

Opening Remarks by Prof Hubert Gijzen, UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa

On the occasion of the Southern Africa Regional Meeting on Global Citizenship Education

Johannesburg, South Africa, 4-5 July 2016

Mr Yousuf Gabru, Chairperson, South Africa National Commission for UNESCO,
Secretary Generals, National Commissions for UNESCO in the Region,
Dr Fay Chung, former Minister of Education, Zimbabwe,
Representatives from Ministries of Education, and participants from the nine countries of the
Southern Africa Region,
Representatives of civil society organizations, and Development Partners here present,
Dear colleagues from UNESCO,
Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you.

It is my pleasure to join you this morning in this Regional meeting on Global Citizenship Education. This meeting comes at a critical juncture: we have reached the target date for the Millennium Development Goals, and the world has now embarked on a new ambitious global development agenda entitled: “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Global Action”. Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents the most ambitious and comprehensive commitment the international community has ever made to leave no one behind, ensure a future of dignity for all, and protect our planet.

The defining challenge is that the world we are living in today is alarmingly out of balance. This relates to the serious imbalance between people and planet, as reflected in the concept of sustainable development. But maybe even more worrisome is the serious imbalance between people. For many, the last century brought unprecedented progress, prosperity, and freedom. For large groups, however, it marked an era of poverty, subjugation, and humiliation.

These sharp imbalances and consequent feelings of injustice and inequality have fuelled polarized perceptions, which in turn lead to violence and conflict. A world with such sharp imbalances between people and planet, and between people, is indeed far away from becoming sustainable.

We need to urgently address these imbalances if we wish to give true meaning to sustainable development and if we wish to create a new world, free of terrorism, a world where people live in harmony between themselves and with nature. That is what sustainable development is all about, to re-balance economy, society and nature.

Addressing these complex and inter-related challenges requires collective action and responsibility from all the world’s citizens. It requires changing mind-sets and attitudes and rethinking of unsustainable consumption and production patterns. Education is the most powerful way to integrate all dimensions of this agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNESCO helped to chart a new course for education, which took shape through the historic Education Forum in Incheon last year May. It found expression in SDG 4 “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Besides representing a Goal in its own right, education is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and essential for the success of all SDGs. Recognizing the important role of education, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes targets on education under several other SDGs, notably those on health; growth and employment; sustainable consumption and production; and climate change. As such, education has the potential to accelerate progress towards the achievement of all SDGs.

Of direct relevance to the theme of this meeting is Target 4.7 of the SDGs, which calls on countries to “ensure that all learners are provided with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are living in a world characterized by change, complexity and paradox. These changes signal the emergence of a new global context for learning that has vital implications for education. These new realities require that we revisit the purpose of education and the organization of learning. The complexity of today’s world requires a comprehensive approach to education policy embedded in a better understanding of the way in which knowledge is created, controlled, disseminated, acquired, validated and used. It also requires further development of the ethical principles that govern education and knowledge as common goods.

Recognizing the emergence of a new global context of learning the UNESCO Director General established a Senior Experts Group to **rethink** education in a changing world. Today, we are presenting the result of their work which is articulated in the publication: *Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?* (2015). This publication is intended as a call for policy dialogue and as a platform for research on the future of learning.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The notion of Rethinking Education is closely interconnected with the concept of Global Citizenship Education (GCED), which aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world, hence nurturing respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helping learners become responsible and active global citizens. It is critical that young people experience positive values in a safe, open and inclusive learning environment to build their resilience against violent extremism as we witness it in many countries in the world. With ¾ of its population being under 35, the SADC Region needs to invest in education and training of youth as a key priority.

Let me also remind that Global Citizenship Education is for learners of all ages – children, young people and adults alike. Therefore, Global Citizenship Education is one of the strategic areas of UNESCO’s Education Sector programme for the period 2014-2021.

Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development are recognized as mutually reinforcing approaches, with commonalities and specificities. Both prioritize the relevance and content of education in order to ensure that education helps build a peaceful and sustainable world. However, they have different agendas, discourses and international policy

frameworks. They also have distinct thematic areas of focus and as a result partly different stakeholder groups. Together however, they help address the two key imbalances I talked about: ESD aims to help rebalance people and planet, while GCE addresses issues arising from the imbalance between people.

I hope that during your deliberations, you will be able to come up with concrete recommendations and action points that would allow your governments and their partners to move towards the realization of inclusive and equitable quality education opportunities which will ensure lifelong learning for all.

As we chart a way forward, the humanist mandate of UNESCO must remain our compass setting. More than ever today, lasting peace and sustainable development require cooperation. Their foundations cannot be built solely on political and economic arrangements – they must be constructed in the minds of women and men.

In finalizing, I would like to remind that UNESCO is owned by its Member States, and therefore it belongs to each one of you. Your wisdom, energy, dedication, knowledge, skills and aspirations are what will steer your societies, and our shared planet, towards a more sustainable and peaceful future. It is in fact quite simple: together we can address the existing imbalances I spoke about, and as such we can also achieve the higher goal as reflected in the UNESCO constitution, namely.....”to build peace in the minds of people”.

Thank you for your attention.