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UN high-level forum urges greater efforts to ensure access to decent education for all



Under-Secretary-General Sha Zukang (left) and Lazarous Kapambwe, President of ECOSOC

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Government officials at a United Nations meeting in Geneva today called for the boosting of efforts to ensure education for all, stressing the fundamental role it plays in creating an inclusive society, reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development.

“We recognize that providing quality education for children, youth and adults helps to develop the knowledge and skills that people and countries need to flourish, and that additional measures

are required to improve the quality of education,” they stated in a declaration adopted at the end of the high-level segment of the annual session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

“Education for all” was the focus of the high-level meeting, which brought together top UN officials, government ministers, experts and policy-makers to Geneva to discuss how to ensure that everyone has access to a decent education.

“Our focus this week on the importance of education outcomes has been timely,” Lazarous Kapambwe, the President of ECOSOC, said in his closing statement. “It is no longer merely about increasing enrolment numbers or inputs; ensuring quality, relevance and equity is equally critical.

Mr. Kapambwe and other senior UN officials hailed the declaration – adopted unanimously by the 54-member Council at the end of the week-long meeting – which outlines measures to accelerate progress towards achieving the goal of education for all.

The Education for All goals were agreed to by more than 160 countries at the World Education Forum in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, with the aim of achieving 100 per cent child enrolment in primary schools by 2015. Improving access to education is also one of the eight Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) world leaders have pledged to achieve by 2015.

“This declaration not only promotes consensus on issues ranging from the importance of education for health literacy and the need for gender-sensitive curricula, but also contains concrete measures to advance progress on the education goals,” said Mr. Kapambwe.

Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, called the declaration a “remarkable” document – one which addresses important areas such as educational access, quality, funding and partnerships.

“The declaration is a model document in other ways too,” he told the meeting. “It navigates the considerable educational challenges of the moment, while casting a thoughtful eye to emerging issues on the horizon – areas like secondary and tertiary education, information technology and lifelong learning.”

He stressed the power of education, saying it “empowers individuals, molds better citizens and creates more just, prosperous societies.

“But make no mistake: enrolment alone is not learning. What goes on in the classroom is ultimately what counts. In order to maximize the benefits of schooling, we must reflect long and hard on what we teach our children – and how,” he stated.

The declaration, said the head of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), notes the importance of moving beyond the MDG of universal primary education in favour of a more “holistic and inclusive vision” of education systems.

“This declaration represents a clear recognition by Member States of the central role that education plays in driving social and economic development,” Director-General Irina Bokova

stated. “I am confident that the vision expressed in this document will be a powerful lever for mobilizing resources and accelerating progress towards Education for All.”

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