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Mr President, Members of Parliament

It is an honor to take the floor on behalf of the International Parliamentary Network for Education. The first time that the network which has been a permanent observer of the IPU since 2020 has done so.

We are a network of parliamentarians from all around the world who share a commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 - quality education for all.

To educate every person. It sounds basic and yet, more than twenty years into the 21st century, the world is still far from reaching such a goal, as captured in the 2030 Agenda.

And the prospects of achieving SDG 4 become more remote every day.

Instead, education confronts a dramatic triple crisis: a crisis of equity and inclusion, as millions of children are still out of school; a crisis of quality, as many of those who are in school are not even learning the basics; and a crisis of relevance, as many educational systems are not equipping learners with the values, knowledge, and skills they need to thrive in today's complex world.

Conflicts and crises undoubtedly make matters worse.

They drive families from their homes, disrupting their education, leaving them traumatized which affects their ability to learn.

According to Education Cannot Wait, the global fund for education in emergencies, there are 222 million children caught up in crises that are in urgent need of educational support.

By and large we fail these children because we deny them the support and funding needed to get them back into school, whether as internally displaced children or as refugees.

Education in emergency contexts is the poor cousin of an overstretched and unfunded humanitarian sector.

Be under no illusion that the impact of conflict on education is because it is the subject of unfortunate collateral damage. In fact schools are destroyed, books are burnt, learners are kidnapped and teachers are killed deliberately and systematically during conflicts.

That's because the agents of war know the powerful role that education plays in building peace.

An effective and well-resourced education system can be an effective long-term preventative tool that protects, builds and sustains peace before, during and after conflict.

If education is placed at the center of our commitment to peace, it can help empower learners with the necessary knowledge, competencies and attitudes to become agents of peace in their immediate communities.

Honorable members parliamentary action for peace must prioritize parliamentary action for quality, equitable and inclusive education.

You all know there is much to do if we have any hope of delivering the promise of SDG 4 to universal quality, lifelong learning for all.

But I want to take this opportunity to share with you two priorities.

I have no doubt that all of us here are able to read and that we all agree it's a basic, essential skills.

However, in low and middle income countries 70% of 10-year-olds are unable to read and understand a simple written text and the vast majority are unlikely to acquire the ability to do so.

Literacy is the foundation for other learning, for individual empowerment and wellbeing, as well as for social, political and economic outcomes.

So the first priority I want to share is that concerted action to ensure all children are in school and learn how to read is urgently needed.

Parliamentarians are central to turning around this crisis, including by

- Acknowledging the learning challenge
- Mobilizing broad societal support for learning
- Set clear and widely understood targets
- Measure learning to identify problems and focus efforts

The second priority that I want to share is the deadly interaction of poverty and food price inflation, which is leaving millions of children hungry.

In sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, global centers of child hunger, there were almost 180 million children aged five to 18 who experienced under-nutrition in 2021 – a 76 million increase over pre-pandemic levels. One quarter of Africa's schoolchildren are now trying to learn while hungry.

Nothing destroys potential as savagely as hunger. Malnourished children are less able to concentrate and absorb information. They are also more likely to drop out of school, partly because they are not learning – and partly because poverty pushes them into work and child marriage.

Feeding these children at school can transform their prospects and that of their families and communities.

We are part of a global coalition committed to giving every child the opportunity to receive a healthy meal, every day at school - the Schools Meals Coalition.

It's inspiring countries, many of whom I can see in the room today, to end child hunger by investing in the development of their school age children.

They know that human capital - the population of healthy and skilled citizens of a country - is central to a country's development.

Central to its ability to guarantee its citizens their rights and to offer them the opportunity to live in peace and harmony.

You're central to achieving this, to representing the aspirations of your communities for these things, to making laws that enable them, for directing public monies to services that deliver them and to holding governments to account for making these things happen.

Education is the foundation for peace and I urge you do everything in your power as parliamentarians to ensure it is a strong one.