

[INTERVIEW: 'Act now,' or by 2030, millions could be graduating from schools without even basic education, warns UN envoy](#)

20 April 2017 – The ground-breaking, United Nations-backed International Finance Facility for Education is vital to ensure that half of the world's children don't miss out on the basic schooling needed to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

That's the view of the UN [Special Envoy for Global Education](#), Gordon Brown, who said yesterday in an interview with *UN News* that "education has been neglected for too long" and the international community needs to "act now" through a new Financing Compact between developed and developing countries.

Sustainable Development [Goal 4](#) commits countries to provide "inclusive and quality education for all" and yet if current trends continue, more than 800 million young people will be leaving school in 2030, without even a basic education, said Mr. Brown.

He said the new Finance Facility would unlock nearly \$10 billion annually for new education investments, help meet the SDG 2030 deadline, and deliver the right of every girl to an education "free from exploitation, child marriage, child labour and child trafficking."

The envoy, who is former Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, said that currently, only \$8 per child is spent on educational aid to the poorest countries, "barely enough in aid to pay for a text book."

"A new approach is essential [...] Of all the investments we make, education is the longest term need with children requiring 12 years of consistent, sustained and uninterrupted funding," he added.

VIDEO: Speaking to UN News, Special Envoy Gordon Brown says that "education has been neglected for too long," calling for the creation of a new financing compact between developed and developing countries.

While the Finance Facility – inspired by the highly successful Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries initiative and Global Funds for health and immunization – will be presented at the upcoming World Bank annual meetings, Mr. Brown said, adding that a new Inquiry on Protecting Children in Conflict –supported by Save the Children UK and Theirworld – would also be launched this week.

It would build on the work of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-

General for Children and Armed Conflict and complement the mission of long-term investment in education, as so many of the countries deprived of functioning classrooms were also conflict zones, he said.

With “moral lines” having been crossed so clearly, as with last week’s purported chemical weapons attack in Idlib, Syria – and the deliberate bombing of schools there – more robust legal protection was needed, said the envoy.

“We think that we need to look at international law, see whether perhaps even an International Criminal Court for children’s issues should be set up; see whether we can strengthen domestic laws.”

A leading London-based lawyer, Shaheed Fatima, will be conducting a legal review to “look at whether we can actually make recommendations that would strengthen the protection of children who are in these conflict zones” said Mr. Brown, who will chair the Inquiry.

Discussing his new initiatives with journalists at UN Headquarters on Wednesday, the Special Envoy said that “only when international law is robust enough [...] to secure accountability for children’s rights will we have done all in our power to ensure that no child of God will ever again suffer the horrors of Syria.”

“When we ask ourselves what breaks the weak, it is not just the Mediterranean wave that submerges the life vest, nor the food convoy that does not make it to the besieged Syrian town. It is the absence of hope – the soul-crushing certainty that there is nothing ahead to plan or prepare for, not even a place in school,” he said.

AUDIO: UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown on the importance of prompt action.

[Security Council condemns latest ‘highly destabilizing’ DPRK ballistic missile test](#)

20 April 2017 – Strongly condemning the 15 April ballistic-missile launch conducted by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the United Nations Security Council today demanded that the country immediately cease further actions in violation of the UN body’s relevant resolutions and comply fully with its obligations under these resolutions.

In a press statement, the Council expressed its [utmost concern](#) over the

DPRK's "highly destabilizing behaviour and flagrant and provocative defiance of the Security Council by conducting this ballistic-missile launch in violation of its international obligations under its successive resolutions on the issue between 2006 and 2016.

Council members agreed that the 15-member body would continue to closely monitor the situation and take further significant measures, including sanctions, in line with its previously expressed determination.

Stressing that the DPRK's illegal ballistic-missile activities are contributing to its development of nuclear-weapons delivery systems and are greatly increasing tension in the region and beyond, the members of the Council further regretted that the country is diverting resources to the pursuit of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons while its citizens have great unmet needs.

The members of the Security Council went on to emphasize the vital importance of the DPRK immediately showing sincere commitment to denuclearization and stressed the importance of working to reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula and beyond. To that end, the Council demanded the DPRK conduct no further nuclear tests.

Further to the press statement, the Council strongly urged all Member States to significantly accelerate their efforts to implement fully the measures imposed on the DPRK by the Security Council, particularly the comprehensive measures contained in resolutions 2321 (2016) and 2270 (2016).

The Security Council reiterated the importance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in North-East Asia at large, expressed their commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to the situation and welcomed efforts by Council members, as well as other States, to facilitate a peaceful and comprehensive solution through dialogue.

[UN expert body urges accountability for attacks against children in crisis-torn Syria](#)

20 April 2017 – In the wake of the recent attack on an evacuation convoy near Aleppo, Syria, and the purported use of chemical weapons in southern Idlib, the United Nations child rights body today called for investigations into all attacks on children in the country and for bringing the perpetrators to justice.

