

4 November 2015.

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, opening keynote address, World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) 2015.

Good Morning,

I welcome you here as you gather once again under the umbrella of the World Innovation Summit for Education. I would like welcome the First Ladies with us today: Mrs. Michelle Obama from the United States and Mrs. Sylvia Obongo Ondimba from Gabon. And I appreciate the attendance of all of you.

Since its inception, WISE has become a global platform and community, advancing innovation in education. This year WISE has been productive in developing a number of policy relevant research reports and focusing on how to invest for impact to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

But before I begin I have to be direct and honest with you and to do this I will speak in English for I am about to make a confession which I want to ensure is not lost in translation.

So, as you have just heard

I have switched to English to make sure we are all tuned into the same wavelength, without static or interference.

Let me begin by confessing

In this region, we are not only paralyzed but going backwards at the speed of light!

Ironically, had we just been going backwards we would be better off!

For example, prior to the first Gulf war in 1991 Iraq's primary enrollment rate was at 100%. In fact Iraq was awarded the UNESCO International Literacy Prize in 1982.

And today?

A recent UNESCO report estimates there are at least 3 million primary aged children out of school in Iraq and Syria alone.

I feel both sad and bitter, with a heavy weight on my conscience, when I remember the faces of Iraqi scientists and educators who came to me after the occupation of Iraq, pleading for protection from assassination.

This was a period when many educators were intentionally targeted in an active attempt to destabilize the nation and disrupt its educational infrastructure.

We formed a committee for the protection of Iraqi scientists and we did everything we could, down to

providing them with bullet proof vests.

But later, communication with them became impossible and one by one they were terminated.

This encouraged us to try even harder.

So, in 2010, a coalition of nations which included the State of Qatar introduced a UN resolution on "The Right to Education in Emergency Situations" at the UN General Assembly.

It affirms the human right to education and access to it during crisis and conflict and urges states to fulfill their obligations under international law, to respect civilians and to not attack teachers, students, and education facilities.

Security Council Resolution 1998 was adopted in July 2011, which makes attacks on schools and hospitals a "trigger violation" for the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism for Children and Armed Conflict. Such a violation can result in armed forces or groups being added to the UN Secretary General's "list of shame" and penalized accordingly.

But what are we doing to enforce these resolutions? Why do we watch perpetrators get away without even the slightest penalty?

Let me be frank - it is not only Iraq, or even Syria and Palestine, which are targets of attacks on education. Between 2009 and 2012 there were at least 30 countries which were heavily affected by attacks on schools.

This is a global problem.

One step in the solution to this problem is ensuring that we have up to date, reliable, and verified data which we can use to better plan our intervention programs to support children living in conflict zones and to help them pursue their education.

Holding perpetrators, whether state or non-state actors, accountable, and forcing them to take full responsibility for their deeds, will, no doubt, serve as a deterrent to others.

Therefore, mechanisms to enforce this accountability, through both financial reparations and punishment from the international community of nations, must be seriously considered and put in place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Education is under attack.

The issue of accountability and punishment for attacks on education must be considered in the implementation of the Framework for Action of the new education Sustainable Development Goal, SDG 4, agreed upon last September.

As we meet here today, another meeting is taking place in Paris to approve this action plan. This adoption must result in real chances to consolidate our commitment and efforts to find new practical methods capable of achieving our priorities.

One thing we know for certain, the SDGs seem like a dream in MENA where we experience the nightmarish sensation of falling backwards,

where our schools have been turned into cemeteries,

and our students and teachers into refugees.

Corpses washing up on European shores.

We are desperately failing the children in “vulnerable situations” to which SDG 4 makes reference.

In fact, we are failing to meet our promises to all the world’s children and youth when it comes to educational goals.

We have an unfinished agenda that we must be held accountable for.

On last count UNESCO estimates there are a minimum of 124 million children from primary to lower secondary levels still out of school, with 59 million of these being of primary age. Yet, this data predates the refugee crisis of the last few years, and so we believe the actual numbers are significantly higher.

All of us believe that investment in education means investment in its medium and long term outcomes. Linkages between education and economic development have long since been established. As we know, UNESCO estimates that every day invested in primary education generates \$10 to \$15 in economic returns.

We also know that every extra year of schooling can add 0.37% to a country’s GDP, and 10% on average to an individual’s earnings.

We need politicians to understand the power of education for their own countries, for their economies.

Political will is required as is a joint sense of moral and historic responsibility to protect and invest in education.

Ladies and Gentleman

After this look at our bleak and dark present, let us shine a light of opportunity on the future of the world’s youth.

The recent adoption of SDG 4 can provide, if we are serious, an historic opportunity to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”.

The targets of this goal focus on all levels of education, including both primary and secondary, thereby allowing us to place special attention on the continuity between different stages of the educational process.

EAC (Educate a Child), launched in 2012, took up the mandate to develop international partnerships in order to address the problem of lack of quality educational opportunities for out of school primary aged children.

EAC works in partnership and emphasizes innovation, scale, and sustainability, to facilitate the fulfillment of children's rights to education.

I am well aware that the education journey does not and should not end with primary school and that there is a substantial drop out rate as children transition from primary to secondary education. In fact, we know that that in low income countries, only 1 in 3 adolescents finish lower secondary school as compared to 5 in 6 in upper middle income countries.

Therefore, it is necessary to advocate for and build effective mechanisms to ensure that the smooth transition from primary to secondary education is a fundamental condition to achieving the basic education target of SDG goal 4.

In recognition of this opportunity and to meet the challenge of SDG goal 4 holistically, EAC is eager to share its research, experience, and expertise with potential partners who are willing to complement our work by providing quality post-primary education to those children who complete our programs.

We encourage new partners to work with us to guarantee that the world's children who complete primary education have access to quality secondary education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Though I have confessed my disappointment, grief, and even anger, I am still hopeful that we can build a bright and better future.

This is why our Young Innovators Program holds a dear place in my heart, because through this program we are attracting exceptional, Arab, youth and offering them the resources and the environment necessary to reach their potential in their different creative fields.

A chance that we lost several times in the past.

We are fortunate to have some of these young people here with us at WISE.

This brings me to a moment I look forward to every year – the announcement of the WISE Prize for Education. Our WISE Prize for Education Laureates, established in 2011, embody the spirit of WISE. They are tireless advocates for the right to education. This year's Laureate is distinguished by her determination to bring education to her fellow citizens in the most adverse conditions of war and

occupation. From refugee camps to secret night schools, and often at great personal risk, she established a network of organizations that provide general education as well as public health education. While her work focuses on girls and women, it also benefits boys and men. Millions have benefited from her optimism. I will leave you now to Mishal Husain to introduce you to this year's WISE Laureate winner.

Thank you for allowing me to share my heart with you today.