THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM

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FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS. The Guiding Principles on Educational Pluralism seek to articulate the way in which educational pluralism fulfills existing international human rights law and provide guidance for its implementation. They create no new rights or obligations.

The Principles are grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, and other relevant international and regional human rights instruments. They shall be interpreted consistently with the principles of human dignity, equality, non-discrimination and the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights.

The Principles position the child at the centre of the educational system and recognize the child as the principal rights-holder of the right to education. They acknowledge that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups.

The Principles are guided by the understanding that education should promote the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Accordingly, they recognize the child's right to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting them, with those views being given due weight according to the child's age and maturity.

The Principles recognize the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society and affirm that parents bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child, with the best interests of the child as their basic concern.

Accordingly, they understand that the exercise of children's rights within education should be understood in light of their evolving capacities and, particularly during childhood, through the guidance and direction provided by parents or legal guardians, recognizing the prior right of parents to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children, as well as the liberty to ensure their children's religious, moral, philosophical, and/or other education, in conformity with their own convictions.

In this regard, the Principles acknowledge the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject to minimum educational standards set by the State.

The Principles recognize the State as the guarantor of the right to education and, as such, the duty-bearer for ensuring the full realization of that right, in all its dimensions.

In fulfilling their role as duty-bearers, States shall respect, protect and fulfil the rights of children and parents, while ensuring that all learners have access to education that meets robust academic standards and respects human dignity.

The implementation of the right to education requires balancing the rights and/or responsibilities of children, parents, communities, including civil society, and the State.

The Guiding Principles on Educational Pluralism seek to provide guidance for addressing the necessary balance between the State, the family, the child, and communities and to clarify the respective roles and obligations of these actors in educational systems.

INTRODUCTION. The Guiding Principles on Education Pluralism rest on the assumption that education aims at the formation of a person as a whole, as established in the international human rights treaties, and is not limited merely to instruction or the delivery of content.

Education attends to the whole child (intellectual, moral, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical), and encompasses knowledge, memory, discipline, wonder, character, judgment, and the ability to live responsibly with others. Therefore, education inevitably reaches into questions of vocation, conscience, belonging, and moral responsibility.

The Principles also envision the child not as an isolated island, but rather as a relational being who is shaped by and flourishes within a particular cultural context.

Therefore, the Principles recognize education as a cultural right which takes into account the familiar and community context. Education therefore should enable children to develop their personality and cultural identity and to learn and understand the values, practices and traditions of the communities to which they belong, as well as those of other communities and of the society in which they live.

Educational pluralism affirms that the understanding of the full development of the child's personality varies from one family to another, from one community to another and from one culture to another, and that all of them shall have a place of respect in the educational

system as far as they respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and meet common quality standards.

Finally, the Principles affirm the State as the guarantor of quality and access for compulsory education, including funding. At the same time, the Principles differentiate between funding and regulating schools and actually operating them.

An educational plural system thus provides funding for a diverse variety of educational institutions that differ from one another (e.g., culturally, linguistically, morally, pedagogically, philosophically, religiously) and simultaneously hold all of them to academic, health, safety and quality standards.

FIRST. Education is a values-driven, lifelong endeavor. Education always reflects and involves different beliefs and worldviews, values, and other cultural commitments, which shape not only the curriculum but also the exchanges between teachers and pupils, as well as the profiles and policies of school leaders and boards of governance. Every element of education is formative and contributes to the learner's development and therefore neutral education does not exist. Educational pluralism leads to a policy of diverse educational options that differ from one another in meaningful ways, while contributing to the promotion of understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence between different groups and societies. Educational pluralism should not reinforce segregation and undermine social cohesion.

SECOND. Education is both a personal and a common good. The next generation's opportunities and capacities impact not only young people and their parents, but the societies in which they live. This personal and common good justifies the States' establishment of standards of availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability, and accountability that all educational systems must provide. This obligation does not imply that the state should serve as the exclusive operator of schools. Even when multiple actors deliver education, the State retains responsibility for ensuring that education serves the common good by setting minimum standards and guaranteeing equitable access, as well as by financing State schools and establishing a human rights-based framework through which different providers are funded in a non-discriminatory manner, according to the maximum of its available resources.

THIRD. The child is the primary holder of the right to education and families are the primary responsible for his or her education. To grant the best interest of the child, education must be a shared endeavor of family and the State, in cooperation with

communities. In an educational pluralistic system, all actors are essential. An educationally pluralistic system enables the active participation of the wider community in the educational process, fostering collaboration among parents, teachers, students and society at large, and promoting dialogue across generations.

FOURTH. Educational options should exist for all families. Public funding mechanisms shall operate in accordance with human rights standards and without discrimination on any grounds, including on the basis of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other standards. They should be just, transparent, and oriented towards the best interest of the learner. Educational choices should not depend on families' financial capacity and the State must ensure that families are entitled to the widest possible protection and assistance in the care and education of children The State should aim to grant, according to its maximum available resources and by all appropriate means, the existence of educational options reflecting families' values and students' needs. Educational pluralism seeks to ensure education is available, accessible, acceptable, adaptable for all families in compulsory education, and accountable.

CALL FOR ACTION. The right to education is fully enacted when educational pluralism is ensured. Educational pluralism enables meaningful diversity to flourish, ensuring that education systems include educational options reflecting the values, beliefs and responsibilities of families and communities, and strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and promote tolerance, mutual understanding and diversity. Educational pluralism supports robust learning standards for all and enables commonality through shared learning content. Thereby, educational pluralism enhances civic and cultural formation and social cohesion. Taking into account the above, therefore States are encouraged to support educational options that reflect families' values and cultural perspectives -including when they concern families belonging to minority groups or non-mainstream groups- and responsibilities. Educational pluralism makes a valuable contribution and it serves to the realization of the right to education for all.