Statement for the Record
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Introduction:

Education systems do more than educate children; they build nations. Education reform must be about more than the schools, and the pedagogic inputs to education; it also must be about how education decisions are made, how resources are mobilized and distributed, how societies address special needs and the rights of all learners, how the school systems are accountable to parents and communities and what options parents have if they are dissatisfied with the education their children are receiving.

The achievement of quality education, for all, is one of the most important challenges of our times. It is one of the most powerful ways of affirming basic rights and supporting positive changes in the lives of children as well as their households, communities and nations. Improvements in education opportunities for girls and other disadvantaged or marginalized populations are particularly important, affecting not just their personal opportunities and choices but also the health, economic and social progress of the larger societies. The positive and lasting effects of expanding education opportunities and improving the quality of education are well documented and the policy priorities for doing so are a basis for international cooperation as well as for national investments. In fragile states and for countries such as those in the Arab World and South Asia where there are challenges of political legitimacy and social cohesion, the efforts required to achieve quality education for all are central to national reform.

Assisting countries to accomplish this priority agenda fully and well should be one of the assistance priorities for the United States. There is no better investment in terms of meeting basic human needs, the affirmation of basic rights, the reduction of poverty and inequity and accelerating social progress. There is no more necessary investment in terms of helping countries move toward democracy, moderate their political and social dynamics and participate effectively and successfully in open, competitive economies.

I. Overview of United States Assistance to Education in Asia and the Near East

The United States helped establish the goals for Education for All (EFA), [1] beginning with co-sponsorship of the World Conference on Education for All in Thailand in 1990 and continuing through the World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar in 2000, and the international mobilization related to The Millennium Development Goals (MDG)[2] USAID currently co-chairs the Fast Track Initiative by which funders have committed to

[1] See http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/index.shtml
[2] See http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

mobilizing the necessary funding for those countries putting in place serious plans of action to achieve universal primary education of acceptable quality for all students. The United States, both through official agencies and through the involvement of the NGO communities, can be proud of its leadership and constructive contributions to this shared strategic agenda. It is one of the most far-reaching initiatives of the international community and the US has helped shape it and support it. This effort must be sustained, and enlarged. There is much more to be done.

The EFA and WEF commitments are to a broad international partnership including private sector and non-government communities as well as the bilateral and multilateral funders and international organizations. The international commitments are to support national plans of action, led by national leaders with broad participation of the national partners, public and private, including civil society, non-government organizations and public opinion generally. UNESCO, the World Bank and other international organizations have taken responsibility for ensuring that these plans are technically sound, well-documented and monitored against agreed goals, metrics and indicators of progress. Basic education for all is to be understood in its broad framework of learning systems beginning in early childhood and continuing through community-based and lifelong learning. Central to these goals and commitments are improving instructional quality and learning standards, with explicit attention to distributional concerns, gender equity and the learning needs of poor and disadvantaged children.

Despite broad support for the EFA goals, it has been difficult to meet the promised the funding levels. In part this reflected limited funds and the many competing priorities. In part this reflected "bean counting" approaches to education and development, which left countries making quantitative progress to rely on their own resources for further education improvement. Until the events of September 11, 2001 forced attention to the social conditions, weak and non-representative governments and extremist political movements in much of the developing world, including the countries of North Africa, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, most assistance for education improvement focused narrowly on quantitative expansion, teacher education and better distribution of opportunities, particularly for girls. Issues of quality, administrative and financial decentralization, local accountability, curriculum reform, early childhood education and attention to youth and adults outside of school received lesser priority.

Total USAID support for education across the Asia and Near East Region (ANE) was only $71.8 million in FY 2001, including $66 million of ESF funds. The United States played a significant role in a few countries, but not a leading role in any. There was an important program supporting education for girls in Morocco and a significant program of school building in Egypt, scheduled to be completed in 2001 with no plans for further education programming.

