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Presentation by Nicholas Burnett,  
Assistant-Director General for Education,  
to "Opening of IIEP Summer School"

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Ladies and gentlemen, participants and panelists,

It is with great pleasure to be here for the opening of the 2009 Summer School on “Rebuilding Resilience: planning for education in ‘fragile contexts’”. This topic is particularly pertinent: according to a UN report released earlier this month on the Millennium Development Goals, major advances in the fight against poverty and hunger have begun to slow or even reverse as a result of the global economic and food crises. Situations of conflict, emergency and natural disaster increase the vulnerability of communities. They heighten the risk of being denied basic rights, including the right to education.

As long as children living in fragile and adverse circumstances are excluded from school or only have access to limited and low-quality learning opportunities, education for all will remain out of reach. Although ‘fragile’ contexts make up only 9 percent of the world’s population they account for over half the children out of school, a third of infants who die before the age of five and a quarter of those living with HIV and AIDS. But the issue goes well beyond numbers. It is about how the denial of education perpetuates a cycle of violence and exclusion. It is about how we deprive children, youth and adults of the very knowledge that would enable them to change their circumstances and improve their countries. It is about how students are being robbed of the opportunity to develop the skills and values they need to build a better and more peaceful future.

You are here as part of the IIEP Summer School, to discuss the nature of education in fragile contexts, the terminology surrounding it, the interventions that work and what needs to be done better. The panel discussion that follows will explore some of the issues that you will be engaging with over the next two weeks.

There is growing awareness in the whole international community of the need for specific policies focusing on education in emergencies. This was notably reflected in the organization of a thematic debate on education in emergencies held last 18 March at the United Nations in New York. It was the first time that the General Assembly has ever debated this theme.

From UNESCO’s perspective, I would like to focus on three specific points: the importance of planning; the need for strengthened collaboration and capacity building of national partners; and the pressing need for increased financing for education in situations of conflict and fragility.

Planning in situations of conflict or emergency is critical for long-term development and reconstruction. What is planned or implemented in the short term during an emergency will affect educational outcomes for years to come. In the case of conflict situations, for example, it is essential that interventions during this phase do not recreate or bolster old tensions. What donors, national governments and UN or non-governmental agencies support during a crisis has ramifications for the future. Until 2006, education was rarely considered part of a humanitarian response and was one of the least funded sectors which profoundly affected the ability of

agencies to support the reconstruction of the education system. I will return to this issue of financing later.

Planning can also play a role in conflict prevention. How an education system functions can reveal signs of potential conflict and/or fragility. By using specific indicators that assess and monitor signs of fragility, there is potential for education to act as a prevention mechanism—a sort of early warning barometer. If these indicators are embedded into the planning process, there is more likelihood that potential conflict can be detected early and measures taken to prevent or at least mitigate its negative effects.

Good planning in these situations may be possible, but how does one implement plans in situations where capacity has already been decimated, where teachers have fled or been targets for attack? Therefore, the second important dimension I would like to focus on and one which is also central to IIEP's core mandate concerns capacity building in situations of conflict or fragility, as well as during an immediate humanitarian response to crises. Rapid responses typically involve a large number of actors and continue to suffer from lack of coordination where external agencies can swamp the capacity of national actors. In 2006, The Interagency Standing Committee accepted the cluster process to be applied to education. While this facilitates a more strategic response to humanitarian crises, a major shortcoming remains in the limited role often given to national partners in the reconstruction process, in particular those from ministries of education.

In response to this challenge, UNESCO, under the Global Education Cluster, is taking a lead in developing and delivering regional capacity development strategies for ministries of education in East Africa and Latin America. Capacity development is at the heart of the cluster strategy. The goal is to ensure that capacities at all levels are sufficient to permit Ministries and other actors to respond rapidly and effectively in a range of emergencies such as floods, drought, earthquake or conflict. Capacity development is not an add-on but must be an integral part of both our crisis prevention efforts and of our response to a crisis. As UN General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann said at the thematic debate on education in emergencies, *“Government disaster relief policies must integrate education into our humanitarian response and into the broader educational framework as well. This requires cooperation and partnerships at all levels.”*

Capacity building improves the skills and confidence of education ministries to act in these situations and to better mitigate their effects. Integrating capacity building into the humanitarian response lays the foundation for a more coordinated response, and a response that ensures more resilient and effective education systems in the long-term.

Complementing other partners, part of UNESCO's expertise lies in contributing policy advice and technical assistance to ministries affected by natural disaster and conflict and to help them plan and deliver education. In Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo, Liberia, Sudan, Pakistan and Yemen, among others, we have assisted ministries in formulating national education plans, bridging the data gap through better information management systems, piloting teacher registration and budgeting systems and training senior

ministry staff. This strategic capacity development approach nurtures ownership by ministry staff to rebuild more sustainable education systems.

