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UK financial support to low-cost private education in developing countries in contravention of human rights, say again UN experts

Press Release, 5 July 2016

(Geneva) In a [landmark report](#), which has just been published, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) expressed its concerns that in some cases UK development aid **“has been reportedly used for activities in contravention of economic, social and cultural rights in the receiving countries.”** This is the [second time](#) within less than a month that UN experts have spoken out on the legality of UK development aid under international law.

The CESCR is **“particularly concerned”** about the UK **“financial support provided (...) to private actors for low-cost and private education projects in developing countries, which may have contributed to undermine the quality of free public education and created segregation and discrimination among pupils and students.”**

This statement confirms the findings of a [report](#) submitted to the Committee by 26 British and international organisations, which includes evidence from [research](#) conducted in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana showing that low-cost private schools, supported by the UK in those countries, were undermining the right to education.

The Committee recommends the UK “adopt a human rights-based approach in its international development cooperation” by

- Conducting systematic and independent human rights impact assessments prior to any project,
- Monitoring, effectively and regularly, the human rights impact of these projects,
- Ensuring access to complaint mechanisms.

In early June, the Committee on the Rights of the child (CRC) [expressed similar concerns](#), recommending that the UK “refrain from funding for-profit private schools” and “prioritise free and quality primary education in public schools”.

Funding by the UK, international commercial private school chains targeting poor people, such as [Bridge International Academies](#), has been particularly [criticised](#) as pursuing UK’s own business interests while undermining the realisation of the right to education in developing countries.

These two UN clear statements in just a few weeks confirm that donor funding of private commercial schools in developing countries, including by the UK, could constitute a serious breach of international law.

The eleven organisations endorsing this statement call on the UK to uphold its legal obligations and immediately stop any project that could constitute a human rights violation abroad. This requires that the UK implement the recommendations from both the CRC and the CESCR, starting by:

- Reviewing its funding to private schools in developing countries,
- Stopping all funding to commercial private schools,
- Clearly integrating any funding in education into a plan to develop free quality public education, and
- Remedying any negative impact of its previous and existing funding to private schools.

Endorsed by:

- ActionAid International
- Child Rights International
- East African Centre for Human Rights - Kenya
- Eastern Africa Collaboration for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - Kenya
- Global Campaign for Education
- Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Global Justice Now
- Initiative for Economic and Social Rights - Uganda
- National Union of Teachers - United Kingdom

- Public Services International
- Right to Education Project

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