Since FY 2001 the assistance levels for the ANE Region have increased substantially, the program priorities have broadened to include administrative and financial reform, decentralization and local participation and the range of countries assisted has expanded. ANE funding for education in FY 2005 is projected to be $239M (plus any

supplementals) and countries with significant education sector programs now include Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Cambodia, Indonesia. Expanded programs are under development for Yemen, Bangladesh, the Philippines and possibly Sri Lanka.

Each of these programs responds to the particular circumstances and needs of the country.

- They include countries undertaking major reform efforts such as the Education Reform for a Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) initiative in Jordan -- one of the most ambitious reform efforts anywhere, combining reforms at the early childhood, basic, and secondary levels to produce graduates with the skills needed for the knowledge economy. The integrated strategy includes: governance and administrative reform, a sophisticated Education Decision Support System (EDSS) supporting policy analysis; effective system management, transparency and accountability with comprehensive and coordinated educational research, policy analysis, and monitoring and evaluation activities; and substantial investment in school infrastructure, teacher training and e-learning application of instructional technologies and media. USAID is assisting with early childhood education, teacher training for new coursework related to business skills and development of an improved school-to-work strategy.
- They also include countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, where education systems need to be built or rebuilt virtually from the ground up.
- And, they include countries such as Yemen and Bangladesh, and to some extent Pakistan, where the governments are relatively weak, financing for education is inadequate, corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency waste resources and consensus on how best to achieve national education objectives for all, in all parts of the country, does not yet exist.
- In a few countries such as Morocco, assistance now includes activities at the lower secondary level and increasing attention to the linkages between education, workforce development and job growth. This reflects the growing concerns about large numbers of youth and young adults without employment prospects, or skills for the jobs that do exist.
- In other countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Egypt the focus is on helping countries decentralize education administration, improve local accountability and increase the participation of parents and community leaders.
- An important new regional initiative is the Education and Employment Alliance, supported by USAID through the International Youth Foundation, which seeks to mobilize the private and nonprofit sectors to work with youth in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Pakistan and the Philippines.

Additional education program support is provided regionally through the Middle East Partnership Initiative focused on education opportunities for girls and strategies to improve access, quality and skills development across the region, and through other USG programs such as the child labor programs of the Department of Labor.

One of the encouraging emerging trends is the substantial involvement of the U.S. private sector in support of education improvement in the region. Private initiatives such as the Education and Employment Foundation, initiated by Ron Bruder with $10M of his own funds is an excellent example. Corporations such as CISCO, Microsoft, General Electric and others are supporting programs both through their philanthropy and through their direct investments in programs managed by NGOs, or in the case of CISCO Learning through a direct partnership with the Jordanian Ministry.

For reasons that are not entirely clear, the major US foundations which played leading roles in earlier decades, including in countries with which the US found it difficult to work through official mechanisms, no longer play a leading role. This is unfortunate as the foundations can more easily and appropriately support strengthening of the social sciences and their application to education reform and improvement, work on sensitive issues of language and curriculum content, research and experimentation on leading edge approaches that cannot easily be supported by official development assistance programs.

II. Overview of education in the region

It is possible to paint a very bleak picture of education progress in the region. According to recent reports, up to half of adult women in the Arab world are illiterate and more than 10 million children in the region don't go to school. In parts of South Asia, illiteracy rates and the numbers of children not in school are even higher. Countries have large young populations. Examination scores are low, both against the standards of the countries and against international comparative measures. The physical quality of schools in rural areas is often very low, sometimes little more than the shade of a tree or a building without adequate water and sanitation. In urban areas schools typically are very crowded, often double-shifted, and frequently in buildings such as large former residences not built as schools. Class sizes of 60 children or higher are not uncommon. Teacher training is inadequate, supervision ranges from bureaucratic and political to inattentive, absenteeism is unacceptably high, morale and incentives tend to be low and in-service professional support is unsystematic and infrequent. Dropout rates are high and for all but the best students and students able to afford private education options, access to secondary education is limited and inequitably distributed. Even comparatively wealthy states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait lag badly in terms of EFA goals, particularly in terms of the education of girls and the commitment to educate all children.

