



## The Durban Statement of Commitment

### Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States (MINEDAF VII)

Durban, South Africa, 20 – 24 April 1998

#### Preamble

1. We, the Ministers of Education of African Member States, convened by UNESCO in a free and democratic South Africa, in Durban, from 20 to 24 April 1998 on the occasion of the Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States (MINEDAF VII),

\* are aware that we are at a period of crucial crossroads in the history of our continent, when, more than at any other time in its history, Education is called upon to play a decisive role in shaping Africa's future. The diversity of our continent and the richness of our different experiences provide some examples of great progress, with some countries showing that difficult problems can be overcome. This diversity also includes experiences where entrenched poverty, war and strife, and the burden of external debt hamper efforts at educational development. Only in fifteen countries are there sufficient school places for all eligible children, and in seventeen countries, which are the homes to over half of Africa's children, the gross enrolment ratio has actually dropped. Illiteracy rates are still 33% for men and 54% for women among adults in Africa.

\* are aware that we must take on the responsibility for our own development if we are to triumph over adversity, and that as a continent we are rich in the experience, talent, culture, and even resources to change the face and fate of Africa. We have much to learn from one another: we have already turned the corner, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the Segou Perspectives, the Decade for Education in Africa of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, and the Paulo Freire African Decade on Literacy for All are some of the signposts pointing to a more determined and purposeful future, to the dawning of a true African Renaissance.

#### A New Vision

2. In the light of this, we, the Ministers in charge of Education, commit ourselves to working towards a new vision for Africa. We commit ourselves to an Africa where knowledge, democracy, respect for human rights and a culture of peace will always guide our actions, an Africa where all the nations will stand side by side with the rest of the world, contributing to the planet its unique vibrancy, energy, culture, creativity and pluralism. We commit ourselves to maintaining the balance between pro-active participation in globalisation and the need to preserve and enhance positive aspects in our own cultures, traditions, values and ways of life.

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We commit ourselves to an expanded role for Education which should be a lifelong process, a continuum which transcends schooling systems and which focuses on the building of a learning society, taking full advantage of what technology, appropriately adapted, can offer. This will be a reformed vision of Education that de-colonises the mind and liberates the individual for full citizenship.

3. Most importantly, we are determined to realise this commitment in unison, collaborating fully with one another to develop common strategies and to provide mutual support to one another, to link regional efforts to national aspirations and actions. We count among ourselves a good number of the world's least developed countries, as well as countries facing serious economic and social difficulties, and we recognise that there is much that we can do together, that no one country can go it all alone. We thus pledge to reinforce co-operation through regional and sub-regional initiatives, seeking as much as possible African solutions to African problems. and to establish and/or strengthen pan-African mechanisms, adequately funded, to accelerate institutional capacity building, to develop collaborative strategies and to monitor progress.

### **Challenges and Commitments**

4. We recognise the specific challenges before us as we face the twenty-first century. We have given very serious thought to these challenges, and we are determined to face them squarely and act on them in new and innovative ways.

5. We have reviewed progress in basic education since the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All and the Amman Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, to whose goals we remain committed. We recognise that access to basic education must include access to early childhood programmes, and, in countries with near-universal participation, access to secondary education, paying adequate attention to the needs of disadvantaged groups. We resolve to reach these groups by designing and expanding formal, non-formal and distance delivery systems, tailoring and targeting programmes specifically to reach them and meet their needs, for example through the development of intensive skills training programmes for marginalised youth.

6. We are concerned that, in spite of our efforts, gender gap in participation in Education remains a major issue. We undertake to tackle the problem forcefully by developing appropriate policy frameworks and an enabling environment, to provide for the safety and security of girls in schools, to develop gender-sensitive teaching/learning materials, teacher training and monitoring instruments, and to work with ministries concerned with gender, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and other concerned groups to ensure a constant increase in enrolment, retention and success of girls and women at all levels and forms of the educational system.

7. We have carefully analysed the future challenges of Education, and recognise that all progress depends on the quality, relevance and efficiency of our educational systems. At the heart of this matter is our concern for the teacher, to whose role, status and career-long development we resolve to give the highest priority. We recognise the need to give the teachers of the future competence in the use and control of the new informatics technology necessary for their work, and will mount programmes and create institutions that can provide this much-needed expertise.

We also recognise the status of science education in Africa to be of particular concern. We will work collaboratively to develop and share science teaching/learning ideas, materials, kits and equipment, and will take appropriate steps to strengthen teacher education in science, mathematics, and technical/vocational education.

