

Early Childhood in the Venezuelan Education sector: Implementing Child Rights

Submission from the Government of Venezuela

In Venezuela a process of re-foundation of the Republic has been started since 1998 and we are walking in that direction using the Bolivarian Constitution as a reference. This Constitution was passed by the people in a referendum in 1999 and it is considered the most democratic constitution in the history of the country due to its content as well as to the participation mechanisms put into practice for its preparation and approval. President Hugo Chávez is the leader of this movement for the construction of a **democratic, participative and protagonist society**, abundant in **ethnic and cultural** components. Venezuela is making big efforts to turn the **political democracy** into a **social democracy** and to construct the rule of law and justice in the framework of humanism. This is the process, the **revolution** that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is undergoing.

Education as a human and social right:

Within the framework of rights, Venezuela assumes education as a human and social right. Every person has the right to be educated, without any discrimination. Therefore, education is compulsory and gratuitous. The State must guarantee education, placing emphasis on the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Hence, the need for equality as a political-ethic aspect. If it is true that **access to education** is one of our major challenges, it is also true that we are simultaneously facing the problem of **quality of education**, and it is precisely here that we find the most challenging task for our peoples: to promote, to impulse and to conquer a system of education with high quality levels for everybody.

In developing countries the scope and coverage of programs precedes quality levels, due to the enormous **social debt** they have with most of people, due to the **size of inequalities** the people have been subjected to and due to the **social gap** that separates the privileged from the unprivileged. The role of the State is fundamental, acting as a **guarantor of the equality** by emphasizing its efforts to ensure the same rights for privileged and unprivileged people alike, in the frame of **co-responsibility**. The State understands education as a task that belongs to the **whole society**, a task in which family, society and Government join efforts for the promotion of equity as an ethic principle, with the purpose of achieving social equilibrium and giving significance to social justice, and granting social context to democracy within the frame of humanism.

To guarantee the right to quality levels of education in Venezuela we have gone further beyond the school programs that we must guarantee. We also have taken into account those who had to drop out of school before finishing their studies; we have considered those who never had the chance to join the system, and those who finished secondary education but could not continue on to college due to the lack of places at the higher education institutions. Only considering all of them, we are considering all the people.

Education since gestation:

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is taking care of education at the early stage, that is, pre-school, **even since gestation until entrance to the first grade of elementary education**. This is the most important stage of life and of development for children. At this stage we have to fulfill the needs they bring from home. In this way, apart from the iniquities they all may have, all children without exception will be able to join first grade of primary education under the same conditions. This way we will exercise the **principle of equal opportunity**. For this purpose, education must be an integral process, promoting the

harmonic development of children, compensating lacks in nutrition, affection, pedagogy, linguistics, ludics and education.

Before 1998, the highest drop out rate occurred at the early stages of primary education and most of our children joined first grade of primary education without attending pre-school. Profound socio-economic differences at home, deficit in the intake of proteins and calories as well as lack of affection and solid intellectual background are the characteristics of poor families. All of them have an impact on the development of children and bring about limitations. If these limitations are not considered, they become chronic and affect the intellectual development of our children, reducing their capacities, hampering their potentials and sustaining school failure, which means, retention, school abandonment and exclusion.

The Bolivarian Government assumes pre-school education as a leading project through the implementation and development of the *Simoncito* project, which offers orientation to mothers during **pregnancy and after giving birth**; it provides medical care to **babies until four years of age**, when they entered an integral kindergarten.

Nowadays we are making big efforts to widen the scope and coverage of programs in order to look after our children during early infancy (0 to six years). We have surpassed the amount of **one and a half million children** looked after in this program. For this purpose we have been building **two thousand pre-school classrooms** in order to incorporate **seventy thousand children** and to widen the non-conventional strategies. Actually, there are **forty thousand children** more and reach one hundred thousand children included in this program.

Moreover, the Bolivarian Government has contributed with extra-budget resources to enlarge the scope coverage of the *hogares* (day care centers) and *multihogares* (multi-homes), along with the Ministry of Health and Social Development in order to look after **three hundred thousand more children**. We have to add here the pedagogic component, which overcomes the assisting approach.

These are some of the programs and actions developed by the Government in order to find social equilibrium, to universalize rights and to guarantee the principle of equity of opportunities to the most vulnerable population.

- Since 1998, the Chavez administration prohibited the payment of school enrollment fees, which allowed all of the poor fathers and mothers to enroll their **kids** in school. Over half a million of excluded Venezuelan **kids** came back to the classrooms.
- It created the single shift Bolivarian Schools, where **kids** can have breakfast, lunch, and snacks, receive medical attention and have access to culture, computers and sports. There are over three thousand and five hundred Bolivarian Schools and many more are on the way to becoming one.
- It doubled the salaries of teachers and professors
- It doubled the education budget from 3% to 7% of the GDP. It created and repaired in just four years, more schools than those that were repaired in the previous twenty.
- It created the Infocenters, where the people have free Internet access and it established agreements with IBM and Cysco System in order to propel Venezuela to be the most advanced Latin American country in information technology.
- It outlawed the privatization of high school education, just as governments from the past 20 years had planned, a proposal that prohibited the entrance or remainder of low-income students to universities.

To pay the social debt accumulated during many years must be the purpose of public policies of **developing countries**. For this it is necessary to activate a real political will,

which involves the Governments and the whole society to devote more time and efforts, but above all, more monetary resources. Ordinary budgets assigned to education in **developing countries** are not sufficient to give immediate answers to major challenges stated nowadays.

It is needed extraordinary and even heroic actions to satisfy some requests that currently are massive, common and general, to the extent that it have been considered as hemispheric problems. These are **illiteracy, scope and coverage of primary education, third stage in rural education, low reading factor and access to higher education**, among others. For this reason, Venezuela along with other countries insists on the need for creating a **fund to finance education**. We reiterate the proposal **to exchange debt for education**, by allocating between three and five per cent from the payment of debt services for the creation of this fund. This would be an important step to tackle the social debt.

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