However, I do not share the bleak view. Progress is being made and it is possible to make further and faster progress with increased assistance and better national leadership. Substantially more resources are needed and could be used effectively both for existing programs and for complementary activities such as secondary expansion and improvement (particularly lower secondary), early childhood development, increased emphasis on workforce development and work-related skills (not necessarily vocational-technical training in the schools), administrative decentralization and management improvement, improved monitoring, measurement and accountability systems.

Unquestionably, there are very large quantitative problems, most countries remain relatively poor and there are serious problems of distributional equity and access, particularly for girls but also for rural areas, cultural and linguistic minorities. Improving these systems will take time, 10-15 years minimum, and the changes will come slowly and incrementally. There is no quick fix, nor is there any inexpensive or risk-free and politically easy strategy. Progress will take sustained leadership, funding, technical and administrative expertise. It also will take a difficult combination of patient confidence in long-term strategies and the courage to take short-term risks and to learn from mistakes.

The encouraging trend is that most countries have now put in place plans for moving toward Education for All. These are uneven and it remains to be seen whether the countries will have the political will to actually implement the plans fully and the international community will honor the commitments to mobilize resources to help these countries achieve the EFA objectives. But, they do exist and are a basis for action and investment, as well as a benchmark for monitoring progress. UNESCO, the World Bank and others, including USAID, provide important support for improving data systems, monitoring and assessment against agreed goals and internationally monitored indicators of progress. Further encouraging is that most countries are making quantitative progress, albeit more slowly than they need to achieve. Youth literacy rates for the 15-24 year-olds are rising along with schooling rates and gender parity is improving in all but a few countries, particularly Yemen, Saudi Arabia, parts of Pakistan and Bangladesh. A third basis for optimism is there is beginning to be more partnership with the private sector and broader consensus across the public sector that education reform, expansion and qualitative improvement is essential for achieving social objectives, maintaining political cohesion and stability, and creating the conditions for investment and job creation. Finally, there now is substantial expertise in the region. A few countries such as Tunisia, Jordan and Qatar are becoming exemplars for the region and there is increasing potential for regional cooperation and exchange.

This growing public policy consensus and broad support, reaching well beyond the sectoral concerns of most educators, is articulated in the series of Arab Human Development Reports. For example, The 2003 Arab Human Development Report addressed the "knowledge deficit" in the Arab World, suggesting that overhauling the region's outdated education systems is necessary for future economic prosperity and human development. The report noted that Arabs themselves need to drive this process of change, drawing from their rich cultural, linguistic, and intellectual heritages.

The same point should be kept in mind for all countries of the region. Assistance is much needed, and welcomed in most countries, but it is the national leaders, public and private and at all levels, who must assess and understand their issues, build consensus, take the political risks and make the budgetary and administrative commitments to drive aggressive national plans of action. There is much the international community can do to provide technical support and critically needed inputs, but sustainable and effective reform leading to full mobilization to achieve quality education for all has to be nationally led, owned and managed. There is much that can be done, and is being done,

working through non-government organizations and alternative schooling systems in countries that have not yet made such commitments. Such programs often are very innovative and effective in addressing specific needs, particularly for poor and marginal populations, girls and women and others not being effectively reached by public education programs. However, other outcomes resulting from the building of national systems of public education, and the administrative and accountability reforms necessary to build such systems fully and effectively, will not be achieved by strategies bypassing the weaknesses of public administration and public leadership.

Public funding, public policy and public administration of public schools will continue, for better or worse, to be the dominant influence in most countries (Lebanon may be the exception). To effect major changes in these systems, donors must work within the framework of national leadership and national plans of action. This is often very delicate and cannot be externally driven except at the margins.

III. Responses to Questions from Senator Lugar

- **Are U.S. education programs contributing to modernization and moderation of societies in these countries**?

Yes, though it is difficult to demonstrate changes in the short term.

Modernization and moderation are most visibly demonstrated by increased civil society participation in education decisions, increased public debate about education policies and directions and expanded public space for consideration of alternatives. In this sense, robust public debate informed by reliable data and growing consensus on the education problems that need to be addressed may be signs of progress; absence of such debate and lack of awareness of education problems is not an environment for progress.