We also recognise that quality is fundamentally contingent on an environment conducive to innovations, the availability of the right type of teaching-learning materials, the assurance of minimum levels of nutrition, learning achievement monitoring mechanisms, adequate and appropriate infrastructure, an enlightened language policy which takes into account national and local languages. We undertake to improve on all these in our respective countries. Relevance in Education; is in turn contingent on the inclusion of basic messages and basic skills in the curriculum, such as those dealing with the scourges of HIV/AIDS and drug abuse, the promotion of democracy and human rights, and preparation for the world of work.

We note with great concern the devastating effects of both HIV/AIDS and a growing incidence of drug abuse, and resolve to combat these scourges with all the means at our disposal. For this purpose, we call upon all relevant ministries, organisations, and members of our society to join hands with us in taking necessary measures against these scourges.

8. We recognise that education for democracy, peace and human rights must always be a priority. As we approach the year 2000, the International Year for a Culture of Peace, we pledge ourselves to emphasising our common African identity and learning to live and move forward together through collaborative educational development efforts.

9. We have examined issues related to higher education and recognise that a fundamental recasting of its mission and role is absolutely necessary. To this end, we resolve to pursue in greater depth the promotion of higher education for service to basic education, to the creation of a learning society, and for overall socio-economic, cultural, scientific, and technological development. We will strengthen our universities and other tertiary institutions so that they can provide the necessary knowledge and leadership for the rediscovery of African history and identity, for the general promotion of science, technology, arts and culture – in short, for the realisation of the African Renaissance. We have documented our thinking and experiences on the subject during the 1997 Dakar regional consultation on higher education, and we will table these at the 1998 Paris World Conference on Higher Education, where we can contribute to a universal search for solutions.

10. Since Education should be a matter of concern to society as a whole, we recognise the crucial role of community participation and public awareness in all programmes that seek to be sustainable. We reaffirm the principle of government responsibility for educational policy based on equity and for quality control and standards, infrastructure and resources, especially where communities are unable to contribute. Nevertheless, 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 and teachers' and parents' organisations in the conceptualisation, planning and execution of programmes and in the mobilisation of resources. The furtherance of decentralisation and greater sharing of responsibility are helpful measures in this regard, and we are determined to promote these ideals.

We reaffirm the principles of a learning society and lifelong education, and reiterate our commitment to the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFITEA V).

11. We recognise that a greater amount and a more efficient and judicious use of financial resources are prerequisites to accomplishing our goals. Financing Education adequately is an urgent task and governments must assume responsibility for protecting this from the curse of corruption. They should also secure for Education as large a share of government budgets as possible, involving the civil society in partnerships, giving special attention to promoting equality of opportunity, and establishing appropriate financial assistance schemes for students. We encourage the return to the continent of expertise and of capital of African citizens from the other parts of the world.

We believe African nations should always show solidarity in assisting one another in the development of Education, while not doing away with collaboration with the wider international community. In any event, national and international financing must be transparent, and every effort must be made to avoid the developmental tragedies caused by the imposed conditionalities and dependency-syndrome which have characterised international co-operation in the recent past. Our governments will continue to take all possible measures to restructure, swap or cancel existing debts and thus release additional resources for Education, especially for girls and women and all categories of disadvantaged groups.

### **Mechanisms**

12. We resolve to designate the President and the Bureau of MINEDAF VII as an intergovernmental committee to follow-up on the implementation of this Commitment, and we request UNESCO to continue to provide the Secretariat for the Committee. We will keep in mind the need for rotation and balanced participation of Member States of the region, and the need to synchronise and collaborate with similar activities of the ADAE.

13. We resolve to use the above Committee and other mechanisms, contacts and modalities, such as regional centres of excellence, a data bank on African intellectual capacity, the sharing of materials and exchange of African experts and expertise, to further regional collaboration.

14. In this connection, we will take appropriate steps to ensure the creation and strengthening of African training infrastructures and centres for capacity building and human resources development in Education, capitalising on existing facilities and structures in a number of countries on the continent.

In particular, we welcome the offer of the government of South Africa to make its experience, expertise and existing infrastructures available to the rest of Africa, and we re-echo the need for adequate financing of this and similar exchange opportunities.

### **Final Resolve**

*15. We, the Ministers of Education of African Member States, conscious of our commitments as articulated in the forgoing, are resolved to work together towards regional integration within the framework of OAU and the African Economic Community, and call upon UNESCO and our regional and international partners to give priority support to our capacity-building and reform efforts, so that together we can shape Education as the lead instrument for the fashioning of the African Renaissance.*

Adopted this 24<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1998,  
in Durban, South Africa