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Chile: UN expert calls for quality education that is accessible and affordable for all



Kishore Singh, Special Rapporteur on the right to education

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Recent student protests in Chile, which were marked by violence in which a student was killed, provide an opportunity to reevaluate the country's education policies with an emphasis on human rights, a United Nations expert said today.

“Quality education must be within the reach of everyone,” UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education Kishore Singh stressed, noting that the protesters were concerned at the quality and cost of education in the country. “Access to quality education, whether primary, secondary or at a higher level, cannot be subjected to students’ or their families’ ability to pay or take on debt.”

According to media reports high school students are demanding an end to for-profit educational institutions, lower interest rates on student loans and a bus pass that is valid year-round.

“Human rights treaties are clear: while primary education must be totally free, States are obligated to adopt measures to establish secondary and higher education that is progressively free,” Mr. Singh said.

He noted that the private sector, when regulated, may play a role in education at all levels, but the State must guarantee that economically challenged or marginalized groups are not excluded from the educational sector.

“In recent decades Chile has made great progress in reestablishing a state of law and democracy,” he added. “Ensuring quality education that is accessible to all is a fundamental part in consolidating these advances.”

He deplored the loss of life and violence during the demonstrations, stressing that peaceful protests are a fundamental part of democracy and must be protected. “All acts of violence in this context is deplorable and must be duly investigated,” he said.

According to media reports, nearly 900 people were arrested on one day and department stores set on fire by protesters in Santiago, the capital. When striking school students they tried to march on the presidential palace they were met by hundreds of police in riot gear and clouds of teargas.

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