



The United Nations has launched a major initiative Education First in the fight for achieving universal primary education, one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are to be reached by 2015.

Launching the initiative, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that \$1.5 billion in new financing had been secured.

61 million children at primary school age are out of schools for many different reasons. A staggering 250 million children are not able to read, write or count properly. Yet only two per cent of humanitarian aid goes to education.

Among the challenges that are to be tackled by the new initiative are:

- The world needs two million more teachers.
- The world's poorest countries need almost four million new classrooms to accommodate those who are not in school..*

- \$16 billion is needed, with a further \$8 required to achieve universal lower secondary education.

“We cannot stop until every child, youth and adult has the opportunity to go to school, learn and contribute to society,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said at the launch of the initiative. “This is our assignment; this is our homework. Let us pass the test for the world’s children. Let us put Education First.”

At the launch, Mr. Ban presented a group of so-called “UN Champions” who have been given the assignment of galvanizing support for Education First among governments and intergovernmental bodies. The UN Champions include President Jacob Zuma of South Africa, the Prime Ministers of Denmark, Australia and Croatia and the heads of the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO.

Australia, Bangladesh, South Africa, Timor-Leste and Denmark were among countries that pledged to intensify their support to the new global partnership. In addition, dozens of top companies and private foundations have mobilized over \$1.5 billion in new financing to ensure all children and young people have a quality, relevant and transformative education.

After the welcoming remarks by Special Envoy on Education, Gordon Brown, the 27 year old Sierra Leonean, Chenor Bah, representing the youth, took the floor. “Last year, I earned a Masters’ degree. I have a job and I have a voice, which I use to mobilize and stand up for the rights of other young people who do not have the opportunities and the breaks that I had. I stand here today, because my story is the exception. And that is not right,” he [said](#) with a strong and proud voice.

Mr. Bah addressed the Secretary-General directly and said “Young people are keen to be part of this partnership, and I should let you know that the Youth Advocacy Group that has been set up to support this initiative and myself, and millions of young people around the world are this time going to be real partners in this endeavor – we will support you, mobilize our energy and resources, and yes, we will hold you accountable for the promises and commitments you make. We all have to be in this together.”

EDUCATION FIRST:

Evidence shows that:

- Providing all children with quality basic education could
- 12 percent of people could be lifted out of poverty if all s
- Over the past four decades, the global increase in wom
- One additional school year can increase a woman's ear
- US\$1 invested in education and skills = US\$10 in econo

Yet:

- 61 million children of primary school age are out of scho
- At least 250 million children are not able to read, write o
- In at least 63 countries , young women from poor house

- 775 million adults are illiterate. Almost 500 million of the
- 171 million children in developing countries are stunted
- Only two percent of humanitarian aid goes to education.