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Conflict is robbing 28 million children of a future, UNESCO report warns

Paris/New York, 1 March - Armed conflict is robbing 28 million children of an education by exposing them to widespread rape and other sexual violence, targeted attacks on schools and other human rights abuses, UNESCO's 2011 Global Monitoring Report warns.

The report, *The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education*, cautions that the world is not on track to achieve by 2015 the six Education for All goals that over 160 countries signed up to in 2000. Although there has been progress in many areas, most of the goals will be missed by a wide margin – especially in regions riven by conflict.

“Armed conflict remains a major roadblock to human development in many parts of the world, yet its impact on education is widely neglected,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova. “This groundbreaking report documents the scale of this hidden crisis, identifies its root causes and offers solid proposals for change.”

The report is endorsed by four Nobel Peace Prize laureates: Oscar Arias Sánchez (Costa Rica), Shirin Ebadi (Islamic Republic of Iran), José Ramos-Horta (Timor-Leste) and Archbishop Desmond Tutu (South Africa)

Introducing the report, Archbishop Tutu says: “It documents in stark detail the sheer brutality of the violence against some of the world's most vulnerable people, including its schoolchildren, and it challenges world leaders of all countries, rich and poor, to act decisively.”

Of the total number of primary school age children in the world who are not enrolled in school, 42% – 28 million – live in poor countries affected by conflict.

This year's report sets out a comprehensive agenda for change, including tougher action against human rights violations, an overhaul of global aid priorities, strengthened rights for displaced people and more attention to the ways education failures can increase the risk of conflict.

Thirty-five countries were affected by armed conflict from 1999 to 2008. Children and schools are on the front line of these conflicts, with classrooms, teachers and pupils seen as legitimate targets. In Afghanistan, at least 613 attacks on schools were recorded in 2009, up from 347 in 2008. Insurgents in northwestern Pakistan have made numerous attacks on girls' schools including one in which 95 girls were injured. In Northern Yemen, 220 schools were destroyed, damaged or looted during fighting in 2009 and 2010 between government and rebel forces.

Rape and other sexual violence have been widely used as a war tactic in many countries. Insecurity and fear associated with sexual violence keep young girls, in particular, out of school. The international courts set up in the wake of the wars in the former Yugoslavia and

the genocide in Rwanda have firmly established rape and other sexual violence as war crimes, yet these acts remain widely deployed weapons of war.

Of the rapes reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one-third involve children (and 13% are against children under the age of 10). Unreported rape in conflict-affected areas of in the east of the country may be 10 to 20 times the reported level. Sexual violence has a devastating impact on education: it impairs victims' learning potential, creates a climate of fear that keeps girls at home and leads to family breakdown that deprives children of a nurturing environment.

The report calls for the end to a culture of impunity surrounding sexual violence, with stronger monitoring of human rights violations affecting education, a more rigorous application of existing international law and the creation of an International Commission on Rape and Sexual Violence backed by the International Criminal Court.

“Children and education are not just getting caught in the cross-fire, they are increasingly the targets of violent conflict,” says the report's director, Kevin Watkins. “The failure of governments to protect human rights is causing children deep harm – and taking away their only chance of an education. It is time for the international community to bring to account the perpetrators of heinous crimes like systematic rape, and to back UN resolutions with decisive action.”

Armed conflict is also diverting public funds from education into military spending, the report warns. Many of the poorest countries spend significantly more on arms than on basic education. Twenty-one countries spend more on the military than on basic education; if they were to cut military spending by just 10%, they could put 9.5 million more children in school.

Military spending is also diverting the resources of aid donor countries. It would take just six days of military spending by rich countries to close the US\$16 billion Education for All external financing gap.

Donors' security agendas have led them to focus on a small group of countries while neglecting many of the world's poorest countries. Aid for basic education has increased more than fivefold in Afghanistan over the past five years, but it has stagnated or risen more slowly in countries such as Chad and the Central African Republic, and declined in Côte d'Ivoire.

The humanitarian aid system is failing children, warns the report, which calls for a major overhaul in aid to education in conflict-affected countries. Education accounts for just 2% of humanitarian aid, and only a small fraction of requests for humanitarian aid for education are met. Financing for humanitarian pooled funds must be increased to US\$2 billion to cover shortfalls in education financing.

Donors also need to break down the artificial divide between humanitarian aid and long-term development aid, the report finds. More development assistance should be channeled through national pooled funds, and donors should establish more effective multilateral arrangements for pooled funding, with funding for the reformed Education for All Fast Track Initiative increased to US\$6 billion annually.

The world's refugees and internally displaced people face major barriers to education, the report warns. In camps run by the UN refugee agency, the average primary gross enrolment ratio in 2008 was 42% in the Arab States and only 39% in South and West Asia.

The report warns that education failures are fuelling conflict:

- *The 'youth bulge'*: In many conflict-affected countries, over 60% of the population is aged under 25, but education systems are not providing youth with the skills they need to escape poverty, unemployment and the economic despair that often contributes to violent conflict.
- *The wrong type of education*: Education has the potential to act as a force for peace — but too often schools can be used to reinforce the social divisions, intolerance and prejudices that lead to war.
- *Failures to build peace*. Education needs to be integrated into wider strategies to encourage tolerance, mutual respect and the ability to live peacefully with others. Between US\$500 million and US\$1 billion should be channelled to education through the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, with UNESCO and UNICEF playing a more central role.

The report outlines the considerable progress that has been made in education since 2000 but warns that:

- The number of children out of school stood at 67 million in 2008, and is falling too slowly to meet the Education for All target by 2015.
- Many children drop out of school before completing a full primary cycle. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, 10 million children drop out of primary school every year.
- About 17% of the world's adults – 796 million people – still lack basic literacy skills. Nearly two-thirds are women.
- Another 1.9 million teachers will be needed by 2015 to achieve universal primary education, more than half of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report is developed annually by an independent team and published by UNESCO.

More information: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>

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