

High-Level Steering Group Teleconference – Minutes

Monday 17 April 2023, 10.30-11.45 AM EST

1. Chair's Welcome and Introduction

The Chair, the Rt Hon. Gordon Brown:

- Welcomed all participants and thanked everyone for their support to the High-Level Financing Conference (HLFC)
- Introduced new HLSG members: Andrew Mitchell, Minister of State for Development and Africa, Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, UK; Harjit Sajjan, Minister of International Development, Canada; and Sidse Marie Kristensen, Chief Executive Officer, Lego Foundation.
- Thanked participants for attending this important meeting and announced the agenda.

2. Current Priority Crises: Girls' Education in Afghanistan

The Chair reminded participants that 18 months ago the regime in Afghanistan ruthlessly restricted girls from fulfilling their right to education. Despite calls to restore access from across the world, to this day the ban remains in effect. There is a need to be vigilant, particularly in light of recent additional restrictions. The Chair invited ECW's Executive Director to provide an update on the recent Afghanistan meeting in Doha. She reported that Qatar had recently arranged a meeting for UNICEF and ECW with the de facto Minister for Education, to discuss a way forward on secondary schools. Whilst the discussion at that time was positive, the situation has since deteriorated. The Chair invited HLSG members to share their reflections on how the HLSG can collectively move forward on this egregious attack on girls' rights.

Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

Explained that Afghanistan is now four weeks into the new school year – and yet again, girls are not permitted to attend secondary school. UNICEF are continuing advocacy efforts with the Taliban leadership. In addition to the recent meeting with ECW, UNICEF have conducted 3 visits since the Taliban took over, including a recent mission with Martin Griffiths. He encouraged the HLSG to remain hopeful. For example, the de facto government continues to pay secondary teachers and to circulate school dress codes. Teacher training and accelerated education have not stopped. He thanked donors and implementers for supporting the impressive growth of community-based education and continued female teacher programmes. Although community schools may not be sustainable in the long run, they are currently a critical pathway. It is important to keep supporting community-based organizations, while also advocating and investing to ensure schools are safe and accessible.

Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director General, UNESCO

Thanked ECW for keeping Afghanistan and girls' education on the agenda. UNESCO's latest analysis confirms that the impact on education is proving devastating. Since March 2022, 1.1 million secondary girls have been prevented from attending secondary school and over 100,000 young women have been affected by the suspension of higher education for women. She agreed with the focus on alternative learning modalities to ensure continuity and highlighted the wide reach of community-based programmes, vocational training courses and audio programmes. UNESCO is also exploring distance learning and online learning options for older female students. She encouraged HLSG participants to think about how the sector can be bolder in addressing the gap at the university level, such as an alliance of universities to provide courses and scholarships and also encouraged a continued focus on data and evidence.

Jan Egeland, Secretary General, Norwegian Refugee Council

Explained that he had recently returned from Kabul. There is a clear battle between the Kabul-based Taliban and the Kandahar-based Taliban and a need to engage at multiple levels. ECW is an important forum to come together on this issue and change is possible. He explained that he will be returning to Kandahar soon and is working with Iran to plan the visit – they are very present in Kandahar, have vested interests there and agree with us on education. He encouraged countries present to ensure their diplomats engage in Kandahar as well as Kabul, and to work with countries like Iran, Qatar and Türkiye. He noted the need to work at regional and district levels and explained that many organizations have expanded region by region with female employees via verbal and written permits. It was always a complicated place to work, even in the previous regime. NRC and others have run schools in Taliban areas before and so we can draw on these experiences.

Andrew Mitchell, Minister of State for Development and Africa, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, UK

Thanked participants for the successful HLFC and welcomed new donors. Too many children are missing out on education because of conflict and crises. The UK's recent visits to Türkiye and Niger highlighted both the need and the impact that ECW can have and thus the importance of prioritising, given the scale of these needs. For example, increasing the FER

budget, and supporting fewer, better-funded MYRPs. The Minister highlighted the critical convening role that ECW plays and encouraged continued collaboration with GPE and CSOs. The UK's new women and girls' strategy will bring a strong focus on girls' rights to education in EIEPC. He reaffirmed that the UK remains a committed and strong partner of ECW and looks forward to working together to change education from an enormous challenge to a huge opportunity in crisis contexts.

