

World Teachers' Day in Ethiopia

Keynote Speech delivered by Irène Rabenoro

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Excellency Ato Shiferaw Shigute, Minister of Education of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

Distinguished Dr Mitiku Tesso, President of the Ambo University,

Distinguished Ato Yohannes Benti, President of the Ethiopian Teachers Association,

Distinguished guests,

Members of the Ambo University Community,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

My first words will be to apologise for not being able to deliver this speech in Amharic. Although I have been learning Amharic for a month now, I am not good enough at it yet. Ten'a yistillin!

It gives me immense pleasure to have been invited to this very important conference that is going to deliberate on major issues in education and its contribution to national development. My organisation UNESCO, as the lead United Nations agency for education, culture, science, communication and information, values very highly the work of its Member States in these areas. And I am happy to note that Ethiopia has done a very commendable work in expanding education to its citizens over the last two decades.

I am also proud that UNESCO has been actively engaged with the efforts to expand education in this country. We all know that there is a lot more work that needs to be done, and we must brace ourselves to do more, especially in the area of quality education. I am confident that with the high level of political commitment and hard work being exerted in this country to improve the quality of education, more impressive results shall be achieved.

In this connection, I would like to stress the importance of having quality teachers in sufficient numbers in order to achieve quality education. It is rightly said that the quality of education of a country is closely tied with the quality of its teachers. It is in recognition of this fact that UNESCO first declared 5 October, "World Teachers Day" back in 1994. Ever since that time, the day is marked with various advocacy events to highlight the pivotal role that teachers play in a country's development. Today's event is an apt illustration of the importance attached to the teaching and learning process and the teacher's irreplaceable position in this.

While it is true that learning is more important than teaching, it is also true that it cannot happen outside of teaching. And the teacher is the central figure in this. That is exactly the reason why we all should give due emphasis to the overall well being of the teacher, beginning with their recruitment, training, deployment, career development, welfare and retirement. Unless we tackle teacher issues in such a comprehensive manner, we may not achieve our desired goal of the provision of quality education in a country. A teacher who is not properly trained, is not productively deployed, does not have opportunities for career development, is not provided with ongoing professional support, and whose welfare is not taken care of, cannot be a committed professional who can bring about marked improvement in the learning of his or her students.

UNESCO works with Member States to realise the goal of quality and motivated teachers in sufficient numbers. The challenge of quality teachers in sufficient numbers is a particular challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our continent needs over a million new teachers, a further 3.4 million teacher replacements, to meet the EFA and education-related MDG goals by 2015, and 2015 is less than three years away. This therefore means we have a lot of work to do, and to do it as quickly as possible, or else we will miss yet another deadline that the international community collectively set for itself back in 2000 in Dakar.

In this endeavour, UNESCO has been contributing its share, together with the other development partners, to support Ethiopia in its bid to improve the provision of quality education to its citizens. This it does in addition to the support it provides to the country in the areas of culture, sciences, communication and information. Leaving aside the contribution of UNESCO over the years and focussing on the most recent ones, I may mention the support provided as part of the Capacity Building for Education for All (CapEFA) programme that was instrumental in the writing of the Education Sector Development Programme IV (ESDP IV), and the capacity building training provided to high level management staff of teacher education institutions and faculties of education, in which all such teacher education

institutions of the country were involved. One hundred forty three staff members have benefitted from that intervention.

Currently, there is a Girls Education Project being supported by the Italian Government and implemented in Afar and Benishangul Gumuz Regional States and another similar project to be carried out shortly in Gambella and Somali Regional States with the support of the Government of Japan. These projects are being implemented by UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) located in Addis Ababa but mandated to work in the area of teacher issues for the whole of Africa.

I must also mention the support that the Chinese Government has extended for a Teacher Education Institutions Capacity Building project to be executed with the Bahir Dar Teachers College and the College of Teacher Education in Hawassa. I take this opportunity to thank the Governments of Italy, China and Japan for their generous financial support made available through UNESCO. Together we can achieve a lot, and I reiterate my Organisation's commitment to supporting Ethiopia achieve its goal of providing quality education to its citizens through quality teachers who are motivated and committed. The World Teachers Day is a platform to demonstrate the value we attach to the contribution of teachers in the work we achieve in education.

I salute the thousands of Ethiopian teachers who are doing a commendable work, sometimes in difficult circumstances.

I thank you for your attention.

Amasagginallahu!