



**George Soros      Address to Keeping our promises on Education**

**2 May 2007**

**Three months ago I stood in a slum in Monrovia, Liberia. War had taken its toll. Four years after the conflict ended there was still no electricity. There was no water. The day was hot, yet huge crowds had gathered to watch as we broke ground for a school, part of a program to restore education to Liberia.**

**The effort was organized by the Liberian Education Trust, in which I have already invested one million dollars.**

**I believe in Education for All. I believe in public-private partnerships. My foundation has signed memorandums of understanding with dozens of governments. When someone like me puts in his own money, he is likely to contribute more than just money. He is going to make sure that the project in which he participates succeeds.**

**The project in which I am currently most engaged is the Roma Education Fund.**

**Less than 1000 kilometers from here is a school for the mentally handicapped which is mainly or exclusively attended by Roma children. The children receive a segregated and rotten education, which denies them any hope of advancement. We need to address the position of the Roma—as it presents the most egregious and most neglected case of ethnic discrimination and exclusion in Europe.**

**The Roma Education Fund is a joint venture with the World Bank. It has received nearly \$60 million in contributions from public and private sources, of which about half came from my foundation. Our effort focuses on leveling the playing field for Roma in education by working to ensure more coherent government education policies in the countries where Roma live. The needs are much greater than the resources. And I would like to urge you to consider making a contribution to the Roma Education Fund.**

**When it comes to an initiative as bold as Education for All, it is difficult for a private foundation like mine to make a meaningful contribution. The numbers are daunting. Primary education alone in developing countries is a recurrent cost running into tens of billions of dollars per year. And so this is very much a matter for donor governments and developing countries themselves, who already bear the lion's share of the cost through their own education budgets.**

**The international funding gap for expanding primary education to all has reached some \$7 billion a year and will grow as enrollment increases. A number of governments have made exceptional commitments. Gordon Brown, one of the sponsors of this meeting, has pledged \$1.5 billion a year for ten years as a challenge grant to the rest of us—a move I applaud.**

**One of the presidential contenders in the United States, Barack Obama has pledged \$2 billion if elected in a move I also applaud.**

**Obviously I cannot compete, but when it comes to individual countries foundations like mine can play a role.**

**Take the case of Liberia. I chose Liberia because like so many I admire the leadership of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who served as chairperson of OSI in West Africa before she was elected president. I believe that it is crucial to develop public-private partnerships that seek to help her achieve Liberia's plan for their children.**

**The needs of Liberia are particularly acute as a post-conflict state, and its own budgetary ability to meet those needs correspondingly limited.**

**By working to support a portion of President Sirleaf's plan, we will not be another donor to attend to, but a partner helping them achieve the plan that they have agreed on and which only they can ultimately succeed in implementing.**

**On behalf of the donors UNICEF is spearheading Liberia's five-year plan. The estimated amount needed for the first year is \$20 million. And against the gap of what is apparently still needed--\$10 million--I hereby pledge \$5 million. I will give that amount provided the official donors commit to covering the rest of a five-year funding program based on the assessment of existing needs.**

**I am confident that my foundation will work to ensure that all groups stick to their pledges and help see that the program is successful.**

**If you unbundled the global program of Education for All – and look at the individual countries -- I know of many private partners who would be eager to participate and make a meaningful contribution.**