

Keynote speech of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser at Human Rights Council High-Level Panel on Human Rights Mainstreaming, Geneva, 1 March 2013.

Secretary-General, distinguished panellists and audience,

It is a pleasure to be here today, to make the case for the role of the right to education in development.

The Secretary-General has the challenge of seeking global agreement on a vision for a sustainable future.

The scale of this task is immense. But so is the scale of the problems that still plague our world today.

Our discussion can bring a valuable contribution to the process.

We are not starting from scratch. The Millennium Development Goals are still unfinished business and we must complete them.

We must build on their simplicity, on their measurability. We must use them as a platform towards true sustainability.

We must make the development goals enforceable, equal and universal, by making the principles of human rights clearly visible throughout them.

These human rights, enshrined in the Universal Declaration have, for 60 years, been a credible and respected deterrent to violators.

Strengthening the human rights dimension in the development goals is the best way to ensure that these goals will also be enforceable.

An accountability mechanism, similar to the Universal Periodic Review, would reduce the scope for violations, by drawing scrutiny from the global community - not only over a country's human rights record, but also its commitment to human development for all.

Enshrining the principle of universality in this way, would help eliminate discrimination in access to education, and ensure that all groups in society are reached.

That is why it is now so important that we uphold this principle of universality in the Universal Periodic Review.

We must not allow its legitimacy - and with it - the legitimacy of the Human Rights Council - to be jeopardised by one country.

I urge the Council to use all appropriate measures to ensure that this Review continues to be an equal process.

Crucially, combining human rights and development will bring mutually-reinforcing benefits.

The MDGs are one of the most ambitious programmes in the history of the United Nations. Many lessons can be drawn for the future framework.

Associating human rights goals with development targets will bring clarity on human rights definitions. There should be no more room for ambiguity, misconception or cultural relativism.

It will also help to make progress in human rights more measurable, by linking to clear and defined development targets.

It will allow us to measure the impact of the right of every child to have an education. To measure the economic and social benefits of realising that right. It will help us assess the damage to a society when that right is taken away by conflict, disaster or even prejudice.

Indeed, placing human rights as an umbrella for the development targets will make the human rights framework more operational and the development targets more enforceable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In looking ahead, we must not get distracted from our obligations to the MDGs, but work harder to find innovative ways to achieve them.

For example, we can - and must - do more now to support each and every child have access to schooling, regardless of race, faith, language or any other factor.

It is unacceptable that education continues to be a victim of conflict.

Take the example of Gaza, where the impact of the blockade continues to have a crippling effect, especially on education. Schools have been damaged. Supplies, from chairs to textbooks and pencils cannot get in.

Since 2009, the Al Fakhoora programme has been working with the UNDP to enable young people to pursue higher education. Helping to reconstruct education buildings. Providing psycho-social support.

It is seeking to address some of the damage caused by the same country that is trying now to escape scrutiny of its Human Rights record through the Universal Periodic Review.

Today, 28 million children across the world are denied schooling because of conflict.

Yet, education is one of the most powerful tools that can break the cycle of conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to see the future sustainable development goals take a more ambitious approach to education.

To move beyond basic education and encompass specific targets on education in conflict, quality of learning and lifelong education.

But the level of ambition of the future goals will depend entirely on the progress we make from now to 2015.

That is why I launched the Educate A Child initiative last year. It is working with expert partners, from UN agencies with global reach, to NGOs with local roots. It is already supporting half a million children in the most difficult circumstances gain access to schooling.

We are still seeking out innovative partnerships to help us reach millions more children.

Nobody can deny that human rights values – the values of dignity, respect, responsibility, justice, tolerance and equality – are essential attributes for human development.

Now we must define how we make these attributes part of the development framework, of which education is the core.

Today I look to you to do all in your power to bring the benefits of international human rights law to the human development agenda.

We must give future generations the opportunity to build prosperous and peaceful societies through human-centred development.

Thank you for your attention.