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Education must be keystone of crisis recovery – UN Assembly President



General Assembly president Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann participates in education access debate

18 March 2009 – The President of the United Nations General Assembly today urged that children’s education be made central to the assistance given to communities devastated by violence and disaster, as he opened a dialogue on the topic in New York. “Let us find ways to assure that we are feeding young minds, as well as bodies, creating safe havens for learners as well as their larger communities,” Miguel D’Escoto [told](#) the representatives of Member States, education experts and aid organizations gathered for the debate.

“Let us give these girls and boys, youth and women the opportunity to contribute in the recovery and the future of their societies. Let us give them hope by learning to overcome what, in the midst of chaos, must seem to be insurmountable challenges,” he continued.

Few development partners include education as part of their humanitarian policy, Mr. D’Escoto maintained, saying that as a result an estimated 75 million children worldwide were being denied what he called “this fundamental right.”

Speaking today on the issue were children, educators and policymakers, including a teacher working in Haiti amidst the destruction of recurring hurricanes, youths from Nepal who worked to create schools as ‘zones of peace’ during the insurgency and staff working on education in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Also [speaking](#) at the meeting's opening, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said she shared Mr. D'Escoto's sense of urgency on the issue, adding that far too many children cannot get an education because of "brutal attacks" on schools, staff and students.

She noted that in Afghanistan last year there were more than 275 such attacks, with 66 people killed and many more injured, most of them children.

There were diverse motivations for such violence, she pointed out, adding "But what every single attack on any school teacher or student shares is this: it can never be tolerated."

Governments, she said, must deliver on their promise of basic education for all children, including in times of emergencies, and must ensure that schools, students and teachers are protected. If schools are not safe during a crisis, alternative safe spaces must be provided, she added.

The UN is keeping the issue in the spotlight, promoting quality education and keeping children studying during the worst conditions, she said, pointing to the example of the "school-in-a-box" kit distributed by the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) during emergencies.

"But we need to do even more," she urged, saying that countries and agencies must include education in their emergency plans, and increased funding must be provided despite the financial crisis.

"As you know, water, sanitation and food are considered emergency responses, but what we are pushing for is to ensure that education is an integral part of emergency programmatic planning and response," Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for Children and Armed Conflict told correspondents at a press conference during the day.

"Education brings stability, normalcy and routine into a child's life, which is absolutely essential, especially when they are displaced," she said.

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