

Good afternoon

My name is Margaux and today, I have the privilege to be the Minister of Development Cooperation and Major Cities. I am taking over the duties from Minister Kitir for one day as part of the Girls Takeover Campaign of Plan International Belgium.

With this campaign, we celebrate the International Day of the Girl, which takes place on October 11th. On that day, we draw attention to the needs and challenges girls face worldwide, and promote girls' empowerment and the fulfillment of their human rights.

And let me start - if you allow me - with what I recently saw when I visited refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon.

And that is that despite the harsh conditions, parents still do everything within their means to get their kids to school, and offer them a quality education.

Education is the only hope parents have left to give a better future to their children. And if they are not able to offer that education, it is my belief and conviction that it's our responsibility to help them to fulfill that hope. Because if there is only hope, and if only hope is left, what are we achieving?

As a Belgian minister of Development Countries I do everything that's in my power to empower them. So all those girls and boys can take up their own future. And that future starts with education.

Our effort is even more crucial in times of crisis. In times of pandemic. COVID has pushed every system all over the world beyond its limits. Whole societies were disrupted. And education was no exception to this rule. Schools were closed in 190 countries worldwide.

This requires a lot of resilience from young people and teachers. And solutions to continue teaching were sought, but rarely accessible for the poor, for the disadvantaged.

In most of our partner countries, inequalities increased. And again, girls were more affected than boys. Not only by the closure of schools but also by the long-term consequences of the pandemic.

So now, it is time to build back. Build back the education system. And build it back better. Therefore, we need to invest in inclusive and quality education and respect our commitment to SDG4.

This is something we can only achieve if we include all stakeholders of the education system. And as today is world teachers day, I want to stress the importance of this one stakeholder.

Teachers do not only transfer knowledge to students, but are also coaches, guides and mentors for a lifetime. They are teachers for the future. A future which is common. I don't have to mention the climate challenge who's affecting all of us.

So, now that we are going back to a more 'normal' situation, the role of teachers is crucial. Not only for the learning part but also to accompany their students in facing the global challenges such as climate change and social and economic inequalities.

Unfortunately, despite the essential nature of their profession, teachers are not always considered at their true value. The testimonies that will feed this conference will help to convince people of the importance of their task, whether here in Belgium or in our partner countries.

One thing is sure. I don't need convincing. I have seen the impact a teacher can make. I have seen the solutions they come up with. I have witnessed their passion.

And even though we are a small donor, we as Belgium have developed quite some expertise when it comes to teacher training. We will continue to invest in this key-profession, because we know that teacher training is crucial, crucial to increase the quality of education.

Crucial to support all children in all their diversity in building a better future. Crucial in making SDG4 come true.

Before giving the floor back to the experts in today's panel, I just want to highlight that my commitment to SDG4 is materializing in concrete actions.

The past months, I have reconfirmed Belgium's commitment to the Global Partnership for Education with a 26m€ for the next 4 years, and a 2m€ additional support for girls education.

In Uganda, one of the partner countries where we invest a lot of expertise and budget into the education sector, we support the Ministry of Education in its vaccination campaign for teachers, by donating COVID-vaccines. This to accelerate the school reopening in Uganda.

And during the pandemic, Belgium supported the ministry and teachers in developing new methods and content for distance teaching and learning.

But also in other countries, we will strengthen the education sector and showcase our commitment to education, by including SDG4 in our bilateral portfolio's in Niger, Palestine and RDC, but also through our future support to the NGO's.

So let me conclude, by wishing you a fruitful conference, and by hoping that today's discussions will help us in getting better results and increased impact. Impact to educate girls and boys all over the world. Impact, so they can take their own future in their own hands. Impact, so they can build their lives close to the place where their hearts beat for.

Thank you all very much for listening.