The Chair thanked HLSG members for their interventions and explained that the team will follow up on these critical issues. In particular, the Chair: 1) recognized the need to call on governments in the Middle East to help with engagement and influence; 2) reinforced the need to step up individual diplomatic efforts in both Kandahar and Kabul; 3) thanked all involved in providing informal education and for making education available often at great personal risk; and 4) noted the important convening role of ECW.

Stephan Schønemann, Under Secretary for Development, Denmark

Denmark is deeply concerned with the situation in Afghanistan and very much appreciates the briefing. Denmark supports ECW's continued advocacy for the rights of all girls to quality education in Afghanistan and beyond. Denmark was also pleased to co-host, together with ECW, the LEGO Foundation and civil society, the Nordic conference on girls' education that was held in Copenhagen in January. Denmark also congratulates ECW on a successful pledging conference in February. The conference demonstrated the importance of investing in education at a time, when development aid is under immense pressure and there continue to be millions of children out of school or not receiving quality education because of protracted crises, new conflicts, the impact of climate change as well as the aftermath of COVID-19 and now a global food and energy crisis.

3. Executive Director's Progress Update

The Chair handed the floor to the ECW Executive Director, Yasmine Sherif, for a presentation on how ECW is turning the promises of the 2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan into action. She thanked the HLSG and all stakeholders for their support for the HLFC and the new Strategic Plan. The tremendous success would not have been possible without the HLSG and ExCom and she thanked the Swiss, as co-hosts, and all of the co-conveners: Colombia, Germany, Niger, Norway and South Sudan. She reported that:

- Since 2017, ECW has reached over 7 million children and young people in 44 countries (and expects this to rise to 8.5 m by the end of the year), with 28 multi-year country programmes, and 390 grants (including to local organizations, to ensure that ECW keeps delivering the Grand Bargain). **See slides.**
- The new Strategic Plan ECW was collectively developed by all ECW's stakeholders. Gender and disability continue to be priorities (as was evidenced in the recent visit to Colombia), there is a strengthened focus on climate change and on localisation, and a new emphasis on advancing financial data for the sector.
- The recent evaluations have demonstrated that ECW's model is fit for purpose and provided concrete recommendations to become even stronger. ECW also completed a comprehensive audit, with ECW scoring top scores across the board and demonstrating excellent financial management.

4. #222MillionDreamsCampaign and the High-Level Financing Conference

The Chair thanked all HLSG members who announced commitments at the HLFC in Geneva. A very impressive US\$ 826 million was announced in support of ECW, less than 2 months into the new strategic period. With 55% of the funding target already achieved, this is a tremendous start for the new strategic period. More is needed though to reach the \$1.5bn target or there is a risk falling short on ECW's objectives. The Chair invited HLSG members to reflect on the HLFC and to share their insights into what the HLSG can do in order to close the funding gap and ensure that ECW is fully funded.

Anne Beathe Tvinnereim, Minister of International Development

Expressed support for the Afghanistan interventions and recommendations and thanked the ECW Executive Director for the progress report. The Minister commended the focus on simultaneously developing the 2023-2026 strategy at the same time as delivering action on the ground, recognizing that it is not easy to do both at once, especially while planning the HLFC. The Minister congratulated all involved in the conference and thanked the Swiss Government as hosts. She

expressed particular appreciation for giving such a good platform to young people and those from the global South. ECW are now well placed to implement the strategic plan, while securing the financing targets in full. Norway is hosting the next ExCom meeting in May, This will be a good occasion to follow up on the HLFC and Minister Tvinnereim looked forward to seeing colleagues there.