Equally important, we bring our expertise to develop curricula and learning approaches that promote inclusion, human rights, mutual understanding, and peace. Teachers themselves can play a highly influential role as peace builders. Schools are where children from diverse backgrounds can learn to live together. Rebuilding education systems after natural disasters, conflict or other emergencies opens an opportunity to make education more inclusive based on values of peace, tolerance and nondiscrimination.

Laying new foundations and fostering reconciliation is crucial to the rebuilding process, especially when the social fabric has been deeply torn by conflict. Focus on policy issues and national and local capacity building right from the onset of the humanitarian response is critical if we want to capture and sustain these opportunities for reform.

The importance of a comprehensive approach should also be emphasized in terms of the programmes we propose in the response package: it is not enough to focus solely on primary education. Programmes must also encompass technical and vocational skills for youth, literacy and life skills for adults, interventions for young children and measures to promote girls' safety and education. There will be no teachers if there is no secondary education provided, and there will be no teacher supervision and no teacher salaries without competent school administrators and educational managers who have budgeting competence.

The third fundamental point is about financing. Our appeal to fulfil the right to education remains an empty shell if it is not supported by resources. Education is a peace dividend and yet it is still one of the least funded sectors in a humanitarian response. The first requirement we must work towards is to advocate for education to be explicitly included in a humanitarian response. Yet only six bilateral donors – Canada, Denmark, Japan, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden – explicitly include education in their humanitarian policy and response although other countries do channel support through multilateral agencies and international NGOs.

Let the figures speak for a moment. In 2008, education constituted just over 5 % of the requests for the UN's consolidated appeal processes. 48% of needs were funded – this is higher than in previous years but well under other sectors like food, water and sanitation. This means that education is not only underfunded, but it receives attention late in the response process. It is consistently perceived as a low priority. And yet, education offers both life saving and long-term benefits and is typically one of the first priorities that children and parents consistently request during the early stages of recovery.

In countries affected by conflict or fragility despite increases in funding from previous years, education still receives a quarter of what is needed to achieve universal primary education. For many donors, the selective assistance provided for fragile contexts focuses on countries with which they have political or economic connections, or on specific crises such as Afghanistan, Iraq or Timor Leste. In IIEP's recent publication on donor engagement in fragile or conflict affected states, the analysis of donor funding portfolios suggests that further prioritization is needed to ensure that their support is aligned with educational demand.

I therefore welcome DFID's latest commitment to conflict affected and fragile states as outlined in their recent white paper. This highlights an important commitment towards securing global security. It was however a great disappointment to learn that the Education Transition Fund which was to be established under the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI), is in jeopardy. This fund was to take an innovative approach to support countries affected by conflict or fragility which are not currently eligible for FTI funds through traditional channels. It is a serious blow to financing education in these countries, which are those that donors typically fail to support. What mechanisms are available for these countries on a global and consistent scale, if there is not a significant global fund that all donors sign up to? Perhaps this is one of the questions you can discuss during the Summer School. I understand you will have an opportunity to speak to Robert Prouty from the FTI secretariat.

This lack of financing for education in countries experiencing fragility mirrors a larger gap in financing education for all. Donors are not delivering on past commitments and the financial crisis runs the risk of aid declining at a time when increasing numbers of people in developing countries are living in poverty. Yet the \$11bn required for low income countries to meet key education goals, is insignificant when compared to the \$380bn in public money injected into banking systems in last quarter of 2009, or the estimated total cost of the Iraq war which is expected to come close to 3 trillion US\$.

In conclusion, these are all issues that you will be deliberating on during the coming two weeks of the Summer School. IIEP Summer Schools are key strategies to focus attention on emerging issues. You have a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge, inspire each other and return to your countries and organisations as stronger and more empowered individuals who can bring about change.

For this change to occur, we also need to consistently reiterate the centrality of education for fighting poverty and exclusion because education is not a top priority on the development agenda. It is encouraging that the United Nations, at the close of the thematic debate on education in emergencies, said that it would press for clearer resolutions, legislation and policies to make education a priority in humanitarian response. We must ensure that the capacity to respond is present before, throughout and after a crisis. It is about strengthening mechanisms to prevent violence and enabling the right to education to exist in the most adverse circumstances. The aim is to ensure that education provides the values, confidence and knowledge to build a more positive and peaceful future.

You can build these in your own contexts, and I wish you every success during this Summer School which will support you in that aim.

Thank you.