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INFORMATION NOTE ON THE
FORUM OF AFRICAIN PARLIAMENTARIANS
FOR EDUCATION (FAPED)

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OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

MOBILISATION OF PARLIAMENTARIANS AND PARTNERSHIP

Over the past few years, networks have been created within Parliaments to address social problems. These include:

- Network for Population and Development
- Network for the Environment
- Network against Drugs
- Network for Town planning and Housing
- Network for New Information and Communications Technologies
- Network against Corruption (Project stage)
- Network for the New African Initiative (Project stage)

In the African countries that are plagued by crises, educational policies have been compromised. Thus, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, literacy rates have fallen drastically. This situation calls for the politician in the Parliamentarians to come to the fore. They are expected to commit themselves to the restoration of peace, to national harmony, to stability and to the dawning of a democratic area where Education would find its rightful place once more in a society of the 3rd millennium.

This commitment by the Parliamentarians would be in accordance with the **Durban Statement of Commitment, paragraph 10** that was adopted by the Seventh Conference of Education Ministers of African Member States (MINEDAF VII). *“We resolve to involve (in an appropriate manner) the entire civil society, as well as non-governmental organisations, the private sector, media organisations, **parliamentarians**, other ministries, religious organisations, teachers and parents organisations in the planning and execution of programmes and in the mobilisation of resources both financial and human. The furtherance of decentralisation and greater sharing of responsibility are helpful measures in this regard, and we are determined to promote these ideals.”*

UNESCO shares these concerns. The Director General, Mr. Frederico Mayor, in his address to the mid-decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, at Amman in 1996, said *“After all, education is not the business only of ministers, specialists, UN experts, donor representatives or education officials. Education involves a true partnership between educators, children, young people and adult learners, parents and teachers. We need to listen to their concerns. And we need to match their determination and faith in education - education for all, by all and with all. Yes, education is a fundamental right and all the social actors must guarantee the full exercise of this right, including the Parliaments, municipalities, religious authorities and armed forces”.*

The **World Bank** shares this vision. Man or woman, promoted as a primary resource, must have access to adequate training; he must know how to read and write in order to become an active and conscious participant in development. With this in mind, the World Bank has initiated ambitious programmes for the development of Education in Africa over the past few years which include the Human Resources Development Programme (HRDP). In Senegal, this Programme is geared towards the promotion of education and the enhancement of human resources. Synergy created through partnerships between institutions like **UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, the World Bank** and the Project is bound to produce results that will help in attaining the objectives that have been set out with a view to addressing Education issues comprehensively.

More and more international institutions are devoting themselves to the fight against poverty, especially the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**. For such programmes to be effective, the roots of the phenomenon, namely **illiteracy and obscurantism**, must be tackled. It is not a coincidence that the illiterate masses are amongst the poorest. Due to illiteracy which inhibits the ability to be creative, the lack of training which reduces the chances of finding a job and the lack of exposure to the outside world, the individual retreats into a world that perpetuates the culture of poverty: fatalism, conservatism and a mindset of dependency.

Poverty can be defined both in relation to the living conditions and in terms of the way of life. Education must bring about changes in behaviour and mindsets. That is why the United Nations Programme for Development (UNDP) is attaching greater importance to educational programmes in the fight against poverty.

Education concerns children above all. In Africa, impoverishment, the explosion of crises and wars (Angola, Burundi, Liberia, the Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone) has led to tragedies in the lives of children. There are street children, orphaned children, lost children, child soldiers, child labourers, sexually abused children, children at risk (drugs, delinquency), slave children, illiterate children, etc. Thus, a part of our future is being compromised.

Parliamentarians will make a commitment to fight against the exploitation and enslavement of children. They will help them to lead a normal life, to benefit from adequate training and to take the **road to the future** - that of **School**.

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**, which has a major education programme, will be an active partner in the Project along with **UNDP**.

Population and development are issues that cover vast areas of which **Education** is an important component like **Health** and **Environment**, etc. The **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** has implemented programmes on Education in order to find a solution to all these problems. Therefore, as a partner, it could play a leading role in the project. Even though it already supports the Forum of African and Arab Parliamentarians for Population and Development, UNFPA will be called upon to support certain activities under the Project such as: education of girls, sex education, combating scourges like female genital mutilation, early marriages which hamper the education of girls, expulsion of HIV positive pupils, etc.

In this respect, partnership between the Forum of African and Arab Parliamentarians for Population and Development and the African Forum of Parliamentarians for Education will also be encouraged.

