

**Remarks to the opening of the Geneva Summer Schools course on Higher Education in Emergencies
17 September 2018**

- Dr. Josephine Gitome, outgoing Director of the Centre for Refugee Studies and Empowerment, Kenyatta University,
- Dr. Barbara Moser-Mercer, Director of In-Zone, University of Geneva,

UN Colleagues,

- Dear Students,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Office at Nairobi for the opening of this week's Geneva Summer Schools course in Nairobi.

Let me begin by thanking In-Zone for spearheading this initiative. UNON and In-Zone have collaborated since 2013, after In-Zone launched its interpretation in conflict zones project.

I am happy that this cooperation is continuing today, with UNON playing host to the second part of this course, following the first half held at Kenyatta University last week.

Given the topic of the course -- higher education in emergencies and crises -- it is fitting that the venue is being split between an institute of higher learning and an organization like the UN that devotes much of its efforts to resolving conflicts, responding to emergencies and promoting peace.

The United Nations has long recognized the importance of education in emergencies.

For children in emergencies, education helps re-establish a daily routine, thus restoring a sense of normalcy in the midst of crises and trauma.

In conflict situations, children in school can be more easily cared for, accounted for and protected – although, despicably, even schools have become the target of attacks in some recent conflicts.

For both children and adults, education provides the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to build a better and more peaceful future. Education at all levels holds the power to move societies from conflict to recovery, from hatred to reconciliation and from poverty to wealth.

And, of course, education is a basic human right, but one that is most at-risk during conflicts and emergencies.

Education is also a universal good and a catalyst for development as a whole.

This is reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda includes one stand-alone goal on education – SDG 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. But the Agenda also recognizes the cross-cutting role of education, with its power to accelerate implementation of the other 16 goals.

For example, quality education has a key role to play in Goal 1 on eliminating poverty; Goal 3 on ensuring healthy lives and well-being; Goal 8 on promoting economic growth and decent work for all; and Goal 13 on combatting climate change.

In post-conflict societies, education is an effective tool for peace-building and for breaking cycles of violence that can lead to renewed conflict, which is essential to achieve Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

Education is also the most powerful means of achieving Goal 5 - gender equality - as it enables girls and women to fully participate socially and politically and empowers them economically.

Several of the SDG targets touch on higher education, the primary focus of your studies this week. One target under Goal 4, for example, is to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

Another is to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, with data on conflict-affected populations listed as one of the relevant indicators.

Another target is to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace, non-violence and global citizenship.

These targets and indicators underscore how the studies you have been undertaking at Kenyatta University last week, and are continuing here at UNON this week, are closely linked to our global development agenda.

There is still much that can be done to promote education in emergencies at all levels, with a view to increasing opportunities and hope for people whose lives have been devastated by crisis and conflict.

Initiatives such as this course can make a worthwhile contribution to advancing this important challenge, and I commend all of you for choosing to be a part of it.

I wish you all the best during your week of learning here at UNON.

Thank you for your attention.