Harjit Sajjan, Minister of International Development, Canada

Confirmed Canada's commitment to EIEPC as a priority, and to providing support for and working alongside ECW. Canada is looking forward to supporting efforts to strengthening coordination across stakeholders, and creating synergies between humanitarian, development and peace programming. He noted that the agenda reminds everyone to ensure that gender equality is fully embedded in all work. The Minister highlighted another important context – although education has been allowed for Rohingya Refugees, it is only accessible up to grade 9. He asked the HLSC to also advocate with the Bangladesh government to allow girls' education to continue beyond grade 9, and to find ways to coordinate and support these efforts.

Awut Deng Acuil, Minister of General Education and Instruction, South Sudan

Noted that, as the interventions about Afghanistan demonstrated, it is important to work together to ensure those with influence are mobilized by ECW to ensure education for all children and young people. South Sudan was honored to be a co-convenor of the HLFC and she congratulated all on the outcomes of the conference. These now need to be translated into results on the ground. ECW has been supporting South Sudan since 2020 and a new MYRP has just been developed. In addition to conflict, South Sudan is increasingly experiencing climate change pushing communities into abject poverty and insecurity. Despite the challenges, as a result of the MYRP there has been an increase in access to learning for IDPs, returnees and host communities and efforts to improve the retention of girls, by, for example, recruiting and training more female teachers. The MYRP investment has improved access and quality, and supported progress on gender parity and disability inclusion. In the next phase there will be an even stronger focus on gender. By funding ECW, donor partners are supporting South Sudan with predictable multi-year funding and providing quality education for those impacted by crises. The Minister noted the impressive collaboration between ECW and GPE. ECW is preparing \$40m for the next phase and GPE is providing an additional \$10m in accelerated funding. This is an important example of synergies in investment flows.

Dirk Meyer, Director General at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

Congratulated ECW for a groundbreaking conference, that elevated inspiring voices, especially youth, from all over the world. He acknowledged the amount raised despite extremely tight national budgets, with existing donors increasing commitments and new donors joining and thanked everyone involved for making it such a success. The Director General recognized that there would be some challenges ahead, but that ECW should be optimistic in mobilizing the remaining funds to reach the \$1.5bn target. Germany will continue political lobbying in the strategic period. He noted that most commitments were made for 2023, and so encouraged all donors to transmit funds in due time and to extend their contributions through multi-year commitments. He reminded participants that multi-year funding is key to the predictability and effectiveness of education responses in crisis-affected contexts.

Tariq Al Gurg, CEO, Dubai Cares

Reflected that climate has often been a blind spot for the sector. Dubai Cares is partnering with the COP28 UAE Presidency to elevate education to the forefront of climate action. The announcement was made during 2023 WEF Annual Meeting in Davos. Dubai Cares will host the second edition of the RewirEd Summit in conjunction with the global climate summit, with a focus on innovative practices and solutions, and will also elevate education during COP28 itself. This will include positioning education as a powerful tool for achieving climate ambition and education goals, highlighting how resilient education infrastructures can better safeguard vulnerable individuals living in crises and emergencies, and ensuring the meaningful participation of youth and youth led solutions. He encouraged HLSC members to join, collaborate and participate in these plans, and noted that ECW's presence and position will be key.

Sidse Marie Kristensen, CEO, Lego Foundation

Expressed appreciation to be joining the HLSC. Ms. Kristensen is a long-time member of the Foundation and knows first-hand the impact of ECW collaboration to ensure access to playful and safe spaces in crises. She explained that this is a period of transition for the Foundation and that their strategic planning process is underway, but their mission to support learning through play for children everywhere remains resolute. The 222m campaign and the HLFC have shown what

amazing work can be done when private funders, governments, and other international organizations come together. She expressed appreciation for ECW's tireless efforts for children in EIEPC, and ECW's commitment to the early years. The Foundation is committed to working with everyone at ECW to raise the critical funding needed in the coming years, and to continue to support the importance of play and learning for children in crisis-affected contexts.

