

STATEMENT FROM THE BRITISH AND IRISH GROUP OF TEACHER UNIONS

26 July 2024

‘Without access to education, children are at risk of losing their futures.’

On the eve of Education International’s 10th World Congress in Argentina the British and Irish Group of Teacher Unions (BIGTU) has denounced the fact that 75 million children worldwide will have their education disrupted this year by war, conflicts or natural disasters. The group called on all governments to increase efforts to combat the catastrophic effects of climate change and to bring an end to the destruction of education systems in several countries.

Children suffer the most during wars, conflicts, and natural disasters. Humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises have disrupted the education of 75 million children between the ages of 3 and 18. Today one in four of the world’s out-of-school children live in countries struck by humanitarian crises.

Gaza

Over 625,000 Palestinian children in Gaza have been deprived of education since the start of the Israeli onslaught on the besieged enclave last October. Over 7,000 students and nearly 400 educational staff have been killed there in the last ten months. 88% of all school buildings in Gaza have sustained some level of damage.

Over nine months into the war, vast tracts of Gaza lie in ruins amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water, and medicine.

Ukraine

Since the first day of full-scale invasion the Russian Federation has been waging war on Ukrainian education. For these two years the occupiers have destroyed or damaged more than every tenth school in Ukraine. Destruction of the educational infrastructure and forced resettlement result in Ukrainian children losing access to education as a basic and fundamental right.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, girls and women have faced significant challenges in accessing education. Educated women are essential for the country’s development, and denying them education risks creating a lost generation

Education is an enabling right, which is crucial in and of itself and for realising other human rights such as the rights to work, to an adequate standard of living, to health, to participate in society and communities, to equality before the law and to fundamental freedoms. Denying the right to education to half the population effectively denies women and girls most other human rights.

Sudan

The education sector is one of the most severely affected areas by the conflict in Sudan, casting a long shadow over the future of millions of children. Reports indicate that the conflict has forced the closure of over 10,400 schools, predominantly in the conflict-ravaged regions, leaving 19 million children without access to education.

This interruption not only halts their academic progress but also exposes them to various risks, including recruitment into armed groups and gender-based violence. The dire situation is further compounded by the displacement of 3.5 million children, rendering Sudan the nation with the highest number of displaced children globally.

Haiti

In Haiti schools are used as battlegrounds for political fights. Currently schools are falling victim to this situation. Some schools have been burned down by armed groups. Others are used by armed groups as their bases. Fleeing from gang violence, citizens are also forced into using schools as camps to take refuge, living in extremely unsanitary conditions.

In Haiti, public education represents a mere 20% of the education sector. For 100,000 teachers who work in private schools, school closures mean they are very suddenly left without any wages. In this context, some teachers are trying to leave the country. Those who can are finding refuge in Canada, the United States, Mexico and other Latin American countries.

Climate Crisis

1 billion children are at 'extremely high risk' of the impacts of climate change. That is nearly half of all children. This represents an existential crisis, which must be addressed.

BIGTU Chairperson Larry Flanagan stated:

“As education trade unions worldwide gather for a week-long conference to plan priorities for the next five years, those of us who represent teachers and lecturers in Britain and Ireland call on the international community to do everything possible to bring an end to the awful conflicts that are so severely impacting on children. We also call for governments to substantially increase education funding as a key response to the challenge of keeping school aged children learning amid climate-induced crises. Without access to education, children are at risk of losing their futures.”

BIGTU Secretary John Boyle added:

“In preparing leaders of tomorrow Irish and British educators work hard to help students under our care learn how to better protect and preserve our planet for all future generations. With nearly half of the world’s children at risk of being impacted by climate change we call on political leaders to redouble their efforts to make the world more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.

Signed by:

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