



## ORAL STATEMENT FOR THE ECOSOC HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT 2011

### **Please explain how your statement relates to the substantive agenda of the ECOSOC High Level Segment**

The FPSC (Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture) is an NGO working in the education sector in different regions of the world since 1992. Its wider and deeper experience in the sector has been developed in the Arab countries of the Middle East Region. Since the definition of UNESCO agenda of *Education for All* in 1998 and the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) later in 2000, the FPSC has sought to contribute to their achievement in all countries where it has worked.

This statement focuses on the situation of education in the OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territories), the progress and obstacles that we have observed in achieving Universal Primary Education and forwards policy proposals for the period 2010 – 2015.

The commitment of both the PNA (Palestinian National Authority) and international stakeholders for the achievement of MDG 2 is undeniable. In this sense, since the PNA was created in 1994 there was an increase of 19% in the GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) in primary education. In 1994 the GER was 81% versus 98% in 2009. Although these figures show that MDG 2 by 2015 could be achieved, it is yet to be seen.

Contrary to what the GER data shows the comparison of the NER (Net Enrolment Ratio) for the years 1999 and 2008 shows a dramatic drop of 21% in primary education. It was 97% in 1999 versus 75% in 2008. Similarly, the Foundation of Queen Rania of Jordan, deeply involved in education in the OPT, has the following figures: in 1999 it was estimated that 4,000 school-age children were not enrolled, in 2008 the estimated number of children outside the system amounts to 110,000. This disturbing increase in school-age children without coverage is due to the combination of multiple factors including the rapid population growth and the situation of conflict in the Palestinian society. A clear example of how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affects enrolment rates is as follows: during Israel's military intervention in Gaza in 2008-2009, damage was reported in 280 educational facilities, 18 of them were completely destroyed. The cluster of Education responded to this situation with the development of a school reconstruction plan which budgeted 35 million dollars of international intervention. At present, only half of the projects included in this plan have been funded.

Another problem shared by most Middle Eastern countries is access to the school system at an older age than recommended. A high percentage of children attending the first grade of primary education are not 5-6 years, as they



should, but 7-8 years. This problem has a strong cultural root, but it is also related to the lack of family-friendly policies, as shown by the decrease of the pre-school NER from 39% in 1999 to 32% in 2009. Despite the delays in the age of access to the school system, the fact is that once children are enrolled the retention rate is very high, 99%.

As for the level of adult literacy, it was 94% in 2008 (latest official figures published). Although this index is quite high, it actually hides the reality of a great inequality between men and women. Out of the 6% of illiterate adult population, women account for 77%. The commitment of both the PNA and international agencies to achieve parity in education is obvious, and so is reflected in girls' enrolment rates at school and tertiary education level. In the 2008-2009 academic year 57% of university enrolments were women. Nevertheless, extreme differences between urban and rural areas and cultural stereotypes are still major obstacles to achieving parity.

In general, the OPt have made great progress in ensuring universal access to primary education of Palestinian children, but the road ahead is long and dependence on international funding to achieve it is too high.



**Please explain the specific topic/theme of your presentation.**

Working in the education sector in OPT: challenges regarding the implementation of UN MDG 2 in 2015

Currently, the Palestinian education system faces major challenges: universal primary education, improving the quality of education, educational parity between men and women and building bridges between education and employment.

Since the establishment of the PNA in 1994, the MoEHE (Ministry of Education and Higher Education) has made great efforts to ensure universal access to primary education, focusing on the construction and rehabilitation of education infrastructure to meet the high demand for school places. Population pressure together with the reality of Israeli occupation has made this effort insufficient. A clear case of how the Palestinian education system is seriously damaged by Israeli policies is the population of East Jerusalem. Most of the 90,000 Palestinian students living in East Jerusalem are denied their right to free public education. To integrate into the education system many of these students have to opt for private institutions, their schooling depending on the purchasing power of their families.

Another factor hindering the achievement of universal primary education is the inability of the existing system to integrate children with special needs. Currently, there are no official figures on how many children could be affected by this problem. Although estimates vary greatly according to sources, special needs are a serious problem to be tackled in the coming years. A baseline study is required in the first place.

