

**Ministerial Conference on
“Education as an investment into the Future in Central Asia”
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**CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOL as an entry point for Democratization of
Education System and Learning**

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Excellencies..... And distinguished guests,

Please allow me to start my speech by congratulating the organizers for a very timely meeting on “Education as an investment into the future” in Central Asia. UNICEF, within its global and regional policies for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, fully supports this important initiative.

Excellencies, and distinguished guests, as we all know: Education is the fundamental human and child’s right. Therefore we should ensure that education is rights-based. In doing so, we make education “the tool” and the “result” of a “rights-based, democratic society”. In other words, democratization of the education systems and of the learning processes is one of the surest ways of establishing and sustaining democratic processes in a given society.

The child can learn democracy ONLY by living and experiencing it through out his/her life: in the family, at school, in the community and later as a citizen of a global democratic society.

Within the spirit of the Child’s Rights Convention, Thomas Hammaberg stated in his report on “School for Children with Rights” that “.. **The school should be child-friendly. The child should have the right to be curious, to ask questions, and receive answers, to argue and disagree, to test and make mistakes, to know and not to know, to create and be spontaneous, to be recognized and respected**”¹

UNICEF, together with other international and national organizations, considers Child Friendly School as an important starting point for democratization of the education systems.

Let me briefly describe what Child Friendly School means:

- **It is a child seeking school.** Continually identifies the excluded children, so as to get them back to school and include them in learning. The school achieves this by establishing parent-community-school “monitoring committees” that will be responsible for a) school mapping to identify every household in the school’s

¹ Thomas Hammarberg, “A School for Children with Rights”, Innocenti Lecture, 1997, p.19.

catchment area by age, by gender and by other characteristics (disability, minority, displaced, immigrant...), b) close follow up of children who may be at risk of faltering, drop out, and low attendance, c) preparing needs assessment reports to be submitted to the **parent-teachers committees** and to the district level planning.

- **It is a child-centered school** that is acting in the **best interest of the child**, realization of child's full potential, concerned about the "whole" child, and with what happens to children before and after the school. CFS recognizes the **indivisibility** of the child's rights. Right to education has major implication on the child's right to health, protection and participation.
- **It is an environment of good quality education** that is a) inclusive of ALL children-girls, disabled, minorities, b) effective with children: interactive, participatory learning processes, relevant content, centered on learner, and with skilled teacher, c) Healthy and protective of children, d) Gender-sensitive, e) Involved with children, families and communities.
- **It promotes *School-based Governance***: It is an elaboration of decentralized, school-based management which can help to; a) bring decision-making about the school to where decisions make a real difference. b) encourage local innovations, c) increase the relevance and flexibility of education to local conditions and needs, d) increase accountability for the provision and quality of education delivered through the school: e) stimulate participation in, and a sense of ownership of, the school by its various community partners; and f) generate a stronger local demand and more resources for education².

Therefore, CFS is a concrete “end result” of Education Policy Reforms which advocate for de-centralized, and school-based management, allowing the school to re-assume its role as the primary change agent in the community.

Experience from the countries of CARK:

I would like to share with you the experience of UNICEF, together with the respective governments of CARK Countries in creating a CFS as a “silent” system reform, starting with individual schools, principals, teachers, children and their families.

Within the current program of cooperation, the Learning Enrichment Project was the central for creating CFS, yet other projects such as School Water and Sanitation, principally in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Children in Need of Special Protection Projects with its Life Skills Based Health Education, CRC training, and Peer to Peer Education, contributed immensely to the understanding and elaboration of the Child Friendly School Concept.

² Sheldon Shaeffer & Govinda, "Towards a new Framework for school Management: Creating stronger partnerships for better education"- UNESCO-UNICEF.

