Ministerial Declaration-2011

"Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2011 of the Economic and Social Council"

"Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education"

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations participating in the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2011 of the Economic and Social Council, held in Geneva from 4 to 8 July 2011,
Having considered the theme of the annual ministerial review of the high-level segment, 'Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education',
Recalling the high-level plenary meeting of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, and its outcome document,
Reaffirming the commitments made at the World Education Forum to reach the six Education for All goals,
Recalling the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, especially those related to education,
Recalling also the agreed conclusions of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women on access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work,
Reaffirming the leading role of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in education, including in the implementation of the Education for All action plan and the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014),
Reaffirming also the right to education and the need for its full realization, and that education is essential for human development, sustainable development, world peace, just and democratic societies and the promotion of all human rights, including the right to development, and noting that culture contributes effectively to education and development,
Recalling that commitments made at the international level emphasize inclusive quality learning, including early childhood education, and universal access to complete, free and compulsory primary education as well as access to secondary, tertiary and vocational education and training and lifelong learning, as well as equal access to education and successful schooling for girls and women,
Noting the progress made on some education-related development goals since 2000, particularly the significant increases in enrolment and gender parity in schooling in many countries,
Expressing concern about insufficient progress and persistent educational inequities among and within countries, expressing concern also

about the high dropout rate, especially of girls in secondary education, and stressing that access to education, including at the primary level, needs to be accelerated, particularly for out-of-school children, rural populations and people living in vulnerable situations,

Expressing deep concern about the persistence of the gender gap in education and that, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, nearly two thirds of the world's non-literate adults are women,

Having considered the reports of the Secretary-General, the regional meetings and other preparatory processes, the national voluntary presentations and the deliberations held during the high-level segment,

Have adopted the following declaration:

1. We reaffirm our commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, particularly those related to education, including the Education for All goals.

2. We also reaffirm our commitment to realizing the right of everyone to education, and emphasize that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity and shall strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

3. We call for a people-centred, holistic approach to the development of educational systems and for prioritizing education in the design and implementation of national development strategies, recognizing the inter-linkages between education and the advancement of all the other Millennium Development Goals. We also recognize that education plays a fundamental role in creating an inclusive society and reducing inequity and inequality, as well as for achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development.

4. We emphasize that education and sustainable development are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and stress the need to recognize the important role of education for sustainable development, including as a contribution to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be convened in 2012.

5. We reaffirm the need to redouble efforts to drastically reduce the intolerably high number of the non-literate population, with a special focus on women, including the further implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade, and promote lifelong learning with the ultimate goal of preventing and breaking the cycle of low literacy and creating a fully literate world.

6. We are concerned about insufficient progress on specific Education for All goals: quality of education, early childhood care and education, skills

development and adult literacy; and call for more effective and efficient international cooperation in order to achieve those goals.

7. We call for continued efforts by Member States to promote human rights education and training.

8. We recognize that the international community has been challenged by multiple and interrelated crises, including the ongoing impact of the financial and economic crisis, volatile energy and food prices and ongoing concerns over food security, as well as the increasing challenges posed by climate change and the loss of biodiversity, all of which have increased vulnerabilities and inequalities and have adversely affected development gains, in particular in developing countries. We call for enhanced cooperation and concerted action to address those challenges, taking into account the positive role that education can play in that respect.

9. We recognize that providing quality education for children, youth and adults helps to develop the knowledge and skills that people and countries need to flourish, and that additional measures are required to improve the quality of education and to ensure positive learning outcomes for all. Therefore, we emphasize the need to promote and improve the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, including through:

(a) Aligning education policies, curricula, training, and teaching and learning approaches with the priorities identified in national development strategies. Education and training should contribute to sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth by developing requisite skills, in line with the labour market requirements and development needs of countries, taking into account the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women in promoting sustainable development;

(b) Ensuring that educational curricula, methodologies and training yield high levels of literacy, numeracy and life skills;

(c) Enhancing teachers' training and their continued professional development in order to improve their pedagogical capacity to conduct student-centred lessons as well as to promote creative and critical thinking;

(d) Improving the recruitment, deployment, retention and working conditions of teachers, raising the status of the profession, enhancing the management and leadership of schools, and ensuring an effective student/teacher ratio;

