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Statement by the Republic of Estonia at the Economic and Social Council

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H.E. Mr. Jüri Seilenthal, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the UN in Geneva

Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First I would like to associate my remarks with the statement made on behalf of the European Union by H.E. Ms. Grazyna Bernatowicz, Undersecretary of State of MFA Poland, in addition to which I would like to offer the following comments on behalf of Estonia.

Mr. President,

The right to education is a fundamental human right. Yet the reality is that we still have to consider education to be a privilege for as long as universal access to education has not been achieved. Various problems are direct consequences of this: social inequality, poor health, violence and conflict, as well as numerous others.

Estonia's 2011-2015 Strategy for Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Aid prioritises the increasing of access to education for women and children in developing countries.

Estonia's bilateral development co-operation projects in the education sector as well as our voluntary contributions to the UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF activities serve to increase access to education. From 2006 Estonia has also made voluntary contributions to the UNDP's Girls Education initiative (UNGEI). As a member of ECOSOC's Commission on the Status of Women, Estonia continues to work for the promotion of women's rights in the political, social, economic and educational fields.

Mr President,

40% of out-of-school children live in conflict affected countries. Access to education in these situations is often overlooked and for that reason Estonia has supported the continuation of educational activities for girls and boys, especially among IDP communities, in many conflict afflicted areas. For example Estonia recently supported the

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UNHCR in making education available for IDPs, returnees and host communities in Southern Sudan. Estonia has supported similar activities for instance in Haiti and Somalia too.

Girls, whose access to education tends to be already restricted, are even more vulnerable in these situations, as conflicts impede their access to schools and physical security. Unfortunately, in a worrying number of cases, girls attending school in conflict affected countries are subject to physical and psychological violence.

Estonia emphatically believes in the importance of the Security Council's resolution 1325, and its implementation. Our aim is to ensure access to education for girls in countries affected by conflict, such as, for instance, Afghanistan. In 2010, in co-operation with an Afghani NGO, *Aschiana*, our government supported the Charikari girls' school in Parwan province. Work in this field continues as Estonia, for instance, encourages closer ties and partnership between Estonian and Afghani schools.

Mr President,

17% of the world's population cannot read. Two thirds of them are women. Our efforts to achieve MDG 3 are directly dependent on acting to guarantee education for women and girls. It promotes women's political, economic and social participation, decreases poverty among women, maternal and infant mortality and rate of early marriage.

It is only right that universal primary education is one of the Millennium Development Goals. Estonia participates in the work of UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA to achieve this goal. In general, a lot has been done, but much still remains to be achieved. While primary education is a vital corner-stone, it remains a bare minimum. Why is evident from for instance research which shows that women with secondary education are far more likely to be aware of measures preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Mr President,

It is also vital to underline the significance of vocational education as a tool for achieving inclusive economic growth. Estonia has been supporting the vocational education system as well as the development of entrepreneurship skills of young people in our partner counties, particularly in Georgia. Similarly, plans are under way to help Afghani university graduates develop their entrepreneurial skills. As a successful and pioneering

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information and communications technology country, Estonia has shared its experience of using ICT tools in educational programs, particularly in Georgia, Palestine and Moldova.

Our first ever term as an ECOSOC member has enabled us to contribute directly to inter-governmental debates on development, humanitarian, and human rights issues which to a significant extent relate directly to today's topic. In 2009 Estonia held the vice-presidency of ECOSOC, being responsible for the humanitarian segment. It gave us the possibility to promote discussions on improving the system of international humanitarian assistance.

Estonia continues to work for the strengthening and coherence of the UN development system. We had the opportunity to actively contribute to the process leading to the creation of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. As a member of its executive board, we hope that UN Women will be able to achieve the goals set by the adoption of the GA resolution 64/289. This can for instance be done by ensuring leadership and accountability on gender issues in the UN system and the implementation of the 2010 Ministerial Declaration.

Mr President,

In the light of what I have said and heard here today, I would like to conclude my remarks by urging us all not to be afraid of tackling the challenge of ensuring broad access to education for our people. Education helps save lives and provides for a better and brighter future, and it is one of the most affordable means available to us to ensure development. We can all make a difference. I believe that Estonia as a small country has been able to prove this by being actively and effectively involved in increasing access to all kinds of education in the European neighbourhood, in Africa, Asia and even Latin America. Let us welcome the challenges ahead in relation to education because, in the end, achieving the goals we set is a win-win situation for us all.

Thank you for your attention.

