



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 44th Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3 – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education
Geneva, 3 July 2020

Madam President,

This year the report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the realization of this right. The numbers speak for themselves: according to UNESCO, 90% of children have been deprived of attending school¹. Online teaching and learning have played an important role in overcoming this crisis for millions of children. Nevertheless, as the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights pointed out, there is still a strong risk of deepening educational inequalities due to unequal access to affordable internet services and equipment².

Education is a fundamental enabler for, and key to, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda. When Pope Francis addressed the General Assembly in 2015, he spoke about the right to education saying that it “is ensured first and foremost by respecting and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate its children, as well as the right of churches and social groups to support and assist families in the education of their children. Education conceived in this way,” he emphasized, “is the basis for the implementation of the *2030 Agenda*.”³

At the present time, the pandemic has highlighted the fragility and fractures of our societies. Among others things, we have noted its broad impact on schools and academic institutions. COVID-19 also has directly affected entire families whose parents were constrained to carry out their regular work responsibilities, while at the same time having the need to adapt their schedules to assist and monitor their children. Not all families are equipped with the necessary information technology tools, nor are they always capable of making accommodations for the continuous presence of their children at home. Article 18.2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents (...) in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for

¹ UNESCO (2020) Covid-19 school closures around the world will hit girls hardest, Available: <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-school-closures-around-world-will-hit-girls-hardest>.

² E/C.12/2020/1, para.7.

³ Statement delivered by the Secretariat of State, His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, at the United Nations General Assembly Hall New York, 28 September 2019 “Galvanizing Multilateral Efforts for the Eradication of Poverty, Quality Education, Climate Action and Inclusion”.

the care of children". Education is one of these responsibilities (art. 18.1 ICESCR); therefore, parents should be assisted by public authorities in carrying out their responsibilities. In this same regard, the support of the State to certain non-State institutions is critical for guaranteeing an education, which is acceptable and adaptable for all, even during this crisis.

Madam President,

The report referred to the four "As" in relation to education: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. "Humanized education", therefore, does not restrict itself to doling out an educational service, but keeps in mind, and has at heart, the bigger picture of personal, moral, and social attitudes of the participants in the educational process. Thus, further development and understanding of acceptability and adaptability⁴ seems urgently necessary. The challenges for educational systems are not only socio-economic, but can also be ethical, religious and cultural⁵.

Thus, the important and complementary role of non-State schools must be acknowledged in our efforts to provide a broad range of educational choices to parents and communities, as we strive to achieve acceptability and adaptability in the educational sector. In the context of the present COVID-19 crisis, the fact that many governments refuse to provide funding for such institutions limits the possibilities for children to receive an acceptable and adapted education that takes into account the best interest of the child as well as of values and religious, cultural and social contexts of the communities in which they live.

Madam President,

The Holy See wishes to emphasize that the Abidjan principles, to which the Report makes constant reference, merely distinguishing between for profit and not-for-profit schools, do not represent fully the broader and multifaceted reality of education. The latter should instead lead to strengthening the educational sector's contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda by promoting greater complementarity between both State and non-State educational institutions.

In conclusion: "Education will be ineffective, and its efforts will be sterile if we do not also concern ourselves with implementing a new approach regarding human beings, life, society, and our relationship with nature."⁶

Thank you, Madam President.

⁴ General Comment No. 13: of the CESCR "*the form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, have to be acceptable (e.g. relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality) to students and, in appropriate cases, parents*". Moreover, "*education has to be flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings*" (adaptability).

⁵ E/C.12/1999/10, par. 6.

⁶ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 215.