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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
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including the right to development**

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education on her visit to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Comments by the Organization*

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Observations by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education on her visit to the Organization

- 1.. UNESCO wishes to warmly thank the Special Rapporteur for the visit she conducted to the Organization in January 2023, complemented by the series of online meetings with the UNESCO Institutes.
2. UNESCO also thanks the Special Rapporteur for her Report which is fully aligned with the discussions held during her visit, and also with UNESCO's positions.
3. Her visit was extremely useful in exploring synergies to further enhance collaboration between the Organization and the Mandate. The discussion covered a wide-range of aspects relating to the various dimensions of the Right to education. In depth discussion exchanges were held with all Sections and Units of the Education Sector, as well as the other Programme Sectors in addition to the Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations, the Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs the Bureau of Strategic Planning, the Chair of the International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations and of the NGO-UNESCO liaison Committee, and well as UNESCO specialized Institutes.
4. UNESCO fully shares the Special Rapporteur's suggestion that each incoming mandate-holder for the right to education would benefit from the opportunity to conduct such an initial visit. To facilitate the handover between mandate-holders, UNESCO can create a repository of previous visit agendas/notes and reports.
5. UNESCO also warmly thanks the Special Rapporteur for her strong support to the Evolving Right to Education Initiative aiming to enhance a holistic approach to education, and for her appreciations on the mainstreaming of the right to education across the Organization's Education Sector activities and beyond to fully play its role as a guardian of the right to education.
6. The Special Rapporteur's views on expanding the right to education throughout life are fully aligned with the efforts conducted by UNESCO in 2022 to strengthen the lifelong learning dimension, from a rights-based perspective, through the series of inter-governmental meetings organised to cover a continuum of learning – namely the Transforming Education Summit with its call for transformative approaches to education within a lifelong learning perspective, the Third World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022) aimed to define a roadmap for a new era of higher education placing the right to education at its center, the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII), which adopted the Marrakech Declaration focusing on lifelong learning entitlements, the second World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (WCECCE2), which adopted the Tashkent Declaration focusing on the right of the child to quality early education and care, as well as the launch of the UNESCO Strategy for TVET articulating around the skills needed to meet individuals, economies and societies expectations and aspirations with focus on work and life.

Below are some observations on few specific aspects highlighted in the report:

“There is a need to address the concern of civil society organizations and experts about a disproportionate voice of the private sector in matters relating to education. Long term partnerships with the private sector must be accompanied by long term partnership with civil society on the same footing. Civil society should also be systematically included in research projects, for example regarding the role of private actors in education and how to regulate them.”

7. (para. 40) >> UNESCO's engagement and partnership with civil society organisations is longstanding and enshrined in UNESCO's Constitution (Art. XI (4)), with several engagement mechanisms in place. For instance, at a broader level, the International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations and the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee, provide a nexus with more than 400 NGOs in official partnership with UNESCO, covering the whole mandate of the Organization. More specifically to the mandate on

education, the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (CCNGO) is a key consultation and discussion platform which is represented on the SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) and leads global mobilization and advocacy efforts. On the other hand, engagement with the private sector is relatively new and is framed within the Organization's Medium-Term Strategy and its Approved Programme and Budget.

Besides, there is an aspect in relation to communication dimension that is not included in the report, but that UNESCO wishes to bring to attention:

8. UNESCO has been running a very successful long-term digital campaign on the #RightToEducation that was launched to mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2018. Through a series of powerful videos, animations, social media visuals, interviews and stories, UNESCO continues to drive a global conversation and engagement across its multilingual digital platforms to raise awareness around this crucial issue. The first two iterations of the campaign have organically reached over 15 million people through UNESCO's English-language channels alone. Its signature animation video had over 3.3 million views on YouTube. The #RightToEducation campaign has become a flagship movement for UNESCO and is now permanently embedded into its other thematic campaigns.

Specific comments from UNESCO-IESALC:

9. We thank the Special Rapporteur for her virtual visit to UNESCO IESALC and for the opportunity to discuss the flagship work being undertaken at the Institute on the right to higher education in the context of the Organization's focus on the evolving right to education.

10. IESALC welcomes the attention given to the interest of the Special Rapporteur in reassessing the notion of "merit" (para. 8).

11. IESALC fully shares the Special Rapporteur's attention to the funding gap for UNESCO (para. 18).

12. With regards to Section B, the Organization may consider creating guidelines for all units and Institutes to guide partnerships with the private sector. In the same way that many universities have fundraising committees that review proposed donations before they are accepted, UNESCO may consider flexible/adaptive mechanisms/guidelines to ensure that private partnerships are ethical and are aligned to the Organization's commitment to the right for education for all throughout life.

13. During IESALC's meeting with the Special Rapporteur, several other topics were discussed that are not reflected in the report and which we wish to bring to the attention of colleagues:

(1) The role of teachers: increasing demand for teachers (including in higher education), their training/formation and the relationship between adequate provision of well-trained teachers in assuring the right to education.

(2) The impact of technological developments on the right to education: the outsourcing and privatization of educational functions to private technology companies (e.g. in the provision of online learning management systems in higher education institutions), the challenges of ChatGPT and artificial intelligence/digitalization, online privacy and safety for learners.

(3) Gender and the right to education, especially for females.

(4) Assessment in higher education: making stronger links between pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment to better understand and assess students' learning; the role of personalization and flexibility to assure relevance in assessment; improving support for students.