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New UN resolution urges again States to take action on commercialisation of education

(Geneva, 22 June 2017) In a new important UN resolution adopted today, States have reaffirmed the urgency to address the negative impacts of the commercialisation of education, which could undermine human rights.

The resolution, which was adopted by the UN Human Rights Council by consensus, urges all States “to put in place a regulatory framework for education providers, including those operating independently or in partnership with States, … that… addresses any negative impact of the commercialization of education” (para. 2.e).

It also calls on States to “regulate and monitor education providers, and to hold accountable those whose practices have a negative impact on the enjoyment of the right to education”. (para. 4), while “recognizing the significant importance of investment in public education” (para. 3).

This resolution comes against a background of a massive growth of private education providers in developing countries in the last 15 years, sometimes with the support of donor States and agencies, which has raised multiple human rights concerns.

“This UN resolution confirms once again that the current global trends towards commercialising of education constitutes a major human rights risk that needs to be monitored and addressed urgently, with the risk otherwise to see inequalities and tensions in communities raise to an unbearable point. This is not about opposing private schools; it’s a recognition that an adequate regulatory framework is essential to ensure that children and parents are not abused by unscrupulous actors, and that there’s no other way but to invest in public education to address inequalities” said Sylvain Aubry, a Legal and Research Advisor at the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This resolution confirms a previous landmark statement made last year by the Human Rights Council, demonstrating the urgency and increasing consensus in regulating and monitoring private education providers, particularly in the current context of the commercialisation of education.
“This strong statement is very welcome and important in the current context where more and more multinational companies operate schools that challenge national regulations in developing countries. It is also very relevant to reflect on the development policies of donor States, as some of them, such as the UK, have been supporting commercial chains of schools, even when it undermines human rights” said Delphine Dorsi, the Executive Coordinator of the Right to Education Initiative.

This year’s resolution also made a new addition urging States to assess the quality of education, “including through independent assessments”. This statement was added in a context where independent scrutiny of private schools has been stopped several times in the last months, including when a researcher was arrested in Uganda, and an independent research stopped in Liberia - leading to a protest letter signed by over 30 leading academics.

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Signatories: Amnesty International, Amnesty International Sénégal, Centre d’Actions pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et le Développement Durable (Bénin), Coalition Education (France), Coalition for Transparency and Accountability in Education (Liberia), East African Centre for Human Rights (Kenya), Equal Education Law Centre (South Africa), Fédération Internationale des Céméa, Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition, Global Campaign for Education, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Initiative for Economic and Social Rights (Uganda), Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education, Program on Human Rights in the Global Economy, Right to Education Initiative, Solidarité Laïque (France)

Documents

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