



## **100 MILLION & GLOBAL STUDENT FORUM BUILDING BACK BETTER OR WORSE? YOUTH CAUCUS DECLARATION ON THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2021**

As grassroots, national, and international youth activists from around the world, we express our frustration at the way in which children and young people have been treated in the proposed Ministerial Declaration of the 2021 High-Level Political Forum.

The High-Level Political Forum is intended to be the accountability space for delivery of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Initially, we welcomed the targeted efforts to respond to the specific needs of children and young people in the Declaration, especially in the context of COVID-19 recovery. However, we believe the Ministerial Declaration fails the children and young people who have been left far behind by both the pandemic and the weak delivery of the SDGs to date.

The Declaration 'recognises' some - not all - of the poor progress made on the SDGs for children and young people over the past year but fails to commit to the kind of action and financing needed to accelerate progress for the world's most marginalised families. When the world's wealth has continued to grow despite the pandemic, and when international corporations and wealthy countries continue to deny lower-income countries of vital tax revenues for public services, we cannot understand why there are not stronger financial commitments to fund the remedial action needed to build back better.

The specific focus on 'children and youth' within the Declaration is rendered almost pointless when children and young people are barely included in commitments within the Declaration's SDG segments. We believe we are being sidelined as a result of a lack of political will to invest in the services and support we need to realise our fundamental rights.

We are particularly disappointed that no reference has been made to the devastating *reversal* in progress in child labour. Even before the pandemic, another 8 million children had been forced to work to survive, and it is shameful not to acknowledge that the lack of progress has particularly hit 5-11 year-olds: 16 million more of the world's youngest children are now in child labour, compared to 2016.

Worse still, child labour is one of the worst end-results of extreme poverty, so the increase in child labour provides ample evidence that governments are failing to deliver across all of their SDG commitments to end poverty, to reduce hunger to zero, and to provide protection in the form of public services like education, health care, clean water and sanitation, social protection, and energy for the children and young people who need them the most.

As children and young people ourselves, we know the devastating impacts the global pandemic has had on our education - from those of us who are fighting for fair treatment from our universities to those of us who have had no access at all to school during the pandemic. Unfortunately, many children and young people have had to abandon their education and have been forced into work, or early marriage, or pregnancy instead. Yet this growing group of us has been entirely ignored by the Declaration: we agree that there must be catch-up and remedial measures for those who remain in education, but it is shameful that there is no recognition for those of us who could not. Again, the lack of commitment to fund the proposals that are included is concerning, particularly when we know already that some lower-income countries are already being forced to cut domestic financing commitments to education.



Children and young people are particularly impacted by conflict and emergencies, and it is well documented that refugee and displaced children receive less support, including psychosocial support, and funding for the most basic of protections, including education. Despite the hard evidence of reduced funding during the pandemic for those living in refugee and displacement camps and the severely under-resourced UN humanitarian appeal, children living with the consequences of conflict and crises receive no mention in the Declaration. This is a disgrace.

Central to the poor progress of the SDGs is the failure by States to address the fundamental and deep-seated discriminations within and between countries, which preserve and increase poverty. The pandemic has increased these inequalities, and we welcome the Declaration's recognition of this. However, the Declaration fails to commit to any action which recognises an effective reversal of progress or which accelerates progress towards SDG10.

Finally, given that the majority of the world remains in the grip of COVID-19, we are extremely concerned that the Declaration suggests an active move away from vaccine justice. The majority of UN Member States are calling for a vaccine patent waiver, yet the Declaration calls for use of existing WTO agreements rather than an agreement to a simpler waiver. Until all of us are safe, none of us are safe, and it is incredible to us that a small number of countries have managed to exclude the possibility of a vaccine patent waiver from the joint Declaration.

We are concerned by the apparent disregard for the specific needs and challenges faced by children and young people throughout this Declaration, despite the overwhelming evidence that our rights are being increasingly denied.

The 2021 High-Level Political Forum could have been a moment for our governments to demonstrate their professed desire to build back better with tangible action. Without such commitments, the world will not even get back to 'business as usual' let alone build back better.