



AN OPEN LETTER ON EDUCATION FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE ATLANTIS GROUP TO THE G20 GOVERNMENTS, OCTOBER 2017

We write as members of the newly formed Atlantis Group, a body of former Education Ministers and Heads of Government from across 6 continents and with a combined period of office, managing public education systems, of over 65 years.

We have come together as a group to champion the ongoing cause of education across the world. Education is, we believe, the issue of our time. When we look to 2030, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, we believe it is only through addressing the challenges of education, as set out in SDG4, that all of the Goals can be achieved. As such, we will work as a Group with governments, school systems and all interested parties to advance the development of an agenda which ensures that all children have the education that they are entitled to as their birth right. We have recently met for a summit in London, hosted by the Varkey Foundation and Mr Sunny Varkey, to consider how we can best achieve this purpose.

Although our aims are broad, we write on this occasion to address the issue of public investment in education. It is not often reported in the newspapers, but there is a crisis in global education. Shamefully, the number of children out of school in the developing world is rising again. On the latest UNESCO figures, the figure stood at 263 million globally: equivalent to a quarter of the combined population of Europe and the United States. In addition, over half of the 22.5 million refugees around the world are children under the age of 18, and millions more are stateless and do not have the ability to access education services.

Investing in a safe, high quality education for every child is not just a moral imperative; it is the most hard-headed decision we can make. For developing countries, poor education stifles innovation and discourages the inward investment they need. And, for the

international community, a lack of education can weaken already fragile states. If frustrated young people lack opportunities they are more prone to irregular migration, conflict and extremism. The costs of this failure will only be compounded by the march of automation, which will cut deepest in those developing world economies with high numbers of low skill jobs.

Regrettably, although the urgency of the situation is clear, we feel the international community has not paid sufficient heed to this crisis. Investment in education through aid and other assistance is lower now than it was in 2009 – and is not concentrated on those countries most in need. Sub-Saharan Africa, home to half the world's out-of-school children, receives less than half the aid it did in 2002. And whilst we recognise – and share, as politicians ourselves – that world leaders wish to address this, the right to an education for every child cannot be left only to those in power who may be buffeted by political headwinds and the short-term needs of the electoral cycle. To give backing to those who are determined to address this issue, the Atlantis Group calls on the G20, as leaders of the major industrialised and emerging economies, to take a lead **by enshrining in law a commitment to education investment and assistance as a percentage of their GDP. We also call on the G20 to lead negotiations with domestic governments whose domestic spending on education falls below the level required to provide a satisfactory education to all their children.**

Over the last two decades, the world has rightly mobilised to transform global public health. Enormous efforts are bringing under control such historically devastating illnesses as tuberculosis, malaria and HIV. However, perhaps because the corrosive impact of a lack of education – on a child, their family, their society - is harder to capture, too many of the world's leaders have allowed the global education crisis to go unnoticed.

All that is needed to solve this crisis is political will. The G20 is in a unique position to address this, and the Atlantis Group stands ready to play our part in supporting the changes required. We ask to work with the world's governments to give every child the education they deserve.

SIGNED BY ALL MEMBERS OF THE ATLANTIS GROUP