



PRESS RELEASE

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION – TOWARDS A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

Palais des Nations, Geneva, 19 November 2019

On 19th November 2019, the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva, in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Order of Malta to the United Nations in Geneva, the Caritas in Veritate Foundation, the International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE), the International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEL) and the International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC), organized a Special Event entitled “**The Right to Education – Towards a Renewed Commitment to Education**”, on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The event was co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Lebanon, Poland, Philippines, Zambia, Caritas Internationalis, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice, New Humanity, Forum of Catholic Inspired NGOs in Geneva, and Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII. The Special Event was moderated by **His Excellency Archbishop Ivan JURKOVIČ, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva.**

In his keynote speech on “**The Right to Education: Towards a Global Compact on Education**”, **His Eminence Cardinal Giuseppe VERSALDI**, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education of the Holy See, highlighted how the CRC calls for an engagement of States in promoting and protecting the rights of minors. Moreover, Cardinal Versaldi stressed the paramount importance of ensuring access to education and of respecting the right to a free and equitable education, as education and life learning are catalyst for accessing all other human rights. The Catholic Church has always been committed to guarantee quality and inclusive education, supporting the *Incheon Declaration* and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, in their effort to achieve “equitable, inclusive and quality education and life learning opportunities for all”. Cardinal Versaldi, thus, called for a shift in paradigm into educational processes, as “transmission of knowledge must be understood as a relational tool, in which a fruitful didactic personal and emotional exchange allows growth of students in their ability to relate to others in a constructive way”. Such a transformative approach, rooted in mutual acceptance and educational community building, and eager to promote a model of coexistence capable of responding to the fragmentation of society through a humanized, integral and transcendent education, calls for a new global alliance for education.

Mr. Benyam Dawit MEZMUR, Member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the Convention on the Rights of the Child pointed out that the CRC embraced for the first time a new image of children as human beings with their own rights. After 30 years, questions should be asked whether the rights stated in the CRC have been respected and fully implemented. According to Mr. Mezmur, lamentably there is still a huge number of children, mainly in vulnerable situations, not benefiting from them. Issues and challenges to education in the new era can be identified as: i) implementation of SDGs with a child perspective: indeed, there are no crises in the world that are neutral to children; ii) increasing technology and automatization: as much as technology gives us significant advantages, we need to recognize that the kind of education we provide to children needs to keep up with these changes, making sure that the digital divide does not significantly affect children; iii) global migration crisis where children are the most affected part of the population: in this context, it is necessary to strengthen measures to avoid drop-out from school, to set zero-tolerance on discrimination in school settings and to empower teachers to deal with the needs of children; iv) public education campaigns, both to combat discrimination and to build a child rights culture. In his concluding remarks, Mr. Mezmur emphasized that education should always encompass a community (*Ubuntu*) aspect that should push people to “taking action, instead of just talking action”.

Mrs. Chantal PAISANT, Honorary Dean of the Faculty of Education of the Catholic Institute of Paris, International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE) and Representative to UNESCO, intervening on “**Education and Values for Inclusive Societies**”, pointed out that inclusion requires capacities to identify exclusion forces at work in our societies, acknowledging our shared coexistence. This process, however, entails a change in how we see the “other”, and how we relate to the human family and our common home. Thus, in order to promote inclusive societies, education should help, on one hand, to conceive the human society as pluralistic and, on the other, should be committed to build and relate with “the other, the different”. Mrs. Paisant enlisted four dimensions of the educative process: i) education to fundamental human rights and to a culture of respect; ii) education to welcome, without judgement, a culture of hospitality and encounter; iii) education to dialogue and to a culture of listening, so to become able to understand and meet “the other”; iv) education to cooperation and to a culture of responsibility sharing, in order to shape a global citizenship and a social and ethical responsibility.

Mr. Jan DE GROOF, Professor at the College of Europa (Bruges, Belgium) and at the National Research University - Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia), UNESCO Chair for the Right to Education and former UNESCO Chargé de Mission, focusing on “**The Importance of Freedom of Education and the Added Value of Faith-Based Education**”, highlighted that prior responsibility for education lies in parents’ moral and legal responsibility, and that States should foster school pluralism, while respecting the principle of diversity and freedom of choice. Questioning on root values of catholic schools, Mr. De Groof highlighted that Catholic Education should enable people to critically understand the world by raising alternative questions and by enticing to “learn what we did not learn”. Arguing that religious diversity stands at the heart of many international instruments as a core human right, he stressed how governments, aiming to shape a vibrant democracy, should guarantee educational pluralism and, in contradiction with Abidjan’s Principles, promoting access to both private and public schools. Prof. De Groof also mentioned the “4As” system that, in his opinion, is still relevant to analyze educational systems but should be updated integrating awareness, advocacy, accountability, adequacy and autonomy. He concluded that the added value of Catholic Education is patent when “a school shapes a ‘value approach’, through its curriculum, the choice of its staff, the respect for ‘otherness’, the moral attitude within the leadership of the educational institution.”

Mrs. Inès de FRANCLIEU, Founder of *Com’ je t’aime*, in her intervention “**Where has love gone?**”: **Emotional and Affective Education** highlighted that sexuality is not just a physical issue but, rather, an element of human deepest intimacy and of the most existential part of the individual. However, family members and parents are often reticent to talk about it in a freely and constructive way, mainly because they find it difficult to choose the right words and to face uneasy questions. New generations are exposed, through the easy access to internet, to pornographic contents that hamper the beauty of sexual relationship and falsify it with hideous messages. School environment, if not controlled, could become an insidious space where sexuality is conceived with a physical approach, and presented by peers as a “must-need step”. Mrs. de Franclieu, inspired by Pope Paul VI and the Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, founded the association *Com’ je t’aime* aiming at revealing the beauty of human relations and individual profound vocations. With programs of sexual and affective education, *Com je t’aime* seeks to arise adolescents’ aspirations and guide them to a real durable love as well as to a higher joy.

The speakers’ interventions were interspersed with videos presenting four case studies: in the Philippines from OIEC, the *La Salle Fratelli* Project in Lebanon, the activities of *Fondazione Proveda* in Guatemala and the emergency response during the Ebola crisis by *Missioni Don Bosco* in Sierra Leone. The Questions and Answers section concluded the event with a good number of interventions from the floor.

A large number of Representatives of Permanent Missions attended the event. The **Working Paper “The Right to Education –Education as a Driver to Integral Growth and Peace”**, published by the *Caritas in Veritate* Foundation was also distributed during the event. It has been officially launched on 31 October at the Pontifical Lateran University (Rome) within the workshop “Education, Human Rights and Peace”, hosted in preparation of the Global Compact on Education, launched by Pope Francis and to be issued in May 2020.