Erica Gerretsen, European Commission DG International Partnerships, Director for Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace.

Thanked the ECW team for the tremendous work on the campaign, the HLFC and resource mobilization efforts. She noted that Team EU, the EU Commission and EU member states, together pledged \$313m. The EU's pledge complements their other financing at country level. The Commission has committed approximately 3.2bn Euros to education in fragile states until 2027. The EU called for even closer coordination at country level, to ensure complementary to each other and alignment to national policies. ECW is in a unique position to convene humanitarian and development partners to work together and to support efficient and effective use of funds at country level. The EU is happy to contribute to this effort, drawing on networks of EU delegations and networks in fragile contexts. The EU also noted the need to continue calling for financing for education, for example like ECW did at the recent EU Humanitarian Forum in Brussels. These are important issues to bring forward at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) later in the year.

Dominik Stillhart, Ambassador, Deputy Director General of SDC and of Head of Humanitarian Aid Department, Switzerland

Noted that Afghanistan remains a priority for Switzerland and agreed with previous speakers. We can make a difference, but only if we do it collectively. He will be visiting Afghanistan in a few weeks, and education is very high on the agenda. He congratulated the ECW Executive Director and the ECW team for a fantastic conference with great outcomes. The Swiss were proud to co-host and remain fully committed to education and ECW. He noted the need to maintain the momentum and follow up to strengthen partnerships, maintain visibility on EIEPC and capture lessons learned for future ECW pledging conferences. The Ambassador requested an update on the status of the post-conference plans.

Susan Hopgood, President, Education International

Congratulated everyone for the successful HLFC. Education International were pleased to see the support for teacher participation and the strong focus on teacher issues at the conference. She explained that EI are advocating to governments to pledge to ECW as part of their wider education financing campaign and will continue to advocate for teachers in EIEPC and support ECW's effort to mobilize funding to deliver the new strategic plan. She reminded participants that teachers in EIEPC regularly go for months without pay, are often underpaid, and most have no social security. EI have also called for a dedicated international funding mechanism to support teacher salaries in emergency contexts. There is a lot of support for this in the sector, and EI look forward to further conversations with ECW and other partners to get this up and running as soon as possible. She also urged HLSG members to engage with the new 'Afghanistan Teachers Rights Observatory'.

Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees

Extended the High Commissioner's congratulations for the HLFC. She noted that the GRF is fast approaching, and highlighted the important linkages between the HLFC, the Transforming Education Summit (TES) and the GRF. Given ECW's focus, this moment is crucial in terms of predictable funding. We need to build on the 2019 joint pledge and work by ECW, GPE and the World Bank. She recognized that a number of HLSG members are strong supporters of the GRF and have made individual education pledges but called for a particular collective focus on predictable funding, building on lessons learnt since 2019 and exploring complementary funding packages. She called on HLSG members to collectively ensure refugees and displaced children are included in education at every level.

Laura Frigenti, Chief Executive Officer, Global Partnership for Education

Congratulated the ECW Executive Director on the remarkable results of the HLFC. Many HLSG members were at the World Bank Spring meetings and the IMF where discussions highlighted the growing gap between needs and resources. There is a clear need to work better, work together, and to be more efficient and effective. She noted that during the Spring meetings GPE, UNESCO and the World Bank convened a meeting of Ministers of Education and Finance, to bring them around the table as local resources are needed and there are several initiatives to explore. She updated the HLSG on the successful joint ECW and GPE mission to Japan and recognized that it is important to have strong collaboration on the ground and

also at the strategic level. She expressed GPE's commitment to continue to work together with ECW and strengthen the collaboration at the strategic and operational level.

Michael Messenger, President, World Vision International (in his role as CSO Representative):

Congratulated ECW on the successful conference and resource mobilization efforts, recognizing that through the strategic plan, this funding can help confront critical educational gaps. He reflected that it was inspiring to witness global leaders, private and public sector partners, civil society organizations, teachers and youth come together, and that the GRF will be an important opportunity to follow up. He noted the importance of collective action to transform education and expressed confidence in the ongoing efforts to improve meaningful engagement in ECW governance which will help to build on this potential. He highlighted that delivering on commitments to EiE will require purposeful prioritization backed by sustained investment and local to global multi-partner engagement given the growing needs and widening gaps.

