

**Second anniversary of the World Education Forum
UNESCO – 26 April 2002**

**Statement by Ms Monique Fouilhoux, Chairperson
of the NGO Liaison Committee**

Mr Director-General,
Distinguished representatives of the Permanent Delegations
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving the NGOs this opportunity to make their views known in this debate through me. Thank you also for informing me in advance, as this enabled me to get in touch with a number of NGOs and regional networks in the field, so that I am better able today to voice the concerns of the NGOs.

Two years have elapsed since the commitments assumed by the international community in Dakar.

As Mr John Daniel reminded us, we have reached the end of the global EFA week in which a number of activities have been carried out. You made particular mention of the drawing competition organized in conjunction with the Global Campaign for Education as an example of partnership with which the National Commissions for UNESCO have also been invited to associate themselves.

PARTNERSHIPS

At the international level there have been a great many meetings and initiatives (e.g. the working group on EFA, the High-Level Group, the meeting of the Task Force in March, the meeting with the G-8 Task Force on Education, and the Conference on Accelerating Action towards EFA in Amsterdam two weeks ago), to which the NGOs and, more broadly speaking, representatives of civil society have been invited, with, we must acknowledge, real opportunities for participating and intervening in the debates. However, we still have concerns about the efficient and effective coordination of all these initiatives.

The point is that the situation is not so satisfactory at the regional and national levels. The participation and involvement of NGOs, particularly in the national forums that have been established and, more generally, in the process of drawing up national plans, is extremely limited. Despite our satisfaction at, for instance, the concerted approach that has prevailed in Nigeria, where the authorities chose for their national EFA coordination a leading figure enjoying recognition in the NGO world and, moreover, a woman, this is an isolated example, which gives a false impression of the overall situation. We must do everything possible to bring about a genuine culture of partnership and ensure that it becomes a lasting reality. States must show themselves capable, even if NGOs are sometimes difficult and demanding partners, of offering them the place that their role deserves. I think we all stand to benefit from a civil society that is highly concerned, motivated and involved in the planning process, but also intent on helping governments in their immense task of implementation and regular evaluation.

As we all know, the goals are ambitious, but either EFA will be the work of us all or it will remain a pious hope and we shall have to start again in 2015.

But, Mr Director-General, the NGOs are in need of assistance, particularly to build up their capacity to take action. We welcome the initiatives taken by some UNESCO regional offices and by some major international NGOs. Also noteworthy is the programme developed jointly by UNESCO and the Collective Consultation of NGOs in Africa, with World Bank support. But more must be done to back up the organizations of civil society in all regions, particularly at the national level.

There has been some discussion of how to improve the annual follow-up report. The NGOs and the Collective Consultation wish to be involved in this effort. For that purpose a questionnaire is being sent out to all NGOs, and case studies will be conducted so as to evaluate and arrive at a better understanding of the nature of partnerships and participation.

But it is important to determine what kind of education we want and for what purposes. Such matters as education for citizenship and AIDS prevention are very important and must feature in national plans. The Inter-Agency Task Team on education met this week and strongly recommends that this question be one of the priorities. The question of quality education and the measures needed to encourage the participation of girls in order to achieve the target of overcoming gender disparities in education by 2005 will also need to be on the agenda in order to feature prominently in national plans. I have, moreover, noted that these aspects are highlighted in today's joint statement by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP and the World Bank.

I note too that the joint statement has this to say: "Let us never forget the central role education plays in promoting equitable and sustainable development".

We do indeed believe it essential to place education in a broader context.

Accordingly:

- The Liaison Committee will organize, within the framework of the Johannesburg Conference, a workshop on the theme "Education and sustainable development".
- The CCNGO meeting will probably be held on the occasion of the next Porto Alegre World Social Forum.

FUNDING

Universal primary education can be achieved by 2015 and we consider that this target, generally recognized as the main Millennium Development Goals, is the most likely to be achieved. However, concrete action to carry out this consensus has not so far been successful. We have high hopes of the outcome of the Amsterdam meeting and of the commitments reaffirmed at the World Bank meetings last weekend, though it is a cause for some regret that on the occasion of the Amsterdam meeting the G-7 members were unwilling to join in the common approach for the development of a funding framework.

I wish at this stage to make it clear that the NGOs attach particular importance to the need for free primary education (a theme which has been selected for the World Campaign), and incidentally I see from the joint statement that the abolition of school fees is on the agenda.

In conclusion, Mr Director-General, we have come some of the way and there has been some progress, but agreement must now be reached on a timetable for rapid implementation. The children of the world are waiting and particularly the millions of children just about everywhere whose right to education is still flouted.

Thank you.