

High-Level Steering Group Meeting – Minutes

Wednesday September 20th 2023, 07.00 AM - 08.15 AM EST

1. Chair's Welcome and Introduction

The Chair, the Rt Hon. Gordon Brown, welcomed all participants and introduced new HLSG members:

- Mutesi Hadijah, Youth and Student-led Representative, Global Student Forum
- Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, Minister of State for Development, Francophonie & International Partnerships, France

The Chair thanked participants for attending this important meeting and announced the agenda:

- Updates from three priority crises: the Sudanese Regional Response, the Hunger Crisis and Afghanistan.
- Presentation and endorsement of the ECW Annual Results Report 2022, *With Hope and Courage*
- Plenary discussion on Resource Mobilization following the High-Level Financing Conference

2. Sudanese Regional Refugee Response, UNHCR High Commissioner

The UNHCR High Commissioner detailed the increasing number of internally displaced people (est. four million) and refugees (est. one million), the levels of trauma and gender-based violence, and the ethnicization of the conflict. Many refugees are moving to already fragile countries, home to refugees from the prior conflict where humanitarian aid was not effectively bridged with development funding. The work of the World Bank in Chad shows how we can and must do things differently. In Sudan, education was already fragile (est. 7 million out of school) and this is now amplified with education cycles disrupted and schools used as shelters. Neighboring countries have inclusive policies but limited resource, and learners face challenges of documentation, certification and language. There is limited attention on the conflict and the emergency appeal is barely 25% funded. The High Commissioner thanked ECW, the only donor to refugee education in the response.

3. Update on the Hunger Crisis and Its Impact on School-aged Children, WFP Executive Director

The WFP Executive Director is proud to support ECW and its critical work, reminding participants that the global hunger crisis is denying millions of children their education. School meal programmes are vital safety nets, especially for girls - this is not a peripheral issue, but vital to ECW's mission. ECW's Annual Results Report demonstrates that joint UNICEF and WFP programmes in Haiti have boosted attendance by 93% - an impactful and cost-effective investment. The recent joint mission showed that the impact is wide reaching, felt beyond schools and into families and communities. The School Meals Coalition has grown quickly since launch, but there is a long way to go to ensure all primary school children receive a healthy school meal each day – particularly children in conflict and fragility. Political support and innovative finance solutions will be key.

4. Girls' Education in Afghanistan, UNICEF Executive Director

The UNICEF Executive Director provided an overview of human rights violations in Afghanistan. Nearly 40% of the population need assistance to survive and it is estimated that 875,000 children under 5 will need treatment for severe malnutrition. Education is under threat across the country. Household surveys show less than 1 in 5 have gained basic skills by grade three, and enrollment is falling across all age levels. The ban on secondary education is denying over one million girls the right to learn. The Executive Director set out a two-pronged approach. Firstly, advocacy to encourage the authorities to lift the ban, as this cannot become the new normal. Secondly, developing innovative alternative pathways for children in hard to reach areas, and building on the well-coordinated response which brings together humanitarian and development partners. The crisis has dropped from mainstream media and remains hugely underfunded.

The Chair reflected on the gravity of the situation and the importance of the HLSG's collective efforts. He opened the floor for interventions. The following statements were made:

Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, Minister of State for Development, Francophonie & International Partnerships, France

The Minister thanked ECW for their work. Education is the key to all SDGs, reducing inequalities, empowering girls, and fostering peace and sustainability - it is needed now more than ever. In May, at the National Presidential Council on Development, Macron set out France's strategy - with priorities including teacher training, gender equality, climate change. France will be hosting the first Global School Meals Coalition Summit in Paris on 18-19 October. Chaired by President Emmanuel Macron, and co-hosted with Finland, it will expand efforts to ensure children are supported through the hunger crisis. The Minister announced a pledge of €40 million to support ECW's new strategic plan and important collective efforts.