The FPSC has been working since 1995 to achieve universal primary education through the construction and rehabilitation of schools in the area of Jerusalem where two schools have been fully rehabilitated in the East part and 11 schools have undergone minor reconstruction, the West Bank where 13 schools have been rehabilitated and Gaza where 1 school with two sites has undergone major construction work. Furthermore, FPSC has equipped classrooms, labs, and other school spaces in 35 schools in the West Bank and Gaza. 2 sports facilities have been built in Ramalah and Beit Sahour, respectively. Finally, FPSC has rehabilitated 4 rehab centres for disabled children in Gaza where 5,000 disabled and non disabled children are receiving psychosocial assistance. FPSC is currently developing a field study on the reality of children with special needs in collaboration with the University of Bethlehem.

Another aspect that should be stressed is the quality of education. While in quantitative terms, progress since 1994 has been considerable, it is not so in



qualitative terms. In recent years, if compared to its neighbours, academic results have not improved in general and in some cases as in mathematics and science they have worsened. Among the factors of existing poor quality education in OPT we can highlight: the poor training of teachers, the mismatch between the curriculum developed by the MoEHE and the real resources of schools, lack of motivation of students, special psychological and emotional needs arising from the conflict in the region and the inability of teachers to cope with children with special educational needs (approx. 20 % of pupils in primary and secondary).

The FPSC has been working on improving the quality of education for the past 15 years, primarily, through training programs for teachers -6,000 teachers from primary, secondary and preschool have benefited- and in the implementation of projects on psychosocial support for children affected by conflict -over 25,000 children benefit (currently two programs are in place in the Gaza Strip)-. Moreover and since 2010, the FPSC is working in a pioneering project, "Training of primary teachers in the diagnosis of Special Educational Needs and adapting curriculum to meet those needs". The four-year program involves 50 schools in the West Bank -20.000 students (primary and secondary school), 750 teachers and 250 teachers-in-training.

In terms of gender parity in education enrolment rates of boys and girls is almost equal, but retention rates are higher among girls at school level. As a result, university enrolment rates are higher for women. The central issue is that contents and values the education system transmits continue to enhance the reproductive role of Palestinian women to the detriment of the productive and representative roles. The FPSC works with various Palestinian organizations in the promotion among childhood and youth of the values of equity, solidarity and dialogue, through programs of youth empowerment and advancement of women -over 15,000 young people have participated so far-.



**Please highlight key issues and/or areas that you feel ECOSOC should focus on in the coming years to accomplish the MDG 2: Achieving universal primary education**

FPSC believes that in order to accomplish the MDG 2 in the coming years, ECOSOC should focus on the following principles:

- Ensure the access of all children to school by promoting protection policies, and inclusive education initiatives. 60% of Palestinian Children feel unsecure on their way to school (UNESCO 2011).
- Provide sufficient resources to ensure quality education for all Palestinian children, including groups of children with special needs and those who are directly affected by armed conflict. Special emphasis should be placed on training teachers to adapt their skills to the real needs of students and to the official curriculum, and to make parents and communities aware of their key role in the education process. Investment and promotion of research is crucial to establish minimum standards to achieve quality education for all.
- Deepen the value system that is promoted in schools by ensuring the presence of democratic principles and promoting an equitable education that enhances equality between men and women and mutual understanding among children from different communities.
- Promote the establishment of a Preschool system in Palestine, by supporting public and private initiatives in this sector.
- Expand programs of psychosocial support to children in school, combining the educational and medical aspects. Teachers and social workers' emotional support to children should be promoted through specific training of teachers in this field so that Palestinian childhood does not fall behind. The fact is that academic performance and motivation of children is much lower in areas affected by armed conflicts (UNESCO, 2011).
- Build bridges between training and employment to facilitate job placement for young Palestinians in order to promote both specialized vocational training and efficient public education policies by getting all public and private actors to participate.
- Strengthen youth leadership programs by addressing the real needs and challenges of young Palestinians from the 21st century, with special emphasis in the advocacy component.