- We started with the **School and Classroom Management training** to improve the capacities of teachers and school principals in selected project sites to better understand and be able to take initiative towards rights-based management. In all five countries, these trained teachers and school principals formed the nucleus for other activities contributing to the creation of CFS.
- **School/Community Based EMIS** for child-seeking, inclusive and school-based management was an important initiative to improve the capacities of the local and rural communities, schools and parents to be actively involved in school mapping, needs assessment, planning, and implementation for improving the quality. International partnership for expansion is also on the way. In Tajikistan, Save the Children UK and USAID are expanding the project. Similar potential exists in other countries too. C-EMIS, provides an excellent foundation for effective implementation of national level Education Management Information Systems which are important planning and policy development tools for democratization of education systems.
- **Global Education Initiative**, in all five countries, through its National Core Teams, and working directly with the teachers, school principals, local administrators, aims to change the **classroom culture**. The initiative integrates **global issues** such as peace, tolerance, gender, environmental protection and **life skills** such as problem solving, interpersonal communication, conflict management, healthy living in each subject of the primary and secondary education curriculum. It also makes sure that learning processes are child-centered, participatory, and gender sensitive. In some countries, the initiative is moving into its second phase with a great support of national and local education authorities and experts, as well as of children, teachers, and parents.
- **School Water and Environmental Sanitation Project**, Through active involvement of children, teachers, parents and the whole community, attempts to improve the hygienic environment of the rural schools, and provide clean drinking water. Successful examples are already documented by the countries. Ministries of Education, Health, Water Supplies, as well as local administrators are fully involved in the process. This project is a value added to CFS.

All these projects take special measure to concentrate in the same schools so as to set concrete example of a “Child Friendly School”.

In addition to these comprehensive education projects, we also support informal education activities which provide additional opportunities for children to learn and live their rights in a participatory and joyful environment:

- **CRC Training Summer Camps:** In several countries of CARK, summer camps were organized with children for them to learn about CRC and acquire skills for not only disseminating the information of CRC to their friends, but also effectively apply them into their day to day living.

I am also pleased to inform you that UNICEF, in cooperation with OSCE in Tajikistan, has organized the first National Conference on Child’s Rights, in July, 2001, which

resulted in a National Plan of Action for Children. Similar other collaboration with OSCE and other international organizations gave fruits to national and local level mobilization for children.

Distinguished participants, the Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for ALL children. **No child should be left behind.** Therefore, all these efforts and successful experiences should benefit all children. UNICEF, using national and international platforms introduces the concept, and reports on successful implementations for wider coverage to include ALL children.

- **CARK Education Forum** is an important mechanism for sustained political and technical dialogue between and within five countries of CARK. Concept of democratic, rights-based learning processes and need for democratic education delivery systems at all levels are openly discussed, and strategies are explored during the Executive Committee and Annual Meetings of the Forum. The Forum is hosted by its member countries. *I am very pleased to inform you that Uzbekistan Education Ministry is hosting this year's Education Forum in May. We hope that the results and deliberations of this Ministerial Conference will be shared with the Forum Members, and integrated into the Forum Resolution and concerted action.*

Excellencies and the distinguished guests,

Let me conclude my speech by reiterating that UNICEF is committed to achieving Quality Education for All, with specific emphasis on Girls' Education. This commitment will be fulfilled as laid out in the Outcome document of the UN General Assembly's Special Session for Children, *World Fit for Children* in May 2002.

The outcome document, restating that

- the education is a human right and a key factor for reducing poverty and child labor, and promoting democracy, peace, tolerance and development”,

Elaborates how these goals are realized by listing several strategic actions, one of which is to;

- “Create with children a child friendly learning environment, in which they feel safe, are protected from abuse, violence and discrimination, and are healthy and encouraged to learn. Ensure that education programs and materials fully reflect the promotion and protection of human rights, and values of peace, tolerance and gender equality, using every opportunity presented by the International Decade of Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the children of the World (2001-2010)- WFFC, paragraph 40 (8).

Therefore UNICEF is ready to collaborate with the respective Governments and national and international organizations.

**To create a world fit for children.....
Thank you.**