



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

“Relevant Education – How to Share Responsibility”

**Final statement
of the Federal Minister of Education and Research
Dr Annette Schavan, MdB**

**on the occasion of
the Third Ministerial Meeting on Education of the
BMENA/G8 Countries**

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Thank you very much for chairing the discussion, Minister Al Sulaimy. And thank you, Mr El-Mahdi and Mr Weiß, for your knowledgeable introductions on today's topic, "Relevant Education – How to Share Responsibility".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We spent yesterday and today engaged in intensive discussions. I would like to thank you for the open debate and for your constructive contributions. They made it possible for us to have a cooperative and fruitful exchange of ideas, even in areas in which we have very different approaches to the important topics of relevance, quality and partnership.

Our BMENA/G8 initiative has breathed new life into the dialogue between our countries. I welcome this development most warmly. An open and lively exchange of ideas is not something that can be taken for granted, but something that requires constant work. And we should also keep in mind that it is not always easy.

We need to build bridges to overcome cultural, religious and language barriers. There are also social, economic and political differences, for example when it comes to job availability, human resources, real capital, natural resources and per-capita income.

There are countries among us that are poor in terms of resources and from which workers emigrate, and there are countries that are rich in resources and accept or even try to attract workers from other countries.

That is why it is so important to respect each partner's individual circumstances in our dialogue. This applies to future bilateral and multilateral collaborations, as well.

Our dialogue is part of a bigger picture. The Task Force's results and recommendations regarding the continuation of the BMENA-G8 initiative in the area of education will be presented at the Forum for the Future, an event that will be organized in Yemen in early December by the ministers of foreign affairs, who are responsible for BMENA/G8.

The Task Force has compiled a number of recommendations in four areas of education: schooling, vocational training, literacy/adult education, and continuing education. These recommendations are already available in the form of a room document. The Task Force has also made general recommendations that address the key elements of the paper on cross-cutting issues. These central recommendations on the topics of this conference bear repeating today:

- 1. We must increase our efforts to improve the quality and relevance of education, to reduce unemployment and illiteracy, to increase the participation of women in education and the labour market, and to contribute to meeting all the other challenges identified in the paper on cross-cutting issues.**
- 2. The communication between BMENA and G8 countries must improve. This applies to the existing working groups on literacy and TVET as well as to the planned series of activities on tertiary education, partly in preparation for the next meeting of education ministers,**

at which the subjects of quality and relevance are to be concluded (for the time being).

3. We would be grateful if ministers of foreign affairs would support us in our belief that educational policy is a key issue for the future of our societies, and that education is therefore not just a concern for ministers of education, but also for our governments as a whole. In my opinion, this applies to finance ministers in particular. We want industry, the social partners and civil society to be integrated more strongly in our joint responsibility for education.
4. We want to fulfil the individual requirements of a growing number of pupils and students, and we want to give equal attention to challenging particularly gifted young people on the one hand and supporting disadvantaged young people on the other.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The competitiveness of the global economy and the demographic challenges facing us necessitate long-term structural changes. Education systems can and should play a role in this process. By 2050, the population of the Arab world will have reached over 700 million people – almost twice as many as there are today. Even now, over 60 percent of the population is under the age of 25. This development is the opposite of what we are experiencing in most G8 countries: declining birthrates and an increasing proportion of older people. This is only one of the many challenges that we will only be able to meet if we all work together.

Education and schooling are vitally important for the life opportunities of individuals, but also for the long-term success of the global economy. If we do not identify and tackle these issues, we might not be able to meet the challenges that face us.

Both the G8 and the BMENA countries need to adapt their education and school systems to the needs of our time. We will all need to work hard on learning to use available resources effectively. We will also need to engage in a continuous dialogue in order to learn from each other and give each other help and advice.

We will only be successful if we work together and if we win the participation of all the relevant stakeholders in our countries, particularly in the private and public sectors.

I think we all agree that we will need a lot of stamina, as we will have to overcome great and complex difficulties. Investing in education is something that does not pay off immediately, but which gives future generations a real chance to contribute to a successful world.

Before I give the floor to my colleague, Minister Al-Sulaimy, I would like to thank you all for coming to this conference.

My special thanks also go to the interpreters.

I hope you all enjoy the rest of your stay here in Bonn and that you get back home safely.