

**Seventh EFA Working Group Meeting**  
**UNESCO, Paris: 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> July 2006**  
**Formal Opening Session**

**Partnerships for Achieving Results in Education for All**

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Mr Chairman; Director General, Koichiro Matsuura, the Assistant Director General Peter Smith, distinguished heads of delegations from bi-Lateral agencies, multi-lateral Agencies, non-governmental organisations and the private sector, dear colleagues: On behalf of the Executive Director of UNICEF Ms Ann Veneman, I would first like to thank UNESCO for its continued leadership in bringing together this distinguished group of like minded organisations on education for all. As a movement we share what is perhaps the most challenging vision of our times – achieving quality basic education for every child everywhere and in all circumstances. There are multiple and complex dimensions to this challenge, but few can doubt the significance of the EFA goals for our common future.

We risk chaos and polarisation at a time when poverty, inequalities, natural disasters, health pandemics and competing ideologies challenge human relations, compromise human dignity and diminish our ability to manage the forces that determine quality of life for the human family. It is imperative that we do not fail with EFA and the Millennium Development Goals.

I have no doubt that these thoughts occupy the minds of most colleagues at this meeting. Personally, I come to these meetings with images of children in my mind and close to my heart – children I have met in recent months in my travels for UNICEF. For me, it is important to remember these children, to remind myself of why we travel long distances and sit through long hours at meetings like this. Amidst the statistics and economic analysis, let us never forget why these discussions call on our energies and our time. It is so that the girls and boys I met recently in Sudan, Afghanistan and the occupied Palestinian territory can go to school, become literate, know their history, learn the ways of peace, and grow strong in a world that is safe and progressive. It is for millions of boys and girls caught up in current or forgotten conflicts, those trapped in poverty or living under oppressive regimes, or simply living in far flung villages, townships, districts and provinces; these children that many of us may not visit, but to whom we are nonetheless accountable; it is for these children whose future will determine our destiny, that we have come to Paris in July.

Chairman, friends; because our mission is critical for millions of children still denied their right to an education, as well as for our common future, we need a new honesty and sense of urgency when we speak of “partnerships”. We must not use the word partnership simply as a cliché. While embracing the joys and successes of partnership, we must not shrink from confronting its difficult challenges and frustrations of partnership.

We have learned the hard way that “education for all” takes time, money and expertise, as well as unfailing vision and unwavering commitment. Most of all we know it takes strong and constructive partnerships. No single ministry

or government can do it alone and no one international partnership such as the Fast Track Initiative or UNGEI can provide all the answers in support of countries. This is why we need to strengthen the movement around EFA and that is why we are all here this week. Let me therefore share with you a few thoughts on what we in UNICEF see as the challenges to be confronted for a stronger partnership around the EFA goals.

First, we believe it is important to harmonise the education objectives of our various agencies into a shared operational architecture with common goals, targets and measurable results established in support of the MDGs and EFA. This is one of the tasks to be urgently addressed by the 5 EFA convening partners as we strive to develop an EFA Global Action Plan – the GAP. Let me assure all our partners that UNICEF will continue to make constructive contributions to the formulation of such a plan.

Second, and just as importantly, we need to have a clear sense of how we are doing in terms of progress by different countries. Although things are getting better with the efforts of UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, we are still frustrated by issues of data authenticity, accuracy and timeliness. One thing we do know is that there are far too many primary school aged children out of school. What we do not know so much about is how well we are doing with the key business of quality and learning achievement. In any event, we need to confront the quagmire of reliable data and key indicators for measuring progress on access, quality and learning. Recent work by UIE and UNICEF has been helpful in getting us to agree that on best estimates there were 115 million primary school aged children out of school in 2001/2. It is remarkable that this is seen as an achievement some 15 years after Jomtien!

