

**Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Kai Eide**

**Global Action Week for Education**

**Amani High School, 22 April 2009**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

This is not the first time I am here, in fact this is the third time I am here to attend an important education event. About a year ago, I was sitting in the corner over to my left with a group of young school girls. They were very much like my own daughters: dressed in their best outfits, full of expectations, and full of dislike for mathematics – a dislike I personally also shared, I must add.

There can be no doubt that the education sector is among the success stories of this country. Today, 6.2 million Afghans are in primary and secondary schools. Approximately 2.2 million of them are girls. In 2008, more than 830,000 children started their education. It is a tremendous achievement compared to 2001.

Of course, the security situation is a major obstacle to growth in the education sector. Today, more than 400,000 children are deprived of education because of security.

However, our ability to build an education system for the future depends on many other components besides security. And these components deserve our full attention.

First, of course, the infrastructure and financial means to build more schools at all levels. Today, out of 11 million children almost half lack school opportunities. And large percentage of schools lack proper school buildings, which in particular affects the opportunities for girls to attend school. So the need for investment in the infrastructure of school buildings is huge.

But let us not only focus on infrastructure. We must give greater attention to human resources, to those who are to fill the school buildings with quality education. The international community has failed to address this in a focused manner. We must focus on the quality of education children receive too.

Today, there is a serious lack of qualified teachers, especially female teachers. Not only are they few, they are also heavily concentrated in very limited parts of the country. Today, 70 percent of all female teachers can be found in five major cities. This has a tremendous negative impact on education in rural areas and the smaller cities. In 15 provinces there are no teacher training courses with female dormitories.

I would urge donors to turn more of their attention to training of teachers across the country. With a rapidly increasing number of school children, this challenge will become even more acute in the coming years.

Furthermore, the donor community must think and provide support for long-term development. Our focus is very much on how many little girls and boys are able to go to school. And that is good. But we must think more on what happens when these boys

and girls finish their secondary education, when they are not so small any more. How can they then receive the education which will make them useful for the development and economic growth of Afghan society?

Today, higher education is limited. But it is even more critically lacking in vocational and technical training. Out of 16 technical schools in the country, seven can be found in Kabul. Out of those who graduate from secondary school, only four percent can continue into vocational training. The target – estimated on the basis of what Afghanistan needs – is 40 percent. And the number of children in need of vocational training will grow rapidly.

This will require more support from the Afghan Government and the international community – from providing infrastructure, to formulating curricula, to building broad institutional partnerships.

My basic message is the following: We must – and very soon – come together – the Afghan Government and the international community and unite behind a broad and long-term educational strategy. Today, I fear this critical discussion is absent.

The challenge now is to ensure that our thinking is not fragmented and our action not piecemeal. It must form part of an integrated strategic thinking, which includes the entire educational system. I look forward to taking part in this discussion, not just literacy – but the entire integrated Afghan education system.

Thank you all.

**END**