The Chair thanked HLSG members for their interventions and support to ECW and encouraged HLSG members to continue this spirit of commitment, coordination and collaboration.

5. Approval of 2022 Organizational Evaluation Report and Related Management Response

The Chair reminded HLSG that a series of evaluations were conducted to inform the development of the 2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan. The Organizational Evaluation provided evidence that ECW is delivering on its mandate and has successfully transitioned into a fully functioning global fund. The Chair explained that the Organizational Evaluation and the associated management response has been reviewed and cleared by the Executive Committee. The Chair invited questions from the HLSG and asked for approval of the Organizational Evaluation and management response.

LeAnna Marr, Deputy Assistant Administrator and Acting Senior Coordinator of United States International Basic Education Assistance, United States

Recognized the leadership and staff commitment to always improve what ECW does. This is important given ECW's rapid growth and the success of the HLFC. The USA is excited by the concrete actions spelled out in the Management Response, including increasing the FER budget (as a unique instrument for rapid responses), the strategic improvements to the MYRP and Acceleration Facility, and the focus on reaching the most marginalized. She asked how ECW plans to strengthen the role of the HLSG in strategic oversight and resource mobilization, in line with the recommendations in the evaluation and the commitment in the management response. Given the high level of commitment, what more can the HLSG do?

Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR

Commended the collegial and transparent evaluation process and noted that this demonstrates that ECW is a learning organization. She noted that the evaluation highlights that MYRPs do not automatically include refugees and that they need to bring a focus on disaggregating data. UNHCR looks forward to a refugee reference group within the governance of ECW as a way to further strengthen programming and results for these marginalized populations and those that host them.

Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director General, UNESCO

Endorsed colleagues' comments on the evaluation, agreeing that it reflects the ambition, vision and strategic approach of ECW. UNESCO supports these efforts. She congratulated everyone on the HLFC which raised remarkable funds but also set important priorities. She highlighted that it is important that the new Strategic Plan aligns with the pillars of the TES Call to Action. The World Bank Spring Meetings showed that there is room for a more ambitious idea of what financing education means within the financial global pact for the multilateral system. She encouraged HLSG members to build on this momentum, for example by bringing a collective voice to the summit to be hosted by France in June.

The Chair invited ECW Executive Director to respond. The Executive Director agreed that there is a need to connect the TES, HLFC and the GRF and to be ready for December. ECW is committed to continuing the collaboration described by GPE colleagues and our collective efforts to break down silos. ECW has a wonderful Executive Committee and needs the high-level ministerial support from the HLSG to, for example, mobilize other strategic donor partners and the private sector. The ECW Executive Director encouraged HLSG members to join ECW missions and advocacy efforts to engage private sector donors and to consider the multi-sectoral nature of education when exploring internal budgets.

The Chair concluded by explaining that given the need for rapid responses, the role of the ECW Executive Director and the Executive Committee was deemed more important than in other governance structures, with HLSG meetings happening twice a year to ensure the most senior-level representation. The ECW Secretariat will come back to HLSG with suggestions to: 1) support greater coordination; 2) use the HLSG convening power as effectively as possible; and 3) draw on the diverse expertise with this group. The Chair thanked HLSG members for their support and concluded that the Organizational Evaluation and management response are approved.

6. Chair's Closing and Summary of Decisions

The Chair, the Rt Hon. Gordon Brown:

- Concluded the meeting and thanked the HLSG for approving the Organizational Evaluation and its associated management response and for sharing their valuable and strategic guidance in the meeting.
- Advised that the next HLSG meeting will take place in September, on the margins of the UNGA.
- Thanked all participants for their valuable contributions to the discussion and for scaling up their financial and strategic support to ECW.