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

Thousands of Sudanese refugees and South Sudanese returnees are arriving daily. The pressure on the education system is already high but the government is working to facilitate access e.g. removing exam fees for refugees, expanding education facilities, increasing teacher capacities. The emergency contingency of USD\$5m in the new MYRP allowed South Sudan to respond quicker than ever to an unprecedented crisis. Now working to mobilize the USD \$25m still needed for the programme. South Sudan is a committed partner of ECW.

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

Reflected on the importance of education during crises - the right and cost-effective thing to do. The High-Level Financing Conference (HLFC) was a great start, ECW now needs bigger and bolder steps to reach the funding target. The Strategic Plan is ECW's blueprint and promise. The Minister called for better global data on financing and reach, clearer prioritization, and a strong focus on impact. Millions of children wake up today without education, and ECW can stop this. COP and the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) will be important moments.

Patricia Danzi, Director-General, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Thanked everyone for their commitment and noted that seeing action gives hope. In the challenging economic context, it is even more important to build on the success of the HLFC. Noted that it is not just about humanitarian aid, but about the nexus. Thanked ECW for shining light on hidden and forgotten crises, and for their strong leadership and communication.

Peter MacDougall, Assistant Deputy Minister Canada

Reflected on the importance of good quality education, holistic learning and wellbeing and a safe place to learn on a full stomach. Canada are especially focused on keeping women and girls unique needs at the forefront, and will continue to work with ECW and WFP to address this issue. School feeding and the School Meals Coalition will unlock wellbeing for millions.

Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director General, UNESCO

Commended the leadership of ECW, the impressive achievements and the new Strategic Plan. Highlighted UNESCO's efforts to establish consortia that facilitate nexus coordination, piloting mechanisms in 50 countries. Noted the need to invest resources in data, reporting, and learning assessment. UNESCO are exploring all avenues to support girls and women in Afghanistan e.g. community-based literacy, radio education, partnerships, and collaborating across the nexus. Noted the importance of access to university.

Tariq Al Gurg, Chief Executive Officer, Dubai Cares

Dubai Cares, a founding member since 2015, thanked the team for their efforts. Dubai Cares will continue to support ECW financially and will encourage new donors to engage. Announced that COP will have its first education day on Dec 8th entitled 'Education, Youth, Skills and Children'. Thanked ECW for leading on several COP sessions related to EIEPC. There will be an outcome report – and this will be taken to decision makers and used as a policy document. Looks forward to seeing and collaborating with HLSG members at COP in December.

Vegard Holmelid, Special Representative for the 2030 Agenda, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway

Noted that education is the top priority for Norway, and that girls and women in Afghanistan need support more than ever. Particularly concerned about the ban on projects from INGOs, and impressed with the principled

response of agencies, the transition of projects to national staff, and the focus on finding solutions. Praised Somaya Faruqi's advocacy and thanked ECW for their work.

5. Presentation: Annual Results Report 2022, *With Hope and Courage*

The Executive Director highlighted that 2022 marked the end of the first strategic planning period. The 2022 Annual Results Report (the ARR), as it is cumulative, therefore sums up progress made since ECW was created.

The Executive Director provided an overview of the ARR covering resource mobilization, country investments and results for children (see slides for full details). Hard copies of the full 2022 Annual Report were shared with HLSG members, and the online version can be found [here](#). ECW continues to closely monitor the situation in Niger following the coup in July. Despite the uncertainty, ECW's partners continue to provide services to children and ECW fully expect to renew the MYRP later this year. Ukraine remains a priority for ECW. The new MYRP will be in place by the end of the year. The Executive Director recognized the contributions of Germany and the Porticus Foundation for providing additional financing to support ECW programming in Ukraine, as well as the Global Business Coalition for its partnership in delivering comprehensive digital solutions to Ukraine.

The Executive Director expressed deepest thanks to ECW's strategic donor partners, as well as implementing partners, for delivering education for those left furthest behind and caught up and impacted by crises.

