

Assistant Secretary-General Kyung-wha Kang Opening Remarks

“Girls’ Right to Education in Emergencies: What we’ve learned and the way forward”

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As delivered

Excellencies, distinguished guests and panelists, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much Madam Ambassador and thank you distinguished panelists, Ambassadors and Dr. Al-Murekhi for this wonderful opportunity to underscore the importance of education for girls in emergencies.

This has been a topic at the core of my heart throughout my entire time in the United Nations. If you had limited amounts of money, you put it in girls and put it into their education in emergencies and in peace times. This is a wonderful opportunity and initiative and I do hope that this event makes a huge impact at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May.

It is heartening to see the reaffirmation of the importance of ensuring girls right to education by various stakeholders, experts, missions and UNICEF all around the table as we all have a role to play to underscore the importance of this issue at the World Humanitarian Summit. The numbers have been mentioned, but just to reiterate, estimates show that 80 million children living in 35 countries crisis-affected countries have had their schooling interrupted. Refugee children are five times less likely to attend school, and the situation is far worse for girls who are 2.5 times more likely than boys, to not attend school in crisis situations.

When girls are not in school, the risk to their safety and dignity mounts significantly. They face a heightened chance of sexual and gender-based violence or early forced marriage, recruitment into armed forces and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

Let me draw a few examples of the gravity of the situation and the gravity of the impact of the lack of education for girls and children in conflict situations.

Iraq, which was once known for its public education system, now has 2 million school-age children out of school. In camps for displaced people, on average only half of the

children are able to attend school, while outside the camps, the percentage plummets even further to just 30 per cent.

In Syria, as you all know, over 2.1 million children and adolescents are out of school inside the country and those currently in school risk being pulled out to help support their families. One in four schools in Syria has been damaged, destroyed or occupied by armed actors – and according to Save the Children, more than 4,000 attacks on schools are reported to have taken place over the past four years.

South Sudan currently has the highest proportion of children out of school in the world, with more than half of the children up to age 15 not attending schools. An adolescent girl in South Sudan is three times more likely to die in childbirth than complete primary school. And nearly one in every three schools in has been destroyed, damaged, occupied or closed, impacting on the education of more than 900,000 children.

We all know of the 2010 General Assembly Resolution on the right to education in emergencies which recognized that a large proportion of the world's children out of school live in areas affected by conflict- or natural disasters and urged Member States to address the specific needs of girls in emergency contexts, in efforts to promote universal education. And while support to education in emergencies – and specifically girls' education - has gained some ground, six years on, the need is still greater than ever. The sector still suffers from a lack of adequate financing, poor coordination between humanitarian and development actors, and insufficient political will to give it the attention it so badly needs.

As conflicts play out over decades, marked by long-term displacement and a complex range of needs, the emergency education sector is straining at the seams, with analysts estimating a US\$9 billion annual funding gap for the sector.

We all know that when children can access education in crisis situations, they are better equipped with the skills and information they need to live healthy, productive lives and to contribute to the resilience of their families and communities, their sense of normalcy and hope for the future is also preserved, and they are better protected from abuse and exploitation in the face of prolonged insecurity.

Humanitarian partners are doing their very best to deliver education to children caught up in raging conflicts, despite widespread insecurity and severely limited resources. In **Iraq**, this year, humanitarian partners have helped 6,200 children access school by setting up temporary schools and training hundreds of teachers in the governorates of Babylon, Baghdad and Diyala. In **South Sudan**, aid agencies have provided education services to over 350,000 children including training to over 8,600 teachers; and establishing over 500 temporary learning spaces. In **Syria**, in 2015, humanitarian agencies have helped 1.2 million children to access school out of a total of 4.5 million in need of education support. And this includes 85,000 Palestine refugees and 213,600 children and youth in hard-to-reach locations and over half a million youths who have received vocational and life-skills training.

Our efforts have also extended to country and region-wide campaigns. Aid agencies and Governments have actively advocated for the specific needs of children, girls in particular, affected by the Syria crisis to be met, articulating real concerns about the possible loss of a generation of children to violence and displacement. The joint ‘No Lost Generation’ campaign has helped put education and child protection at the centre of the response inside Syria and across the five refugee hosting countries - Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Thanks in great measure to all the support to the many member states around the table that that have supported this initiative. In Nepal following the earthquake last year, UNICEF supported a ‘Back to School’ campaign which reached over one million community members.

But despite the well-known protective role that education plays in children’s lives in emergencies, less than 2 per cent of all humanitarian funding has targeted education every year since 2010 and in 2015 the emergency education sector received just 30 per cent of the funding it needed. In Syria alone, the cost of replacing or rehabilitating schools is estimated to be US\$3 billion, according to the NGO Save the Children, and the total economic loss due to the dropout from basic and secondary education is estimated to be \$10.6 billion or 18 per cent of Syria’s GDP

And we now have a chance to change this narrative. We are one month away from the Secretary General’s World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, which will provide a stage for leaders and stakeholders to commit to concrete actions to ensure that girls’ right to education is upheld, and that girls, regardless of the contexts in which they live, are able to enjoy equal and safe access to education.

At the Summit, the Special Session on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises will launch an ambitious education crisis platform which will aim to deliver on the right to education for the millions of children living in crisis situations, by focusing on five areas. This is a vital opportunity to ensure that the gender dimension and girls’ right to education are at the core.

We will also have a high-level Leaders’ Roundtable on *Women and Girls: Catalyzing Action to Achieve Gender Equality* by calling on leaders to make commitments to deliver on two tenets of the Secretary-General’s Agenda for Humanity: to uphold the norms that safeguard humanity, including eradicating sexual and gender-based violence, and to leave no one behind, by empowering and protecting women and girls. These core commitments, identified in broad consultations with multi stakeholders led by UN Women, do not specifically mention girls’ rights to education, but the whole point of the core commitments is that these are the common benchmarks, but individual leaders from governments, agencies and NGO’s are asked to come to the Round Table to make specific commitments. We count on you to come and make specific commitments on girls and girls right to education in this Round Table and at the Special session.

These initiatives give leaders the opportunity to make bold, firm and transformative commitments that will ensure that no girls are left behind by being denied their right to schooling. As we approach the Summit, everyone here has the power to make girls’ access to education in crisis settings a reality; we must make the most of these

opportunities provided in Istanbul. Your actions at the Summit and beyond will have a profound impact not only on the future of individual girls, their families and communities, and the economic and development prospects of their countries and societies for years to come.

Representing OCHA, I readily look forward to working together with you to make the most of the opportunities provided by the Istanbul Summit.

Thank you once again for this great initiative. I thank you all.