In terms of output of better educated young people, education systems change slowly and incrementally. Contemporary society is shaped more by the adults who have been educated, or ill-served, by the education systems of the past several decades. Adult education can help to address some of this deficit, for example NGO-managed activities in Egypt, Morocco and elsewhere combining basic literacy, health and other skills training with training on the legal rights of women. Perhaps the most strategic task in the short run is to increase the roles for parents and other community members in education decisions and school governance – participatory consultations and assessments, school management committees, improved transparency of education data, use of public media to broaden consultation and inform public debate. Such participation is among the objectives for programs in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Indonesia and other countries.

More attention is needed to the culture of education, to the bureaucratic sclerosis that wastes resources, slows education change and stifles innovation, and to the authoritarian pedagogy that pervades most classrooms. Improving pedagogic content, the physical quality of schools and teacher competence is important, but not nearly enough. Modernization and moderation of societies is as much, if not more, the result of the

commitment of national leaders to make changes in the culture of education as it is a result of the pedagogic inputs and incremental contributions of better-educated children as they grow to adulthood and become productive citizens in the changing society. A national system of education, with national leadership, is needed to ensure national objectives are achieved. A national commitment to education for all is a powerful affirmation of citizenship and basic rights for all in a more open, tolerant and democratic society.

Unfortunately, most assessments of education progress focus narrowly on the outcomes, particularly those that can be counted and measured, not changes in the underlying systems that contribute to those outcomes. Expansion and completion of an education system represents the successful accomplishment of a number of related capacity improvements, changes in civil society, infrastructure, governance and administrative environments. All of these require reducing corruption and increasing accountability, at all levels and among all participants. Such accomplishments, though not normally treated as education outcomes, nevertheless are direct results of the education expansion. These outcomes relate directly and causally to the legitimacy of governments, stability of regimes, social cohesion and the ability of a society to effect other infrastructure and services improvements and to respond effectively to new influences, technologic change and economic opportunities. Such outcomes are valuable forms of social capital and should be treated as additional, and additionally valued, outcomes of sustained education investments.

There are many ways to accomplish the national functions; the national education system does not have to be run by a central ministry, but it must be nationally led and national leadership must be accountable for ensuring that the system is built and maintained. A first function to be achieved nationally is the articulation and confirmation of basic rights to education. A second function is development and articulation of goals and standards for education. A third function is the orchestration of roles for the providers of education at each level and in each specialized subject and vocational area. A fourth function is mobilization and allocation of resources to support education. A fifth set of functions is then the actual administration of the institutional, technical, logistic, personnel, financing and other systems that support the accomplishment of the first four functions. There is no single best model for how to accomplish these functions, but all of the functions require leadership and all must be accomplished effectively with broad consensus, understanding and support.

A key understanding for strategic planning is that these national functions are not just sectoral education concerns. They include affirmation of fundamental rights of citizenship and membership; they require participation of a wide range of stakeholders on a continuing basis; they both feed into and are shaped by policies and programs across the public sector and in the private sector and communities. Simply put, the education systems are among the largest sector of public activity in any country, accounting for 20-25 percent of public budgets, 25-30 percent of public employment, a major fraction of public works and a set of activities affecting every household in ways that mirror if not

determine their participation in the society generally. How national systems are managed is as important as the technical and administrative choices about what is managed.

A second key understanding is that decisions on how best to meet national education goals tend not to stay made, at least in their details. This is in fact a healthy dynamic, as education is integral to the nation's current condition, and so critical to its future. Progress in almost any dimension will require continuing examination of ways to support the educational and learning processes. Active dialogue and transparent consideration of the iterative choices can only improve the choices and facilitate their implementation. The essential task is not one of controlling or even predicting these changes. Rather, it is to ensure that iterative change is informed by public participation, accurate information, monitoring and evaluation, research, and sustained support for innovation.

- **Are US-funded programs increasing access to and quality of education in a comprehensive manner?**

Yes, but more can be done.

The program emphasis has been on quantity more than quality. As the emphasis shifts to quality, quality itself is becoming a broader concept including aspects of parent and community participation, accountability and learner-centered pedagogy.