The Chair reflected that the ARR demonstrates the power of cooperation and collective action. He opened the floor for interventions. The following statements were made:

Sidsel Marie Kristensen, Chief Executive Officer, LEGO Foundation

Thanked ECW for the important work done in 2022 and in 2023. LEGO Foundation believes in children's learning, development, and wellbeing, with a special focus on how learning through play positively impacts children's outcomes, especially for children living in crisis and conflict settings. The LEGO Foundation has invested hundreds of millions of US dollars in children's learning and development and remains committed to ECW. More funding, evidence-based programming, and influencing is needed to ensure that children thrive and develop in these contexts. The LEGO Foundation is motivated to work everyone to ensure early childhood development and education in humanitarian settings becomes even more central in the priorities of decision-makers.

Michael Messenger, President & CEO, World Vision

Endorsed the ARR on behalf of the CSO Constituency. Welcomed the focus on investments across the nexus and efforts to analyze progress across the strategic plan, including MHPSS, inclusion and amplifying lived experience. As World Vision finish their HLSG term, they are proud to continue to support as an implementer, advocate and supporter. Everyone has a role to play in delivering the shared vision and there is still lots to do.

Ole Thonke, Ambassador and Deputy State Secretary for Development Policy, Denmark

Expressed Denmark's support for ECW's important work and noted that the results speak for themselves. Highlighted the importance of the nexus, climate, and understanding the needs on the ground. What ECW does and how ECW works is becoming ever more important. Looks forward to the next ExCom hosted by Lego.

Ms. Erica Gerretsen, Director for Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace, EU

The ARR demonstrates return on investment and the power of education. Worryingly, national education spending is reducing in many lower- and middle-income countries. The EU are increasing their education budget from 7% to 13% and have announced €140m for Afghan Girls through grassroots organizations. COP and GRF are key advocacy opportunities for education as an investment. EU will continue to deliver joint objectives for education e.g. collaboration with ECW through field offices, bilateral support, and a regional teachers' initiative.

Scott Turner, Deputy Assistant Secretary, United States Department of State

Noted support for endorsement of the ARR and commended everyone for the progress and results. Expressed particular support for the ongoing commitment to girls' education. Called on participants to keep EIEPC and forgotten crises in the media.

Susan Hopgood, President, Education International

Expressed support for the important work underway, as demonstrated by the ARR. EI are pleased to see the importance of teachers so strongly in the ARR and call for more support for them. Teachers cannot wait. Highlighted that the High-Level Teaching Panel (set up by the UNSG) is concluding its work and making very strong recommendations for crisis-affected, refugee and displaced teachers. EI are also calling for the establishment of a global fund for payment of teacher salaries in emergencies.

The Chair thanked HLSG donors for their continued financial support which has enabled all these results to be achieved. After opening up for any objections, noted that the HLSG has endorsed the 2022 Annual Results Report and that ECW will take forward the recommendations from members.

6. Resource Mobilization Post High-Level Financing Conference

The Chair reminded members that, as of today, ECW has raised \$870 million for its new Strategic Plan 2023-2024, but it is still facing a funding gap of \$630 million. This high-level group has a unique opportunity —to work together and close this gap. The Chair put forward three proposals to support Resource Mobilization efforts:

- Increase commitments and approve additional funding for ECW. Demand is growing by the day. In places like Libya, Sudan and the Sahel ECW cannot address the high needs without more resources.
- Support to help convince governments that have not yet joined this cause in Europe, the Arab Gulf and the Asia Pacific regions.
- Take inspiration from partners like Lego Foundation, Porticus, and the Zurich Cantonal Bank to broaden ECW's private sector donors. This works best when ECW's political leaders champion these partnerships e.g. in Denmark, Switzerland and UK. Time to see this in many more countries.

