



## Learning for a Lasting Peace

### International Day of Education Statement: Education Cannot Wait Executive Director Yasmine Sherif

**24 January 2024, New York** – Education is the bedrock of peace, the foundation of strong societies, and the building block for a better world. This year, as we celebrate the [Sixth International Day of Education](#) under the theme of ‘learning for a lasting peace’, we call on world leaders to end wars and armed conflicts and focus on our common humanity to embrace the vast potential learning offers in uniting our world.

Our world is being torn apart by injustice, oppression, racism, xenophobia, fear, greed and violent conflict resolution. School-aged children bear the brunt. No child in Gaza – over 600,000 girls and boys – has access to education. In Afghanistan, 80% of school-aged Afghan girls and women – 2.5 million girls and women – are out of school and are systematically denied their human right to an education due to their gender. In Ukraine, 300,000 children are at risk of learning losses over this school year. In Sudan, 19 million children are out of school today amidst the ongoing brutal conflict. In Ethiopia, 7.6 million children are not in the classroom due to compounding challenges – including armed conflicts, the impact of climate change and forced displacement.

Around the world, over 224 million crisis-affected children are denied education, often occupied with seeking protection and survival, girls are being forced into child marriage, and both boys and girls are being forcibly recruited as child soldiers. The safety, protection and hope of the school and their teachers is long gone.

224 million children impacted by the compounding impacts of armed conflicts, climate change and forced displacement are in dire, urgent need of quality education.

The world made a promise to future generations to ensure education for all through Sustainable Development Goal 4. UN Member States made a legal commitment to the right to an education in binding human rights conventions. This promise and legal commitment must be realized in order to end extreme poverty, aid-dependency, and the vicious circle of violations of children’s rights and dignity. “No peace which is not peace for all,” as the late UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld said.

As global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises within the UN, Education Cannot Wait has a proven, innovative model of bringing together governments, UN agencies, civil society, private sector and, above all, local communities, to rapidly deliver quality education for the world’s most vulnerable girls and boys. Working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, joint programming allows for a holistic education approach to achieve an inclusive, continued quality education in emergencies and protracted crises. Together with all our partners, Education Cannot Wait ([ECW](#)) has reached over 9 million crisis-affected girls and boys with a quality education in just a few years.

Whether we jointly deliver a First Emergency Response or a Multi-Year Resilience Investment, we are together investing in transformative pathways towards sustainable development. This means that refugee and forcibly displaced girls and boys like [Mariam](#) in Burkina Faso and [Leonardo](#) in Colombia now access a child-centred and holistic education.

This includes early childhood education, accelerated learning, mental health and psychosocial support, school feeding, school supplies and equipment, gender-sensitive water and sanitation facilities, cash-transfers to incentivize school attendance, vocational training to enter the workforce, risk management to stay safe, and trained teachers that foster young talents and nurture the ideals of compassion, community and the common good.

To deliver on our promises outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals, legal commitments in the UN Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international accords, we urgently need more financial resources to deliver the hope and opportunity of an education for girls and boys living on the frontlines of these conflicts and crises. ECW calls on our strategic donors, philanthropic foundations and the private sector to reach our target of [US\\$1.5 billion](#) so that ECW and our partners worldwide can reach 20 million crisis-affected girls and boys with quality education by 2026.

By giving all children and adolescents the opportunity to realize their right to an education, by not leaving any one of them behind through affirmative action for girls, children with disabilities and refugees, and by empowering them to sustain hope, feel that their lives have a meaning despite all they have experienced, and keep pursuing their dreams, we are indeed investing in humanity and peaceful co-existence on the globe. Instead of investing in more wars, leading to more human suffering, injustices and extreme poverty, let us heed the words of Nelson Mandela, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

*\*Names changed to protect identity.*