

**Notes for Princess Firyal intervention
Roundtable on Health and Education,
NEW YORK, 25 September 2008**

As we have heard from the Secretary General, and the Director General of UNESCO and other distinguished speakers, the anti-poverty targets agreed upon by world leaders in 2000, as part of the Millennium Development Goals, are achievable, if we are united in mobilizing political will and resources. But, we have new realities today, and before I speak about the accomplishments of this initiative and repeat some of what was said before, we ought to think of how to continue achieving these goals in spite of, and in light of, the present, new economical reality.

The UN Secretary General has stressed that we face (nothing less than development urgency) at this midpoint, to 2015./ And, as you all know, our commitment to reduce extreme poverty and foster every child's right to education by 2015 remains strong. We are encouraged by what we have seen in education since 2000. More children, boys and girls, are in school than ever before. Primary school enrolments have increased dramatically in sub-Saharan Africa and have also risen in South and West Asia, the two regions farthest from the goals. We have heard yesterday from the Norway Minister of Environment and International Development, the honorable Erik Solheim, that our goals have reached very encouraging levels in some areas and offer positive future forecasts.

We believe education is (*sine qua non*) and is the foundation of reaching all the MDGs, because better health, better living standards and safer more sustainable environments cannot be achieved without giving all people the opportunity to acquire basic knowledge and skills.

But we are also here to galvanize stronger political commitment. Some 75 million children/ and children are the future/ remain out of school and they are among the

most vulnerable children in the world. More than half are girls. They have the right to education, and education in a child-friendly environment. Millions more are learning in extremely impoverished conditions, without trained teachers, notebooks, pencils and adequate sanitation. Because these pupils often come from the poorest backgrounds, they are also more likely to suffer from malnutrition and ill-health.

Education and health are intricately connected. No one can learn on an empty stomach. One of the conditions for reaching Education for All is to improve the health and nutrition of children and their parents. There is a direct relationship between school feeding programs and academic achievement. These low and cost effective interventions can make a major difference in the lives of children, and in their education. Ministries of health and education must develop sustainable ways of working together for the well-being of children.

As a board member of the International Rescue Committee for refugees, and in my work for the International Hope Foundation for street children, I have seen how learning brings joy into the lives of the most underprivileged children.

And, as UNESCO's ambassador for Education for All, I would like to stress the importance of the holistic approach advocated for by UNESCO and other key partners. Policies must connect the whole educational spectrum because learning begins well before primary school and continues throughout life. Early childhood care and education programs have a proven impact on child well-being and subsequent schooling, especially for the poorest. Literate adults, and particularly mothers, have a direct influence on whether their children, and especially their daughters, attend school. On average, a child whose mother has no education is twice as likely to be out of school as one whose mother has some education./ These

are the foundations for giving children a better chance of success, for overcoming gender discrimination and other forms of injustice.

We have rich and moving evidence that education can transform lives even in the most extreme and fragile situations. Our commitment to the world's children must start with the will and the resources to reach those who do not have a voice to demand their right to education. Education is a motivation and a vehicle to better life and to a better world.

Thank you.