"Children are [bearing the brunt](#) of horrific attacks in Syria," said Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Committee Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

“I urge all relevant actors to investigate these abhorrent acts and bring their perpetrators to justice, including by providing full support to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons’ fact-finding mission, the independent Joint Investigative Mechanism, the Syria Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria,” Mr. Mezmur added.

He stressed that States Parties to the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which includes Syria, as well as other actors, have an obligation to prevent violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws and to take all possible measures to minimize the impact of the conflict in Syria on children.

Children in Syria “have been killed, maimed, subjected to sexual violence and traumatized,” Mr. Mezmur said.

About 2.4 million children have been displaced and some 280,000 are in besieged areas, according to UN figures the independent expert cited.

Most recently, at least 67 children were killed in an attack near Rashideen, western rural Aleppo Governorate, targeting a convoy carrying people from the besieged Syrian towns of Fuha and Kefraya to Government-controlled areas. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), video shows children gathering around a person giving out sweets just prior to the explosion.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the child rights Convention by its State Parties. It also monitors implementation of the Convention’s two Optional Protocols, on involvement of children in armed conflict and on sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

[UN urges all efforts be made to lower tensions in Venezuela](#)

20 April 2017 – The United Nations today expressed concern about the latest developments in Venezuela, calling on the Government and the opposition to address the country’s challenges for the benefit of the people.

“We call on the Government of Venezuela and the opposition to [engage sincerely](#) to reactivate dialogue efforts,” according to a statement attributable to UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

Specifically, he noted dialogue around critical issues that are already agreed to be placed on the agenda, namely the balance of power among branches of the State, the electoral calendar, human rights, truth and justice and the

socioeconomic situation.

Mr. Dujarric called for “concrete gestures” to reduce polarisation and to create the necessary conditions to address the country’s challenges.

[UN global assessment on higher education reveals disturbing disparities](#)

20 April 2017 – Noting the lack of sufficient institutions to cater to the growing demand for higher education as well as increasing disparities in its access, the United Nations educational and scientific agency has presented a series of steps to make such education more equitable and affordable.

In its new paper, [Six ways to ensure higher education leaves no one behind](#), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) also urged policy makers to set up national agencies to ensure equal opportunities in education as well as to devise measures that keep student loan repayments to less than 15 per cent of their annual income.

“Demand for higher education is going to continue rising. Governments must respond by introducing a range of new policies that will ensure expansion doesn’t leave the marginalised behind, and that access is based on merit, not privilege,” Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO, said in a [news release](#) announcing the findings.

“By creating and transmitting vital knowledge, skills and core values, higher education is a cornerstone for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),” she highlighted.

According to the assessment, the number of university level students doubled to 207 million between 2000 and 2014, but global trends showed that only 1 per cent of the poorest students spent more than four years in higher education, compared to 20 per cent of the richest.

The figures also revealed that only 8 per cent of young adults were enrolled, on average, in the poorest countries, compared to 74 per cent in the richest countries. The low-income countries also suffered the greatest gender disparity, with women making up only 30 per cent of bachelor-level students (in 2014).

The assessment has been prepared by UNESCO, together with the International Institute for Educational Planning ([IIHP](#)) – a specialized UNESCO institute that works to strengthen national education capacity and policies – and the Global Education Monitoring ([GEM](#)) Report, which monitors

progress towards global education targets.

Though 'controversial', affirmative action could help

According to IIHP, quota or bonus systems could potentially be some means that can help address issues identified in the assessment.

“In certain countries with deeply rooted social inequities, affirmative action through quota or bonus systems may be necessary to expand access to underrepresented groups, even if these mechanisms are controversial,” noted Suzanne Grant Lewis, the Director of IIEP.

At the same time, the report also noted that while private colleges and universities have expanded to cater to the growing pool of students, enrolling some 30 per cent of all students worldwide, Governments aren't keeping pace financially with this expansion and families are left having to bear the expenses.

The last thing we want is for higher education to be the ball and chain around students' ankles
Aaron Benavot, Director of GEM

Across 26 countries in Europe, households paid for 15 per cent of the cost of higher education in 2011. In other high-income countries, these expenditures were even higher – Chile (55 per cent), Japan (52 per cent), the United States (46 per cent) and Australia (40 per cent).

Efforts, particularly aimed at helping the disadvantaged, such as low tuition fees, need-based scholarships and loans repayments based on income, can help families manage the costs.

“Coping with dramatic student expansion is not easy, but there are policy solutions Governments can put into place to stop the bill falling to households,” noted Aaron Benavot, Director of the GEM Report.

“The last thing we want is for higher education to be the ball and chain around students' ankles.”