



SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION, BERT KOENDERS, AT THE HIGH-LEVEL EDUCATION EVENT, *KEEPING OUR PROMISES ON EDUCATION*, BRUSSELS, 2 MAY 2007

Ladies and gentlemen,

Education is the passport to a better life. It benefits not just children, but families, communities and even whole countries. It is a basic human right and a powerful driver of progress towards the other Millennium Development Goals. This morning we heard ample evidence to support this. And we heard where we stand on the road to education for all.

Although there is progress, we heard that at least 75 countries will not achieve universal primary completion by 2015. With 2015 the target date for achieving the goals, time is clearly running out. Every child must be enrolled at school by 2009 if the target is to be achieved.

On several occasions we have committed ourselves to doing more and doing it better: the Education for All Conference in Dakar, the Millennium Summit, Monterrey and Gleneagles. But we are still far from the nine billion dollars' external aid that is needed every year.

That money is needed not only to increase access to education. Education for All cannot be achieved without improving the quality of education. That requires more than building classrooms. Classrooms, after all, don't teach. Good teachers do, but they need to be trained and to receive a decent salary. We also have to get girls into school. The same goes for children living in states affected by conflict. And we need to tackle the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on education.

So, we know what the challenges are. It is now time to deliver and to live up to our promises. If we are serious about achieving the MDGs, urgent action is needed. For their part, developing countries need to put sound sector policies in place that meet the aspirations of their people. And they need to ensure that every last penny is used effectively. We need to show that we are serious about meeting our own commitments to more and better aid. I am therefore pleased to see new players around this table who will hopefully bring financial and

other resources with them. There is a new coalition of hope emerging and this afternoon we need to agree on specific follow-up.

The new Dutch government is giving centre stage to the MDGs. The Netherlands has always been a strong supporter of the Education for All agenda, with the full backing of both parliament and the general public. This year we will be spending 15 per cent of our total ODA on basic education alone. This translates into almost 700 million euros a year. We have doubled our efforts since 2004.

In the past few years we have substantially increased bilateral support to our 16 partner countries. Let me give you some examples. Our support to Mali, Zambia and Burkina Faso doubled between 2003 and 2006; to Bangladesh it tripled and to Mozambique it increased fourfold. In all of these countries we have entered into reliable, multi-year agreements.

We heard a lot about children in conflict situations and other emergencies. With UNICEF we have agreed on a contribution of 166 million euros for education in emergencies. That was the single largest donation UNICEF has ever received in its 60-year history. It is an investment in education programmes in 40 countries in crisis. In practical terms this means schooling for 25 million children in countries like Sudan, Congo, Afghanistan, Somalia and Uganda, of whom 10 million currently receive no educational input whatsoever. The programme will also improve the quality of education for another 15 million children living in crisis situations and will seek to improve the overall functioning of education systems. In Southern Sudan a 'Go to School Campaign' was launched to help children go to school, train teachers and set up 'child friendly schools'. In Northern Uganda the programme is focussed on curriculum improvement to make education more relevant for out-of-school children such as child labourers.

Last but not least, in response to the persistent funding gap in countries endorsed under the Fast Track Initiative, we have increased our support to the FTI Catalytic Fund to a total of 150 million euros a year. As a leading contributor to the FTI we welcome what has been achieved and strongly support it as an effective mechanism in providing more, better coordinated and more effective support.

We intend to maintain our efforts at a similar level in the years to come. I also want to congratulate those countries that show a similar commitment. But there are too few of us. Others need to step up to the mark as well. More bilateral donors, including the G8 countries, need to follow through on their promises and substantially increase their funding of basic

education. Not only through their bilateral programmes but also through other instruments like the FTI Catalytic Fund.

I have to be frank with you here and share my concern about the future of the FTI Catalytic Fund. The FTI has been widely acknowledged as a successful partnership. And its financing instrument has just been transformed into an *Expanded* Catalytic Fund, meaning that more countries are eligible to receive longer term funding from it. As donors to the Catalytic Fund we have promised more predictable outflows from the fund. But how can we live up to these expectations if the resources going into the fund are insufficient and unpredictable? I call on my colleagues to make sure that the resources are there to meet the needs of all those countries that will apply for multi-year grants from the Catalytic Fund later this month.

I would be very happy if new financial commitments were made today.

However, more money is not enough. We all need to improve the delivery of our support. This means: prioritising our policies to benefit children in low-income countries and in countries affected by conflict; targeting basic education while working with countries to develop balanced approaches to the whole sector; providing the reliable, long-term funding which will allow developing countries to fulfil their ambitions – in that context we are interested in exploring the MDG-contract that Commissioner Michel mentioned. And of course we need to ensure that we coordinate our efforts.

Together we can make a difference. Let's not keep the world's children waiting for another half century before they all get the chance to go to school and get the education they need.

Thank you