The involvement of the Parliamentarians will be a great support to:

- The Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States,
- The Jomtien Conference,
- The World Education for All (EFA) Forum.

CREATION OF THE FORUM OF AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR EDUCATION (FAPED)

Given these implications and in view of the desire to establish an African Parliament and to implement new partnership for Africa that gives priority to Education, it would be advisable to set up, here and now, an **Forum of African Parliamentarians for Education**. Its aim would be to strengthen the commitment of Parliamentarians towards creating greater awareness and giving due consideration to the problems facing Education. In light of the above, UNESCO, through the Director of its Regional Office for Education in Africa (BREDA), has undertaken to work in close collaboration with the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Beirut and the Forum of African and Arab Parliamentarians for Population and Development in order to do everything possible to ensure that this Forum is launched by the end of 2002 in conjunction with MINEDAF VIII.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM

The objectives of the Forum are to:

- **Outline the form and content** of the commitment of Parliamentarians through the setting up of National Parliamentary Committees for Education;
- **Make them more aware** of the huge challenges involved, by providing them with adequate information and continuously sensitising them;
- **Induce Parliamentarians to mobilise more funds for education when passing the budget;**
- **Provide Parliamentarians with the arguments for advocacy** that will be useful to them not only in the Chamber but also in the field;
- **Promote the right to education** as a fundamental human right, and launch a debate on the quality of education. The emphasis will indeed be on enforcing one of the recommendations of the Dakar Framework for Action: "ensure that by 2010, compulsory primary education will be enshrined in all Constitutions".
- **Increase the capacities of Parliaments to supervise the Executive:** field visits, commissions of inquiry, questions to the government (written questions, oral questions, questions on current affairs), hearings in committees;
- **Encourage the creation of Parliamentary Assistants'** posts in the field of education;
- **Enable Parliamentarians to have new speaking partners** with respect to these issues: UNESCO, the World Bank, NGOs, and Foundations. Just as the IMF's Director General was welcomed to the Senegalese National Assembly in 1996, other Parliaments could invite the heads of international institutions like the Director General of UNESCO or the President of the World Bank to make a statement on the problems relating to Education;
- **Foster an exchange of information and experiences,** especially with the help of the New Information and Communications Technologies;
- **Provide a space for dialogue, consultation and co-operation** between African parliamentarians. Holding of national seminars, bilateral workshops

(eg. Senegal-Cameroon, South Africa-Gambia, Mauritius-Mali, Maroc-Niger, Egypt- Nigeria, Zimbabwe-Burkina Faso, etc) and fact finding missions, etc. will be encouraged;

- **Mobilise extra-budgetary resources**, especially from the international community, in support of local projects of particular interest to the Parliamentarians;
- **Make Parliamentarians play the role of mediators**, if need be, in certain serious and exceptional situations of conflict (school or university strikes with the threat of disruption of the academic year). As school partners, the parliamentarians will devote themselves to renew, if necessary, the dialogue between the various stakeholders in schools without encroaching on the prerogatives of the Executive. This delicate mission, in which they will, if necessary, engage, should not be misunderstood. It should be seen only as a mean of increasing the capacity of public authorities to resolve crises relating to schools and universities
- **Facilitate dialogue between the local authorities and national and international partners in the context of decentralisation**. In this sense, Parliamentarians will mainly serve as go-betweens;
- **Allow for periodic assessments** of Jomtien, the Dakar World Forum and the Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States. The parliamentarians will ensure that every year, when the budget is being passed, the Ministers of Education present a report on the follow-up to and assessment of these conferences;
- **Advocate within Parliaments** that the relevant recommendations of the major international meetings such as Montreal, Salamanca, Jomtien, Dakar become the subject of draft laws to be adopted and passed by the Member States.
- **Favour the emergence of a new vision for Africa** that promotes **Knowledge, Democracy, Progress and Peace**.

STRUCTURE AND STATUTES OF THE FORUM

a) Structure of the Forum

The Forum should be flexible in nature, geared towards co-ordinating and providing an impetus to parliamentary activities.