(e) Emphasizing the importance of literacy for lifelong learning, focusing on high-quality literacy instruction in the early years of schooling and on promoting second-chance educational opportunities and adult literacy programmes, as well as recognizing the important contribution of innovative pedagogical initiatives in the area of literacy, including South-South and triangular cooperation in that regard;

(f) Encouraging support for the development of the potential and talents of children and young people;

(g) Encouraging the provision and mainstreaming of skills development and training in technical, technological and vocational schools, taking into account national and local development needs, and in cooperation with relevant economic actors;
(h) Strengthening opportunities for learners to take advantage of and contribute to scientific and technological innovation, and developing strategies to increase girls' and women's participation in science and technology education;
(i) Stepping up efforts to build more classrooms and improve the material conditions of school buildings and infrastructure, where necessary, as well as the quality, content and relevance of the curriculum, pedagogy and learning and teaching materials, harnessing the capabilities of information and communications technology;
(j) Scaling up efforts to integrate the principles embodied in the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) into formal and non-formal, as well as informal, education and training;
(k) Ensuring that education, delivered in a violence-free school environment, actively supports the promotion of peace, tolerance, responsible citizenship, social cohesion, gender equality and the empowerment of women, while stressing the importance that the organization of schools, the behavior and approach of teachers and the engagement of parents and the wider community have in that respect;
(l) Developing gender-sensitive curricula for educational programmes at all levels and taking concrete measures to ensure that educational materials portray women, men, youth, girls and boys in positive and non-stereotypical roles;
(m) Encouraging the use, and improvement where necessary, of learning assessment systems that allow learning progress and outcomes to be tracked at the classroom, local and national levels.

10. We stress the importance of maternal health and education to children's well-being, recognizing their positive impact on children's enrolment, learning and grade progression rates, particularly for girls.

11. We note that quality education can provide the knowledge, capacity, attitudes, skills, ethical values and understanding necessary for lifelong learning, employment and better physical and mental health, including through the prevention and control of maternal mortality, HIV and AIDS and other communicable and non-communicable diseases.

12. We emphasize the role of education and health literacy in improving health outcomes over a lifetime, and urge Governments to ensure that health education starts early in life and that special attention is paid to encouraging, in a gender-sensitive manner, health-enhancing behavior among adolescents and young people, especially by discouraging the use of tobacco and alcohol, encouraging physical activity and a balanced diet, and providing

access to information on sexual and reproductive health that is consistent with their evolving needs and capacities, so that they can make responsible and informed decisions on all issues related to their health and well-being and understand the synergies between the various health-related behaviors.

13. We reaffirm the importance of investment in early childhood care and education, recognizing its potential to bolster learning outcomes in later years, as well as its particularly strong effects on reducing economic, social, gender and learning disparities, and in that regard take note of the Moscow Framework for Action and Cooperation, adopted at the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, held in Moscow from 27 to 29 September 2010.

14. We stress the need to take measures to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence in any educational setting, including gender-based violence, bullying and cyber-bullying, and recognize the need for the development of a safe and supportive educational environment, counseling and complaint and reporting mechanisms to address those issues effectively. We recognize the need to protect children and young people from other risks they face in the educational environment and encourage the taking of effective measures in that regard. We also stress the importance of girls and boys getting to school safely.

15. We reaffirm our commitment to removing barriers, outside and within educational systems, so as to provide equitable educational and learning opportunities for all children.

16. We reaffirm our commitment to giving greater focus to the transition from primary education and access to secondary education, vocational training and non-formal education and entry into the labour market.

17. We encourage programmes to promote universal access to secondary education and to expand access to quality higher education which is relevant to the needs of the labour market, in accordance with each country’s specific realities and development challenges.

18. We call for the development of inclusive policies that ensure access to education for vulnerable children and young people often excluded from educational systems, such as the poorest children in cities and remote areas, children affected by and living with HIV, refugees and children of migrants. We call for the effective allocation of educational resources to ensure equal opportunities for children and young people living in vulnerable situations through education that takes into account diversity, local languages and mother-tongue education, as appropriate.

19. We also call for ensuring full and equal access to quality formal and non-formal education and vocational training at all levels, including to free and compulsory primary education, and for providing educational

opportunities, including in science and technology, from early childhood and throughout the life cycle, including lifelong learning and retraining, human rights education and learning, and adult and distance education and e-learning, including in information and communications technology and entrepreneurial skills.

