

**Notes for remarks by
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at the first meeting of the high level group on Education for All

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(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Mr. Director-General (Koichiro Matsuura), Sir John Daniel, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen.

I am honoured to take part in this first meeting of the High Level Group on Education for All. I want to assure you today that Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency, is fully committed to advancing the Dakar Framework for Action. That's why I am especially pleased to speak to the issue of building political commitment and partnerships and, of course, turning them into action.

There has never been a greater need for education. Not just because education is a basic need and a human right. Not just because it's a catalyst for better health and nutrition, and a tool to fight HIV/AIDS. But because basic education is also key to fostering democracy and active citizenship, equality, justice, dignity, tolerance and respect for human rights. In the wake of September 11th, these qualities have suddenly taken on new urgency. Education should not simply be about the acquisition of knowledge. It must also promote values that will enable the people of the world to live together in peace.

From a practical perspective, basic education is critical because it is also the foundation for lifelong learning which, in today's world, is what we all need to gain employment and contribute economically to our families as well as to the growth of our local and national economies.

For all these reasons, we cannot individually or collectively stray from the goals of Education for All; we cannot fail in our respective commitments to them.

That's why, in September 2000, world leaders, including Prime Minister Chrétien, endorsed the Millennium Development Goals. In so doing, they recommitted all of us to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, to achieving universal primary education, to promoting gender equality and empowering women, and to working together, as a global community, towards all other aspects of sustainable development. In this process, Canada is determined to work closely with our partners to support local ownership, and above all, to learn from the lessons of the past.

How do we build on the momentum we generated in Dakar ? How do we improve our collaborative efforts to better support national ownership of the process, in order to meet the 2002 deadline ? How can we show political commitment, and how can we support it every step of the way ?

As we struggle with these questions, the Monitoring Report on Education for All is a useful tool. I would like to reflect on the key challenges outlined in the report.

Those challenges begin with our understandings about the E.F.A. process.

We are all familiar with the three operating assumptions in the Dakar Framework, but I think they bear repeating :

- The heart of E.F.A. activity lies at the national level.
- Broad-based partnerships are critical.
- And finally, governments need to cooperate with civil society.

To put it another way, with the Dakar Framework as their roadmap, national governments are in the driver's seat with E.F.A. But we also know they need the involvement of civil society to reach their final destination. Moreover, along this sometimes arduous path, they may well need the support of international partners. I'm struck by how these three principles – national ownership, partnership, and the role of civil society – interact with each other. When they're in synch, they reinforce each other. But if one element is not harnessed to its full potential, the others suffer, and our goals are put further out of reach.

It's no secret, for example, that some countries are struggling to integrate Education for All into their development planning. The Monitoring Report notes that some National Plans of Action for E.F.A. were prepared over 10 years ago. We also know that many plans were prepared without broad input from stakeholders and communities.

Yes, embarking on broad-based consultations is a challenge. However, if we can integrate the three guiding principles of national ownership, partnership and civil society into the process, it also presents a tremendous opportunity. I'm not suggesting that governments start preparing new E.F.A. plans from scratch. However, I do think plans will only be durable if they are the product of broadly based consensus and reflect the views of civil society. This includes teachers, parents and administrators, among others.

And there are other benefits for governments as well. The consultations will increase their knowledge, and enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens, thus strengthening their ownership of the process. In the end, their engagement will be crucial to meeting the recurring costs of educating their nation's children and adults in the generations to come.

For their part, donors can support the participation of civil society in the Education for All process wherever possible and appropriate. This value-added to the process can only generate benefits for all concerned.

I speak from experience. In Canada, we're just emerging from a consultation on our own " donor's action plan " in support of Education for All. Indeed, just as many developing countries have been busy preparing national plans for education reform, my Department, too, has been rethinking the way we can best support the goals of universal primary education for all and the elimination of gender disparities. We, too, have been looking for ways, as donors, to help improve the quality of education and ensure that children, especially girls, complete primary school.

In this process, we've consulted organizations within Canada, in developing countries, and at the bilateral and multilateral levels as well. In fact, we received comments from individuals and organizations in over 40 countries from around the world — from Mali to South Africa, from Jamaica to Slovakia, from Sri Lanka to Thailand. At times, this input stimulated us. At times it even provoked us. But ultimately it enriched our understanding of the challenges ahead, and how we might tackle them.

Let me turn now to reflect on key strategies identified in the Dakar Framework to promote Education for All.

My first point relates to both the level of internal and external finance for basic education, and the need to keep that finance flowing at a predictable rate. In the wake of the economic slowdown exacerbated by the events of September 11, it is clear that all countries will be stretched to provide major infusions of cash. And we now know more than ever how unpredictable events can upset the best-laid plans. But this does not mean that we give up on the pledge we all made in Dakar to ensure that no country seriously committed to Education for All is thwarted by a lack of resources.

So how do we efficiently and effectively mobilize the resources we currently have ?

