

15 November 2007

Dear Mr. Masahiko KOUMURA,

We are writing to request your urgent attention on the vital issue of Education For All, and to press for your attendance at the EFA High-Level Group meeting in Dakar this December. We believe that the High-Level Group is a critical opportunity to outline a specific and actionable plan to set the world back on track for achieving EFA by 2015. Time is running out for millions of children and adults currently missing out on the life-saving benefits of education.

Around 72 million children are out of school today and many more – up to 200 million, will not complete a primary cycle of schooling. 1 in 5 adults – the vast majority of them women – cannot read or write. In poor countries, secondary schooling and early childhood education remain out of reach for most. Yet study after study has shown that the benefits flowing from education are huge; improved family health and nutrition, reduced risk of HIV infection and higher incomes are just a few of the proven gains for society and individuals. To ensure that all can complete primary education by 2015, they must enter school by 2009 at the latest. This leaves a brief window of opportunity to redouble international efforts for this crucial, and attainable, development goal.

The GCE movement is encouraged by growing domestic investment in education, the elimination of user fees in increasing numbers of low-income countries, and rising primary enrolments in some of the poorest-performing parts of the world. Yet poor countries can only achieve so much with the limited resources available to them. The UN estimates that \$9 billion in aid is needed each year to achieve universal primary education. We believe that as much as \$16 billion may be required to achieve the full EFA agenda.

Aid to the sector has grown significantly since 2000, reaching a peak of \$4.4 billion per year in 2004. However GCE is alarmed that in 2005 the total fell to under \$3 billion. Not only that, the global plan to match more and better quality aid to good country plans – the Education For All Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) – remains drastically under-funded. In these circumstances, countries struggling to open the doors of learning to all will be discouraged from planning ambitiously to get on track for 2015.

We remind you of the promise made by world leaders at the 2000 World Conference on Education For All that 'no country seriously committed to Education For All shall be thwarted in this ambition for lack of resources' – a promise reiterated in various forums over the last seven years, but still not realised. GCE urges that 2007 must see this vision translate into a firm action plan with rich and poor countries together recommitting to a 'global compact'. The EFA High-Level Group, which returns symbolically to Dakar where the EFA Declaration of 2000 was made, provides an ideal opportunity to rally the support of Southern leaders, donor nations and international institutions behind such a plan. Your attendance will be an important signal of Japan's political will to rise to this challenge, and could be pivotal in ensuring a positive outcome.

The time for warm words is over. The time for action is now. Please do your part to ensure that future generations do not have to suffer the blight of ignorance and illiteracy in their lives.

Yours sincerely,

Nobuhiko Katayama
Representative
Japan NGO Network for Education (JNNE)