

28/11/08

Joint NGO Statement on Civil Society Participation at the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education (ICE)

The undersigned non-governmental organizations submit the following comments regarding civil society participation at the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education, Geneva – 25th-28th November 2008:

1. As organizations concerned with the achievement of inclusive, equitable, quality education for all from early childhood and throughout everyone's life span, our organizations recognize that the forty-eighth session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) entitled 'Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future' is an important and timely opportunity to discuss and develop strategies to address the continued exclusion of certain groups from education.
2. Our organizations also welcome the high level of participation by Ministers of Education at this session and hope that this is an indication that governments will take greater action to promote inclusive education as we move towards the 2015 goals on Education For All (EFA).
3. However, while we are grateful for the opportunity to promote inclusion issues in the exhibition, we are highly concerned at the lack of recognition given in the conference to the role of civil society in developing inclusive approaches to education and working with national governments to meet their commitments in this area.
4. In particular, we are concerned that we have been excluded from formal engagement in drafting the session's outcome statement. We want to thank those governments who have facilitated our informal input to this document.
5. Moreover, given the high demand expressed by many delegates for examples of scalable good practice in inclusive education, we are very disappointed that civil society practitioners have not been given a formal platform to share and discuss the many examples of effective practice and research which are changing lives in varied settings worldwide.
6. Though there has been a recognition during the session that fostering inclusion demands multiple stakeholder engagement, such engagement has been notable by its absence during the formal deliberations of the conference. A conference on the inclusion of marginalized people ought to give more opportunity for minority voices to be heard. Engaging civil society more fully in this conference could have gone some way to overcoming this exclusion.
7. We propose that recommendations from this conference be taken forward in full partnership with civil society, particularly those organizations representing marginalized people and that this partnership be extended in all efforts to achieve the Education For All goals.

Signatories:

Disability Equality in Education

The Enabling Education Network

Handicap International

Inclusion International

Leonard Cheshire Disability

Norwegian Association of the Disabled

Save the Children

Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities

Sightsavers International

SIL International

World Vision

UK Council of Disabled People International Committee

Voluntary Services Overseas