First of all, we know that resources take many forms. Apart from financial resources, we are all very much aware of the need for, and availability of, human, technical and logistical resources. On this point I note that the single most important repository of knowledge related to education is, of course, UNESCO's network of educators. And donor countries, including Canada, are certainly willing to share best practices.

Secondly, if new resources aren't immediately available, we know there are other ways to prioritize our support for Education for All. In the months following the Dakar Forum, I instructed my department to reallocate a significant portion of its resources in favour of E.F.A. as part of a social development agenda. As a result, CIDA's investments in basic education will have quadrupled by 2005.

Like other development partners, we've seen overwhelming evidence that investing in social development is central to eradicating poverty.

Educated, healthy and well-nourished people are the foundation of prosperous economies and stable nations. Without them, development is impossible. For that reason, Canada has placed more emphasis on four complementary areas : basic education, as I said, health and nutrition, HIV/AIDS, and child protection.

So one way to move the E.F.A. agenda forward is to use existing resources more effectively — and that goes for national governments, as well as donors.

Relieving the burden of debt is another possible strategy to free up resources. Canada and its G7 counterparts have shown strong commitment to the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. We see this as an effective way to provide flexibility, so that developing countries can focus on their priorities, like poverty reduction and education, without the burden of repaying crippling international debts. As many of you know, Canada also declared recently a unilateral moratorium on debt payments for well-performing HIPC countries.

Finally, allow me to emphasize the need for greater donor co-ordination. Given our limited resources, we cannot afford to work at cross purposes, or to re-invent the wheel. Our work must be targeted and focused. Furthermore, we have a duty to relieve some of the administrative burden imposed on developing countries by our individual conditionalities and processes.

Regarding the proposed Inter-Agency flagship programs, I believe we need to discuss these further. There are some important management issues which must be addressed with respect to this approach. If nothing else, we need to reassure ourselves and others that these initiatives won't duplicate efforts or detract resources from national E.F.A. purposes.

I can assure you that donor co-ordination will be a key concern of the G8 Task Force on Education that is just being formed. The 2002 summit presents a rare opportunity to raise the level of policy dialogue on education, and to mobilize resources in support for E.F.A. Canada will play an active role on the G8 Task Force on Education to ensure that it brings added value to the E.F.A. global initiative, and reinforces the ongoing process.

At the same time, we will support the G8's Action Plan for Africa, which in turn, supports the New African Initiative, or as it's now called, the New Partnership for African Development. This initiative is a prime example of local ownership and leadership. African leaders have put forward an impressive plan to lift their continent out of poverty. Their actions must be heard and supported.

The issue of co-ordination strikes to the very core of the Education for All process, because it is and must be education by all. The movement is vast and complex, and it needs a strategy to provide direction for all its actors, in its various components. At Dakar, we agreed that UNESCO would co-ordinate E.F.A. partners and serve as the secretariat. Is this sufficient to carry us forward? Is the mandate clear and strong enough? Have we provided the right tools to operationalize Education for All?

In terms of more pro-active strategies, the Monitoring Report highlights the usefulness of sector-wide approaches. I can tell you that Canada is increasingly involved in these approaches. We believe they help ensure that the national government remains firmly in control of the agenda, and they allow for longer-term, more predictable support.

In Senegal, for example, where only six out of 10 children complete primary school, Canada is one of the main contributors to the country's 10-year education reform plan. Given that less than half of girls have access to primary school, we are working to ensure equal access to education.

Ensuring universal access, improving the quality of basic education, addressing gender issues, keeping children in school, supporting teacher training – these are all priorities in sector-wide approaches that Canada supports in a range of developing countries. And through our projects and policy work, we encourage E.F.A. partners to engage community groups, including parents, in matters that will ultimately affect their lives, and the lives of their children.

The last issue I would like to address this afternoon is the question of monitoring. Without common monitoring systems in place, we have no way to measure our progress. It's imperative for all partners to work together to develop common indicators that still allow for variations in different countries. I believe the indicators linked to the Millennium Development Goals are a good starting point. Over and above the net enrolment ratio in primary education, we must include indicators for retention of students for the first five years of primary school, the quality and relevance of education, ratios of enrolments for young women and men at all levels, and so on.

I think the new E.F.A. Observatory within the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in Montreal will go a long way to addressing these concerns. Canada welcomes the Institute's commitment to building closer ties with civil society in this process, and looks forward to working with it.

Before I end my remarks, let me offer my congratulations to UNESCO and its Director-General. UNESCO has taken significant steps to strengthen its co-ordinating role in Education for All. The appointment of Sir John Daniel has added a vibrant and experienced voice to the global initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe it's crucial that we seize the opportunity of this

High Level Group to work through our priorities in a meaningful way, namely – to build further political commitment and partnerships, to mobilize resources, to harness the power of civil society and to monitor the progress we make toward our goals.

Our goals are ambitious. Our challenges, profound. But by marshalling and channelling the vast human resources at our disposal, we can achieve our objectives. We can, and we must.

Thank you.