While we all look to the UIS for authoritative data on education, we must also embrace multiple sources of data such as from household surveys. This would enable us to link EFA more closely with wider social and economic indicators and with the Millennium Development Goals. We need to agree not only on how many children are out of school in different countries but also on how factors like civil conflict, poverty, rural location, disability, and gender affect the chances of children accessing and successfully completing a good quality basic education cycle.

Thirdly, we need to work together to make the annual EFA High Level Group meeting much more of a dynamic platform for deciding on action, for reviewing progress with the global agenda, and for taking on the challenges that need to be addressed by all of us. Through the convening power of UNESCO and with the support of major bilateral donors as well as World Bank, UNICEF and other key partners, we are afforded an annual chance to focus on EFA at the highest level. The High Level Group meeting should be the place where we not only review the report card on EFA, but where we scrutinise who has been doing what and why we have failed to achieve some of the targets set in the previous meetings, as well as who needs to do what by the next meeting. It should be an accountability forum with frank peer review by agencies and by countries. The agenda should be worthy of the presence of national leaders and heads of our various organisations.

Fourthly, we must deal with the challenge of mapping out clear and concrete roles and responsibilities for each of our agencies as we seek to define our partnership and how it contributes to effective and efficient support for

education at the country level. Our organizations have been working so closely for so long that we know each other's strengths and weaknesses as well as we know our own. We know each other's comparative advantage, and each other's track record of performance. This knowledge, rather than any organizational myopia, should determine how we assign our roles and responsibilities in achieving EFA.

Fifthly, we need to make the EFA Global Monitoring Report more widely accessible as a key tool for reporting on and publicising how well countries and their development partners are doing, what are the main challenges, what more needs to be done and by whom, etc. This requires joint advocacy and a shared communication strategy by EFA partners.

Finally, let me take a brief moment to touch on the outcomes of the UNGEI meeting, which will be reported on more formally on Friday by DfID as one of the UNGEI co-Chairs. I would like to assure you all that UNGEI is committed to fully integrating its work into the EFA Working Group and into the EFA High Level Group meeting. We are keen to see gender equality as a central part of advocacy and programming in support of countries. This is why we welcome the agreement of EFA-FTI partners to integrate gender into the guidelines document. We look forward to similar agreements for the framework document at the Cairo meeting.

Chairman, colleagues, since the last meeting of the EFA Working Group and the last meeting of the UNGEI Global Advisory Committee, UNESCO and UNICEF have been working on their plans and strategies for the future. The World Bank has produced a new Education Strategy document and several bilateral partners like the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden and the

USA have produced important position papers on education. We also know that Canada is working on a similar document. Each of these organizations has consulted widely, with each other, with the same institutions, the same NGOs, and the same bilateral and multilateral partners. In all consultations, the main message has been the need to work together more closely.

UNICEF appreciates the valuable input from UNESCO, World Bank many bilateral agencies and non-governmental agencies to our education strategy, and the opportunity to contribute to the EFA Global Action Plan and to the strategies of other partners. We will continue to work with all partners to strengthen the EFA movement, especially in terms of advancing the rights of children, restoring education in disrupted societies and advancing gender issues and girls education within the EFA and the MDGs.

Chairman, colleagues, we will no doubt be talking about these aspects of our partnerships as we meet for the rest of this week, and in the months that follow, and in Cairo. And as we do so, we will inevitably come up against the difficulties and frustrations integral to building strong partnerships. At these moments, I urge you to remember the last child you saw with the joy of education in their eyes. Anyone who saw the pictures of girls and boys going to school in Southern Sudan after the successful “Go to School” campaign cannot miss the sense of joy and hope that replaced the sheer destitute and hopelessness in these same children over many years of crisis. This is the magic of education and it is to help unleash such human potential, to help generate that joy, that delight, that pride; it is why we do what we do and struggle through our differences. For, in the most important sense, our work on education for all is about upholding the right of every child.

I wish you all a very successful meeting of the EFA Working Group.

Thank you!