make ethical decisions, eliminating corporal punishment and establishing a non-violent school and community atmosphere. There is a call for co-ordinated efforts in research, data collection, awareness-raising, and advocacy, as well as for a full commitment to strengthening and enforcing legal and policy mechanisms that protect the rights of children. In addition, the participation of children and young people, and the role of civil society and the media in helping schools reduce violence is critical to success. UNESCO, in close cooperation with other partners, has been contributing to these recommendations. We attach high importance to the theme being addressed at this conference on 'highlighting the importance of promoting national integrated strategies on the rights of the child and elimination of violence against children'. We hope very much that meaningful interactions will be generated with UNESCO's work in this important area.

Thank you.