The Chair also reflected that the climate crisis is a learning crisis and ECW is working at its frontline. Important to go even further. Urged ECW's donor community to safeguard the right of all children and adolescents to education, especially those displaced by climate change. In the build-up to the COP28, there will be an appeal on this.

The Chair invited interventions from the floor. The following statements were made:

Jakaya Kikwete, Chair of the Board of Directors, Global Partnership for Education

Thanked the Chair for his leadership and commitment, and commended the ECW Executive Director and team. GPE are proud partners of ECW. The HLSG is meeting at a critical time - a year ago world leaders committed to transforming education, but overlapping crises affect millions of children. Need to build on the success of HLFC to fully fund ECW and keep advocating for education financing for the most vulnerable. ECW and GPE are working together in mutual collaboration to provide timely and effective support, e.g. in Sudan and Afghanistan.

Dirk Meyer, Director-General, Multilateral development policy; transformation; climate, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany

Thanked ECW for their tremendous work and leadership. Noted that as ECW grows, the complexity of the HLSG has increased, and better representation from the global south is crucial. Noted the importance of resource mobilization, and that Germany will remain a reliable partner, and will support engagement in the upcoming climate campaign, COP and other summits. Urged members to provide substantial, multi-year commitments.

Michael Gaffey, Director-General, Development Cooperation and Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland

Reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to food security. Explained that Irish aid focuses on those furthest behind and thus children in EIEPC are high on their agenda - if they lose education, humanity loses. Advocated for further support for ECW. Ireland have already committed financing over four years, but keen to work with ECW to see how they can increase this given the increasing needs. Particularly interested to collaborate on climate resilience.

Satu Lassila, Director, Unit for UN Development and Innovation Issues, Finland

Thanked ECW for the great work and impressive results reflected in the ARR. Described Finland's commitment to the right to education, especially for girls, support for the Schol Meals Coalition, and work on innovation in education and innovative financing. Quality, inclusive education is a development priority for Finland and key for achieving the SDGs. On behalf of Finland, the Director announced an additional €8m to ECW.

Mutesi Hadijah, Youth and Student-led Representative, Global Student Forum

Noted that it was an honor to attend as a student leader from one of the largest refugee hosting countries. The Global Student Forum is an umbrella organization and serves in 126 countries, including 22 ECW countries. ECW is the only fund to invite students to participate directly in its structures. Testament to the critical role young people play in responding to crises and how often their experience is under-utilized. The ECW youth and student-led constituency stands ready to support e.g. with Resource Mobilization efforts and grassroots advocacy.

5. Renewing HLSC Chair

The Chair handed over to ECW's Executive Director to present this item.

The Executive Director reflected that in light of dramatic growth of refugees, the significant increase of armed conflicts, both unprecedented since WWII, the continuity of strong global political leadership in the governance of ECW's HLSC is key to mobilizing the resources needed to deliver ECW's Strategic Plan. Continuity and the effective chairmanship of the HLSC is essential during this strategic plan period. This required linking the HLSC Chair with the strategic planning period. This would ensure coherence with the overall ECW Strategy, continuity of leadership across planning cycles, and avoid risky interruptions to leadership of The Fund.

There was no objection to extending the HLSC Chair by one-year. There was no objection to review - as part of the update of the Operational Manual - the associated provision on the tenure of the current Chair to extend it until the end of this strategic planning cycle (i.e. the end of 2026),

8. AOB and Close

The Chair:

- Thanked France and Finland for their announcements.
- Thanked Michael Messenger for great cooperation and support to ECW. Noted that there will be new elections for the INGO constituency shortly, and a new member for the next meeting in 2024.
- Concluded the meeting and thanked the HLSC for endorsing the 2022 Annual Report and sharing their perspectives and strategic guidance in today's meeting.
- Advised that the next HLSC meeting will take place in April, on the margins of the World Bank Spring meetings.
- Thanked all participants for their valuable contributions to the discussion and for scaling up their financial and strategic support to ECW.