20. We re-emphasize the need to implement national and international commitments to closing the gender gap in education by promoting access by girls and women to quality education at all levels, particularly the secondary level, and in all disciplines, particularly science and technology, and to promoting their academic and social achievement.

21. We stress the importance of ensuring the availability of affordable transportation to enable all communities, particularly those in rural areas, to gain access to education.

22. We stress the importance of ensuring that persons with disabilities, in particular children and youth, have equal opportunities to participate fully in education and in community life, including through the removal of barriers that impede the realization of their rights, and of fostering, at all levels of the educational system, including among all children from an early age, an attitude of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities.

23. We stress the need to take effective measures to allow indigenous peoples to have non-discriminatory access to all levels and forms of education provided by States, and to promote access for indigenous individuals, particularly children and youth, to education in their own languages, when possible, as addressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

24. We reaffirm our commitment to promote appropriate and targeted evidence-based measures, especially to support the poorest and most vulnerable families in overcoming multiple barriers to school entry, attendance and achievement, including through, inter alia, the abolition of school fees, conditional cash and food transfers, school feeding programmes, textbook provision and separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls, noting the strong impact of such measures with regard to improved educational outcomes as well as the increased enrolment and retention of girls. We also encourage the implementation of programmes to improve the nutritional status of young children, to address under-nutrition in children under five and to provide adequate nutrition to schoolchildren.

25. We emphasize the importance of promoting social responsibility and responsible citizenship by encouraging youth, the private sector and civil society to contribute positively to their societies by engaging in education-related programmes.

26. We underline the particular vulnerability of young people to various violent ideologies and urge the appropriate authorities to provide age-appropriate education that fosters mutual tolerance and understanding, promotes peace and counters incitement to violence, including terrorism.

27. We express concern over the persistently high levels of youth unemployment worldwide and recognize the need to design education and training programmes that improve employability and individual capacities through skills development. We emphasize the need to improve the quality and relevance of post-primary levels of education, including joint educational and skills development programmes for out-of-school children, by enhancing school-to-work transition for both youth and adults through the development of technical and vocational education and training programmes, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship education.

28. We stress the need to strengthen public policies for the provision of information and communication technologies for education, including the promotion of training in information and communication technologies for education that is relevant and of high quality; the incorporation of information and communication technologies in teacher training and professional development, as well as in educational management; and the use, where appropriate, of innovative new information and communication technology platforms in education that draw on advances in mobile education, open education resources and social networks, and note the need to improve cyber-security measures and for appropriate safeguards, especially for children and young people.

29. We express the need to overcome the urban-rural education gap and to improve access to quality education for the rural population through increased investment in and the full use of modern technologies, including the establishment of remote education systems and training, including, inter alia, sustainable agricultural productivity.

30. We express grave concern that a large number of the world’s out-of-school children live in States affected by armed conflict and natural disasters, and recognize the special challenges faced by those countries in meeting the education-related development goals, particularly with regard to access and quality of learning. We call for scaled-up efforts at the national and international levels to increase access to education in a safe and secure environment for children and teachers living in armed conflict and post-conflict settings, as well as those affected by natural disasters.

31. We acknowledge that protecting schools and providing education in humanitarian emergencies should remain a key priority for the international community, and recognize that ensuring the right to education in emergency

situations requires specifically designed, flexible and inclusive approaches consistent with protection needs, conflict mitigation initiatives and disaster risk reduction considerations.

32. We stress the need to promote the right to education and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the education-related goals, and the Education for All goals for people, in particular children and youth, living under foreign occupation, by removing obstacles to their full realization.

33. We note the importance of including educational service delivery in humanitarian response systems in emergencies, including in armed conflict, post-conflict situations and natural disasters. We call for continuing efforts to strengthen fund-raising for the education cluster in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee humanitarian response system.

34. We call for the provision in emergency situations of quality education that is gender-sensitive, centred on learners, rights-based, protective, adaptable, inclusive, participatory and reflective of the specific living conditions of women, children and youth, and that pays due regard, as appropriate, to their linguistic and cultural identity, mindful that quality education can foster tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for the human rights of others.

