

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Continental Education Conference Concludes with Historic Commitment to Transform African Education

The Continental Education Conference concluded yesterday, December 11, 2024, with African nations adopting the Nouakchott Declaration, marking a watershed moment in the continent's commitment to educational transformation. The declaration, presented by Chad's Minister of National Education and Civic Promotion, Mr. Mamadou Gana Boukar, outlines comprehensive measures to revolutionize African education systems.

The three-day conference, bringing together African Heads of state, ministers, and education stakeholders, addressed critical challenges facing African education, including the need for 15 million teachers, a \$77 billion annual funding gap, and the imperative to prepare for a youth population that will represent 40% of the world's children by 2050.

A significant moment came during the presidential dialogue, which featured host President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani of Mauritania, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, President Bassirou Diomaye Faye of Senegal, and President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria, alongside African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat. The AUC Chairperson highlighted the urgent need for 15 million teachers across Africa and called for transformative systemic reforms in education, while the presidents presented concrete national commitments. These ranged from Rwanda's increased education spending to Senegal's focus on digital transformation and youth employment, Algeria's pan-African scholarship program, and Mauritania's emphasis on building resilient education systems.

The Nouakchott Declaration commits African nations to transformative actions, including making education compulsory and public education free, allocating 4-7% of GDP to education funding, and declaring 2025-2034 as the "AU Decade of Accelerated Action for Education Transformation, Youth Skills Development and Innovation in Africa." The declaration emphasizes foundational learning, reforming the teaching profession, strengthening STEM education, and promoting technical and vocational training. It also outlines specific measures for education in emergencies and innovative financing mechanisms, including exploring new tax revenues and leveraging international partnerships.

In his closing remarks, Prof. Mohamed Belhocine, African Union Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, called for urgent action, questioning what had been achieved in the past three decades and urging immediate implementation of the declaration's commitments. UNESCO's representative highlighted the historic significance of education being chosen as the African Union's theme for 2024, while UNICEF emphasized the importance of translating the declaration's commitments into concrete actions.

The Chair of the Specialized Technical Committee, Hon. Nancy Chaola Mdooko, Deputy Minister of Education of Malawi, summarized key takeaways, including creating conducive learning environments, improving data management systems, and finding innovative ways to finance education reforms. She emphasized that countries must use available resources efficiently to achieve learning outcomes.

The conference tackled urgent challenges through focused sessions on education financing, curriculum development and teacher training, and armed conflict's impact on education and school environments among others. Innovative financing solutions emerged as a key theme, with countries exploring new mechanisms from tourism taxes to international partnerships. The World Bank introduced new financing instruments, including the "Data for Development Support" mechanism, already helping countries like Côte d'Ivoire free up resources through debt refinancing.

As the conference concludes, it sets in motion a decade of accelerated action toward transforming African education systems. The new continental accountability mechanism established under the declaration will monitor implementation, with biennial reporting to Member States, ensuring that commitments translate into concrete improvements in African education.

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