

Statement of Director UNESCO Islamabad office for Media Briefing
18 January 2008

Good Afternoon and Aslam-o-Alaikum

Representatives of media organizations, editors, sub editors, news editors, director news, bureau chiefs, free lance journalists, reporters of news agencies, and producers of electronic media,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of UN agencies and UNESCO I welcome you all to this briefing session on forthcoming 'All Parties Conference on Education For All'. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) and UNESCO have joined hands to take this initiative, which is expected to trigger the process of educational development in this country, where about half of adult population is illiterate. We decided to commence or kick off dissemination of information on this historic APC by first taking the media into confidence, as we believe that education and media are interlinked, and supplement each other.

During this pre-election period, Pakistani nation is passing through a formative stage. Promises made and commitments announced by the politicians during these days, will influence the shape of future policies and actions of the governments. Role of media is important, as it can divert the attention of leaders to the real issues, document their plans reflected in their speeches and manifestos, and later on follow them up when they are in power, and can ensure objective reporting on education. During this spell of election drive, when attentions are mostly concentrated towards political tensions between individuals and parties, PILDAT and UNESCO have decided to converge political debate towards long term developmental issues of the nation. Education For All is a common interest of the whole Pakistani nation, and we are sure that all democratic forces strive for the up lift of masses and achievement of prosperity, peace, and tolerance in the society. Let us see why we have selected policy discussion and dialogue by major political parties on Education For All.

Education is the main vehicle for socio-economic development. Pakistan is blessed with natural and human resources, but these resources can only be harnessed and exploited fully when citizens are educated and skilled. Unfortunately, about half of adult population in Pakistan can not read and write. With respect to Human Development Index, Pakistan has been placed by UNDP at 136 position, lower than some of its regional neighbours like Sri Lanka (99), Maldives (100), India (128), and Myanmar (132), mainly due to its low literacy rate and low primary level enrolment. In the area of education, Pakistan is lagging behind other countries in South Asia, even lower than Nepal, Bangladesh, and Maldives. Educational position of various South and West Asian countries in Human Development Index, as assessed by UNESCO in its 2008 EFA Global Monitoring is given below:

Pakistan and Education Development Index (2008)

Country	Maldives	Iran	Myanmar	India	Bangladesh	Nepal	Pakistan
EDI Ranking	74	90	94	105	107	110	120

Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, Annex Table No 1, page 203

Pakistan is sixth most populous country of the world. Its young population is increasing, and government needs to invest more on education and training. Due to rapid population growth and inability of the formal education system to bring all children into school, illiterate population has increased from 22 million in 1961 to 50 million by 1998. It is feared that by 2008, illiterate population in Pakistan may have risen to 50 million +. Although Pakistan has recently increased its focus on educational development, yet its Net Primary Enrolment Rate is among the lowest in South Asia. The following table gives a comparative picture:

Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in South and West Asian countries (2005)

Country	Iran	India	Bangladesh	Maldives	Nepal	Sri Lanka	Pakistan
NER %	95	89	94	79	79	97	68

Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, Annex Table No 5, page 289

Apart from the data issued by the Ministry of Education and reported to international agencies, a recent survey (PSLM 2005-06) conducted by the Statistics Division, Govt. of Pakistan, presents a more dismal state of affairs by reporting Net Enrolment Rate of only 53% at primary level in the country. The following table offers details of actual field situation;

Table 2.9 (a): Net Enrolment Rate at the Primary Level (Age 5-9-excluding Katchi Class)

Area/Gender	Both Genders	Boys	Girls
All Areas	53	56	48
Urban Areas	65	66	64
Rural Areas	47	53	42

Source: PSLM Survey (2005-06), Statistics Division, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Govt. of Pakistan

Above statistics indicate overall aggregated situation of the country. Educational picture in under developed areas and districts is bleaker. For example, only 23% rural girls are lucky enough to be enrolled in primary schools in Balochistan, as

compared to almost twice that ratio (47%) in rural Punjab. Only 17% rural women in Sindh can read and write, compared with 67% female literacy in rural Punjab (PSLM 2005-06). Similarly, in 55 districts of the country, half of the school age children are not enrolled in primary schools, and 21 of these districts are in Balochistan alone. According to the National Education Census Report of the Ministry of Education (2006), about 31% children drop out before completion of primary education. Out of 100 fortunate children enrolled in Grade 1, only 22 reach Grade 10, and only 13 are able to pass Secondary School examination. There are certain factors responsible for this wastage and poor performance, which need to be addressed by the future governments, if Pakistan is serious to achieve Education For All goals.

Ratio of budget indicates the level of importance given by a nation to the education. Historically, Pakistan has been spending less on education, as compared to other countries in the region. UNESCO has set the norm of a minimum of 4% of GDP for education. The following table provides information on education budget as percentage of GDP.

Education budget as % of GDP

Country	Iran	India	Bangladesh	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan
Education budget	4.7%	3.8%	2.4%	7.5%	3.4%	2.4%

Pakistan has committed to achieve Education For All goals set in Dakar in April 2000, and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). During 2000-2007, Pakistan has taken a number of steps towards the achievement of these goals. These include preparation of a National Action Plan for EFA (2001-2015), launching of Education Sector Reforms (ESR) and provision of additional funding to the provinces, abolition of school fees, provision of free textbooks, stipend for girl students, and slow but consistent enhancement of educational budget. International community and civil society organizations appreciate and acknowledge these positive strategies and achievements of Pakistan. However, Pakistan has to go a long way. Keeping in view the gigantic size of problems of illiteracy and out of school children in Pakistan, all these efforts need to be augmented and sustained during the next regime also.

PILDAT and UNESCO are convening All Parties Conference on EFA, during first week of February (05 February 2008) to achieve following objectives.

1. To apprise and sensitize the top political leadership about the key issues and challenges faced by Pakistan in the area of basic education and literacy.
2. Listen to the views and plans of various political parties for educational development in the country.
3. Seek commitment of the political parties for accelerating concrete actions and devising viable strategies for the achievement of Education For All goals by Pakistan, in the form of a Joint Declaration.

It is to be clarified that this APC is purely a non-political consultation, aimed to pool wisdom and support of all those leaders who believe in development and

transformation of Pakistani society through quality education for all. Invitation has been extended to all major political parties which were having representation in the National Assembly and the Senate during 2002-2007.

Achieving Education For All targets and MDGs relating to education, is in the interest of Pakistan. A literate Pakistani society will be prosperous, better skilled, forward looking, and able to overcome various social evils and extremism. It is pertinent to note that annual average remittance from a Pakistani worker abroad is US\$ 680 only, compared with US\$ 1385 by a Filipino and US\$ 1259 by an Indonesian worker. (Source: NAVTEC, Islamabad). Most importantly, if majority of the voters in Pakistan are literate, they read newspapers and have access to information necessary for informed decision making, the risks of political instability will be reduced. Pakistan is signatory to MDGs and Dakar Framework of Action for EFA. PILDAT and UNESCO seek support and guidance of media to make APC on EFA, a success. We expect the media to raise and highlight issues faced by education sector in Pakistan, and create an environment which may inspire political parties to accord priority to education in this country. We seek your support to improve efficiency of education system in Pakistan, eliminate political interference in appointment and transfers of teachers, and ultimately raise quality of education in schools. Our aim is provision of quality basic education for all children, boys and girls, men and women, young and adults, poor and rich equally.