35. We underline that support for education in emergency contexts should specifically address the gender-specific needs of girls in such contexts, inter alia their increased vulnerability to gender-based violence.

36. We express serious concern that the least developed countries are starkly lagging behind in meeting most of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, despite having made some progress towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in the field of universal primary education and gender equality in school enrolment. We recognize that education plays an important role in eradicating poverty and hunger and in promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development. We call for particular attention to and well-targeted support measures in favour of the least developed countries, in line with the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020, adopted by the Fourth United Nations Conference for the Least Developed Countries, held in Istanbul from 9 to 13 May 2011, in order to enable them to achieve the education-related Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals.

37. We recognize the specific challenges faced by the middle-income countries in maintaining progress towards their educational goals, and stress the need for their efforts to be adequately supported by the international community and the United Nations system, through various means, taking into

account the needs and the capacity to mobilize domestic resources of those countries.

38. We reaffirm the importance of national commitments to education, recognizing that each country has primary responsibility for and ownership of its own economic and social development, and that development strategies, national policies and domestic resources are critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals. We are therefore determined to develop and strengthen comprehensive, multi-sectoral approaches towards improved educational outcomes and educational equity among and within countries.

39. We recognize the need for accountability and transparency in national educational systems in the delivery of educational services, which should ensure the efficient allocation and use of resources, including through:
(a) Protecting and sustaining social investment in response to the ongoing, adverse impacts of the global financial and economic crisis;
(b) Improving the transparency of decision-making and policy processes in regard to education, through greater stakeholder participation and governance, including through the increased involvement of local-level educational authorities;
(c) Strengthening national efforts to ensure predictable, long-term financing of the educational sector.

40. We recognize the need to enhance national capacity for strategic planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of qualitative and quantitative targets, as appropriate, in order to achieve the education-related goals, including through:
(a) Improving the quality of data, including through the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex, age, disability, location and other relevant factors in order to, inter alia, better target marginalized communities;
(b) Enhancing national capacity to perform regular student assessments in order to monitor overall progress in learning achievement.

41. We reaffirm the need for donors to fulfill their commitments to education, in particular basic education, emphasizing the importance of international financing as a critical supplementary source to domestic financing. We underline that the fulfillment of all official development assistance commitments is crucial, including the commitment by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance to developing countries by 2015, as well as the target of 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance to the least developed countries, and we recall the commitment to reach a level of at least 0.5 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance by 2010, and urge developed countries that have not yet done so to fulfill their commitments for official

development assistance to developing countries. We call for the substantial replenishment of the Education for All Fast Track Initiative. We reaffirm the need for donor resources to be predictable and aligned with countries' national priorities, as well as channeled in ways that strengthen national educational systems.

42. We encourage the private sector and foundations to increase their contribution to the financing of the education sector.

43. We urge further exploration of new innovative finance mechanisms and the strengthening and scaling up of existing ones, where appropriate, given their potential to contribute to the development of educational systems. Such voluntary mechanisms should be effective and be aimed at mobilizing resources that are stable and predictable, which should supplement, and not be a substitute for, traditional sources of financing for development and be disbursed in accordance with the priorities of developing countries and not unduly burden them. We welcome the ongoing work of the Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development and the Task Force on Innovative Financing for Education.

44. We reaffirm the need for Governments to take the lead in education, while emphasizing the significant progress that can be made through strong partnerships of national Governments, official institutions and local authorities with relevant stakeholders, including, as appropriate, the private sector, foundations, teachers' unions and civil society, and highlight the importance of parents, as well as communities participating in decision-making at schools for improving the learning environment comprehensively.

45. We call on the international community, including the United Nations system, especially the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to strengthen the coordination and implementation of existing policies, programmes and follow-up mechanisms for Education for All by strengthening regional and international partnerships and cooperation, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, based on the sharing of knowledge and good practices in the education sector. In that context, we take note of the Millennium Development Goals Follow-up Meeting, held in Tokyo on 2 and 3 June 2011, and its outcomes, including the good practice list compiled by participants.

46. We request the Economic and Social Council to continue its role in the follow-up of the progress in education-related development goals."

Closure of the high-level segment

108. At the 21st meeting, on 8 July, following a statement by the President of the Council, a statement was made by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and

Social Affairs.

109. At the same meeting, the President of the Council declared closed the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2011 of the Council.