



General Assembly

Distr.: General
13 February 2017

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-fourth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Child Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[02 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.17-02135(E)



* 1 7 0 2 1 3 5 *

Please recycle



Education is not a privilege, it is a right.

Across the world nearly 50 million children have been uprooted and forced out of their homes as a direct result of violent conflict, extreme poverty, neglect, and other major threats that have a serious impact on their quality of life. Approximately 20 million of these children are classified as refugees who are unsure of when or if they will ever return home. These individuals face a variety of challenges that range from physical and mental health, to lack of education and social acceptance. Recently, it has become blatantly clear that more needs to be done by host countries and humanitarian organizations to ensure that the long term care of these refugee children is considered when allocating funds both now and in the future. Studies by UNICEF and the UNHCR have shown that education will play a key factor in further improving the current and future quality of life for these millions of children around the world.

Education is the key to alleviating the financial stresses of refugee families, but unfortunately, around 3.7 million school age children are not currently enrolled in any education system. A UNCHR report published in September 2016 showed that only “50% of refugee children attend primary school,” compared to 90% of children worldwide. Additionally, only 22% of refugee children are enrolled in secondary school, as opposed to 84% on average worldwide. These appalling statistics are proof that more needs to be done to properly educate the future generations of war torn countries in order to assist them in rebuilding once the dust has settled. Studies show that a secondary school education vastly improves the future career opportunities for a child. This time allows for growth beyond letters and numbers, and it provides the training and skills that are necessary to obtain a higher quality position with higher earning potential.

Unforeseeable futures and unfortunate circumstances have left little to no room for improvement in the area of education with the funds that are currently available. At present, refugee education is largely supported by monetary reserves which are often considered to be “emergency funds.” While it is a blessing that these programs are understood to be of such high importance, these emergency situations are still on going. Without the allocation of additional monetary resources, it is quite possible that the use of these “emergency funds” may leave the refugees that still remain worse off years from now.

Refugee children face additional yet different hardships in their new countries, many of which lead them down the wrong path and often hold them back from becoming contributing members of their society. Reports show that education vastly improves one’s ability to pursue a bright future. Simply by attending school on a regular basis, a child has the opportunity to make friends, form bonds, find mentors, and function in a safe space. All of these positive reinforcements come as a result of encouraging surroundings and have been shown to decrease the chances of teen pregnancy, child labour, and even child marriage, all of which currently plague a vast number of displaced children. Additionally, the opportunities that education can provide has the ability to help not only the children themselves, but many times more than not, has the potential to assist entire families as well. (children in tertiary schools)

While many host countries across the world have attempted to assimilate refugee children into their education systems, enough has still yet to be done. For example, while more than half of school children in underdeveloped countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, and Pakistan are out of school, these countries have attempted to include refugee school children in their yearly school plan. This effort has begun to make a difference and more than anything, these large strides provide a fantastic example for the international community to model in their own countries. In the coming years it is crucial that refugee children receive more than just an education, but that they also continue on long enough to learn the skills necessary to move onto higher levels of learning. The only way to do this for sure is by integrating them into the host country’s school systems. Without this necessary dedication to their education systems, it is quite possible that the many resources used may go to waste if it is found that their transcripts do not match up with the requirements of their host country. With no responsible party willing or able to keep track of this, it is crucial that this responsibility is taken on by education in their host country to ensure that their knowledge is furthered in the most productive way.

One of the most difficult problems faced by refugee children when going through relocation is leaving their entire lives behind. Whether it’s prized possessions, family members, or memories, so much is sacrificed when they are forced to leave the only homes they’ve known in attempt to spare their own lives. One of the many things that children leave behind when they relocate is their ability to learn. On average, refugee children lose between 3 and 4 years of schooling because of displacement. While many host countries and humanitarian organizations are attempting to provide an education for as many school age children as possible, it takes a significant amount of time to deal with many basic

needs for survival before life improvement is considered. With this being the case, when seeking refuge, many children lose crucial learning years that are often not immediately replaced. As time passes, and grade levels go by, it is only natural that when they are reintroduced to the school system, children find themselves years behind and instructors are unsure of where to place them.

This common problem of placement in the education system is one that must be handled with urgency. Precious time is lost in these formative years and it is this time that is next to impossible to regain. With this in mind, we must call upon the international community to form independently functioning programs to speed up the assimilation process, especially for those students who are driven enough to push themselves to learn. Also, these accelerated programs have the ability to help a wide range of refugees with a variety of problems. Of the many discovered reasons for low enrolment reported by UNHCR including distance to schools, low absorption rates, and social, cultural, and economic problems, many could be aided by independent programs consisting of suggestions made above. By more widely developing programs such as these, the UN and other humanitarian organizations could have the opportunity to help refugee students get their education back on track.

Education is not a privilege, it is a right. The way the education system currently functions, this key message is not being sent. It is crucial that education is made available for all, especially those such as refugees who are seeking out opportunities to better their lives. As a community, we must work together to ensure that all children are given the right to education that they deserve.
