

Gordon Brown - *Education for All: beating poverty, unlocking prosperity*

Former British Prime Minister and Co-Convenor, with Graca Machel, of the Global Campaign for Education's High Level Panel.

*Download Gordon Brown's latest report **Education For All: beating poverty, unlocking prosperity**, (May 2011) www.campaignforeducation.org or pick it up from the GCE stall on the 1st Floor.*

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The world is in danger of sleepwalking through one of the greatest injustices of our times. Despite all the promises made to the world's children - the pledges made and targets set by the international community - today nearly 70 million children are denied a place at school.

Even worse than this abject failure to keep our word is the shocking reality that, despite our promise to get every child into basic education by 2015, on current trends the number of children out of school four years from now will not have gone down but gone up to 75 million.

This assault on opportunity is the second great economic crisis of our generation. The first economic crisis was the failure of our banks and the subsequent devastating impact on the world economy. The second crisis is of millions of young people uneducated not because they are uneducable but because they are unnoticed – and now joining the biggest ever army of young unemployed in a global epidemic, with the projection that over the years to 2025, nearly 1.5 billion young people will suffer a prolonged period out of work.

The consequences of that profound social failure will make this year's youth uprising in Egypt and Tunisia look like the opening salvo of a wider generational battle for justice for the world's young people.

I believe our failure to meet our promise on education is not only the biggest denial of opportunity the world has ever seen, but also a profoundly immoral neglect of our most vulnerable citizens – one that should trouble the conscience of all nations. We made an explicit pledge to the world's children that we would create school places for them as part of the Millennium Development Goals. With each day that goes by we are breaking the trust we asked them to place in us: we are demonstrating that we cannot be relied upon to honour our word. In the course of this campaign I have met young people from the remotest part of Tanzania, to the worst city slum of Delhi, and everywhere they ask me why they cannot go to school: Why are there still no teachers, no school buildings, no computers or books?

I believe that the promises we made to the world's children must come first. When you break a promise to an adult you might disappoint them, and perhaps even harm their material wellbeing. But when you break a promise to a child you risk damaging them for ever, destroying their faith in the human spirit and their hope in life itself. You create an attitude of cynicism that is almost impossible to reverse.

And the world is not even breaking its promises with a heavy heart, with expressions of regret and remorse, but doing so in a manner that is casual, almost glib. It is hard but inevitable, we are told – everyone is suffering and we must all tighten our belts. But I believe we are better than this.

So for me it is absolutely essential that we build on recent successes of getting many more millions of children into school through smart aid and debt relief. And it's essential too that

national governments do their bit to make sure that all children, rich and poor alike, have a chance at getting an education, just as Western Cape Province has done so successfully in South Africa.

We've developed some of the talent of some of the children for some of the countries; now we need to develop all of the talent of all of the children of all of the countries.

And I believe this not only because it is a moral imperative, or merely as a means to avoid calamity in the future: it is also a way to build a stronger and more prosperous world for everybody. Education is the key to ending poverty and increasing global growth. Educated people are more likely to get jobs, stay AIDS-free, immunise their children and build the businesses that lift their families and their communities out of poverty.

We can achieve education for all without breaking the bank. We spend about \$100,000 in Britain and in America to educate a child from their infant to their teenage years. In Africa the average spending is \$400. In other words, 250 times more is spent on the British child than on the African child. We collude in crippling the life chances of Africa's children and then we blame them for a continent-wide lack of technology, industry and productivity. The \$13 billion extra a year we need to fund education for all – to get every child into school by 2015 – is the equivalent of investing less than 5 cents a week in those children. This small price is tiny relative to the huge human and social cost of not investing in the next generation.

Those of us engaged in this fight are always prepared to answer the cynics who claim the world has already been overgenerous in aid, or indeed that aid does not work. The fact is that a mere \$10 a year goes in aid towards the education of the average child in sub-Saharan Africa: the equivalent of just 20 cents per week – or 4 cents for every school day. No one can say that aid does not work when only 4 cents a day is spent trying to educate an illiterate child. The plain truth is that real aid has not even been delivered and found wanting: it has not been delivered.

Nor do I believe there is a fatigue in giving by the people of the world, or a retreat into individualism or selfishness because of the recession. In fact, the willingness of the public to share in hard times has never been stronger. The British charity Comic Relief, under the leadership of Richard Curtis and Emma Freud, recently held a public appeal that broke all records, and charitable giving has increased in many other areas, proving that the generosity and altruism of ordinary people is often sharpened by a climate where everyone is suffering hardship. We sometimes see the world through an entirely different prism when an economic downturn strikes: we feel an insecurity, see our own frailty in others more clearly, and as a consequence our sense of togetherness and community grows.

Now is the time for the public, whose demands that we improve the lives and prospects of the world's poor are getting louder, to throw down the gauntlet to governments to honour the promises we made at the turn of the new millennium.

The leadership on this issue provided by Sheikha Mozah, the UN Special Envoy for education, has been truly inspirational. In the coming months my colleagues at the Global Campaign for Education and I will be launching an unprecedented coalition of faith groups, business leaders, civil society organisations and ordinary members of the public to support her – combining fundraising, political action and ways for people to provide education directly. And I'm particularly delighted to be co-convening GCE's High Level Panel with my good friend Graca Machel, whose lifelong commitment to education is absolutely unwavering.

We hope you will join us, because getting the children of the world into school is not just a noble aim; it's a deliverable result. The prize of a generation is within our grasp