It will be made up of the following bodies:

- The General Assembly that can meet every four years in conjunction with MINEDAF
- The Executive Bureau
- The Secretariat headed by an Executive Director

The Forum will cover all African countries. This is the area that falls within the competence of UNESCO's Regional Office for Education in Africa (BREDA) and UNESCO's Regional Office for Education in Beirut that is **53 States**:

- **West Africa** (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania¹, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo);
- **Central Africa** (Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sao Tomé & Príncipe, Chad);
- **East Africa** (Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania);
- **Northern Africa** (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia)
- **Southern Africa** (South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe);
- **Indian Ocean Countries**² (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles)

Each of these zones will be represented in the Bureau. The Parliament nominated to the Bureau will be in charge of:

- Co-ordinating the activities of the zone especially the setting up of National Parliamentary Committees;
- Giving an impetus to the activities.

BREDA will be the seat of the Forum. It will provide offices, institutional and logistical support.

b) Statutes of the Forum

The constituent texts will be drawn up in time to be submitted to the General Constitutive Assembly in Dar-es-Salaam. They are:

- The Charter of the Forum
- The Financial Rules and Regulations

THEMES OF THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIVE ASSEMBLY

In addition to the basic texts, the Constituent General Assembly will have to turn its attention to themes that are likely to raise awareness among parliamentarians about issues relating to Education in order to keep them up to date. As an example, the following themes could be suggested:

- What kind of commitment can the parliamentarians make to face challenges of Education?
- Education policies in Africa: State of play
- Funding of Education
- Education and the New Partnership for the Development of Africa

¹ Even though Mauritania is not covered by BREDA, it should be included in countries of West Africa as it is part of Africa south of the Sahara..

² This distribution does not correspond to UNESCO's, which considers these countries to be part of East Africa).

- What new vision for Africa?
- Advocacy by Parliamentarian: principles and objectives for making a case.

Apart from the papers presented by Resource Persons, the parliamentarians will have to present their own papers thereby drawing the attention of parliamentarians to the problems Education is facing .

It is recommended that on the occasion of **MINEDAF VIII**, a parliamentary round table be organised that includes Ministers, civil society, UNESCO, donors and journalists.

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES FOR THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIVE ASSEMBLY

A preparatory meeting of the Contact Group has been held from **21st to 23rd January 2001**, in Dakar. **9 countries** representing each of the zones established (South Africa, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan).

The tasks to be carried out by this meeting were to :

- Outline the general thrusts of the Forum;
- Examine the draft preliminary texts of the Charter, the Financial Rules and Regulations;
- Draw up a draft preliminary Programme of Action;
- Establish the Schedule and the Programme of Action of the General Constitutive Assembly (Dar – es – Salaam), December 2002);
- Decide on the organisation of the Round Table in conjunction with MINEDAF VIII;
- Sensitise parliamentarians in order to guarantee their participation;
- Propose the budget for the General Assembly and the Programme of Action.

At the end of the Meeting, the Contact Group will be officially instituted with the basic mission of liaising with all the parliamentarians to prepare for the General Constitutive Assembly. The Group will enjoy the support of Resource Persons and will take charge of the whole process leading up to the Assembly (mail, contacts with BREDA, budget mobilisation, preparation of the themes of the conference, choice of the resource persons to lead the discussion on these themes, preparing the conference programme and guide, logistics, missions to a few countries to prepare the meeting of Dar-es-Salaam which will be held on November 27 – December 2 , 2002).

The Contact Group is presided by Senegal (Parliamentarian: Oumar SARR), Maurice is Vice – President (Parliamentarian: Mrs LABELLE) and Nigeria is the Reporter (Parliamentarian: Dr Shehu A. Garba MATAZU).

A second meeting of the Contact Group was held in Mauritius in June 2002, to make final arrangements. Thus, opportunity was given to the members of the Contact Group to have an idea of the eminent role they have to play in the organization of the next General Constitutive Conference.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that Parliaments which rank second in terms of the power they exercise, are playing to the full their traditional role: passing laws, supervising the Executive. They have helped to regulate national life and to make the democratic process - a factor of peace and stability - irreversible.

They will continue to play this role. Today, even in countries that are at war (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola), Parliaments do exist. While the mode of appointing deputies varies from country to country, there is the same concern everywhere: **respecting the will of the people**.

Parliaments today have managed to rid themselves of the image thrust on them at the time of single parties. They are now democratic, pluralistic, open and dynamic. In this manner, they intend to contribute to advancing great causes: **African Union, combating AIDS, Education**.

By joining the already existing Network of Journalists for Education, the African Forum of Parliamentarians for Education will make an invaluable contribution because it covers at once the **Political aspect** (blueprint law), the **budgetary dimension** and **advocacy**.