The key concern is whether the US-funded programs are supporting comprehensive reform initiatives by the respective governments. Comprehensive reform needs to include fundamental administrative, management and financial restructuring as well as systematic attention to pedagogic requirements – schools, teachers, textbooks and materials. The most effective reforms involve efforts to decentralize education systems, creating both more flexibility and more accountability locally, and involving parents and community leaders more directly in school management and oversight. More narrowly focused strategies providing selected inputs (teacher training, support for school building, funding for local NGOs) or targeting assistance geographically and for groups of priority concern (rural poor, girls and women, minority populations), though visible and useful in achieving short-term impact, are difficult to sustain and are unlikely to lead to systemic change in institutional capacities, administrative and funding policies for the system as a whole.

The most effective assistance modality for support of comprehensive reform may be budget support within carefully negotiated results frameworks and policy conditionalities, supported by technical assistance as needed and close monitoring of the agreed results. USAID and other official funding mechanisms are constrained by a number of factors, including funding levels, in supporting more comprehensive reform efforts. Principal among these are: requirements for project assistance modalities, mainly on a bilateral basis; expectations for short-term results attributable directly to the US-funded activities; reluctance to program jointly or coordinate closely with other funding mechanisms; difficulty in making multi-year commitments at predictable funding levels. The expected commitments for education activities under the Millennium Challenge Account may have

more flexibility on such factors, though it is not clear at this stage what the MCC assistance priorities and preferred modalities will be.

- **Where might the U.S. make adjustments to its education programs in these countries to effect change more rapidly**?

Additional support could be used effectively in the following areas:

1. Quality standards and quality improvement strategies. Content and performance standards and the ability to measure and monitor performance are key to building consensus and managing for results. They also are key to the competition between schools and between systems of schooling. Most important, they are key to teacher training and teacher support. At present there is very little data on quality and performance at the school level and the debate about alternative education systems, including religious education systems, turns more on ideology and political advocacy than on informed discussion about education results and consequences for the child. Informing this discussion with good data and measurement tools and helping local educators become competent in the use of such data and data systems is one of the most cost-effective, sustainable and politically acceptable roles for external funders attempting to support education progress and moderate education practices.
2. Early childhood development. This is key both to initial preparation and nurturing of the child, addressing problems of health and household understanding of the needs of the child, and to mobilizing parents and civil society generally for child-centered community development. Where programs can achieve parental engagement with the learning needs of the young child, it is possible both to flow this engagement upwards for parental engagement over the rest of the school years and to build on such local civil society organizations for a variety of other development and self-help purposes. Such strategies are particularly helpful in supporting new leadership roles and social opportunity for women.
3. Special needs. An area of strength for the United States is education for special needs. Much more could be done in this area. Assistance would be very welcome in most if not all countries and would address some of their most intractable problems. It also would affirm one of the strategic commitments and core values of the United States, namely that education is a right, that all children have the right to expect opportunities to learn and that it is a public responsibility to respect and support this right. At present there are only a few small programs in this area, such as the work of Helen Keller International.
4. Research-based approaches to achieving early reading skills and numeracy skills. These are the building blocks for further learning, have little ideologic content and are among the most basic expectations of parents for their child's education. Where this can be accomplished

effectively in the early grades, success in the higher grades is dramatically higher and parents are more likely to support continued education for the child, girls as well as boys. Where these skills are not being accomplished, for whatever reason, the likely result is frustration and dropout, parental dissatisfaction not just with the local school but with the government that failed to provide education of basic quality. These are the conditions that motivate parents to support alternative education, including education associated with religious and political organizations, and children to give up on any expectations of success in the modern, secular, literate and numerate larger society.

5. Increased attention to secondary education, particularly lower secondary. These years grades 7-9 or 7-10 are the adolescent years; young people in all cultures face early life decisions about their identity and their future. Discouraged or alienated adolescents are heartbreaking in any culture, and potentially dangerous where there are illicit occupations, militant political movements and no social alternatives responding to their needs.

   One of the factors constraining enrollment and completion of primary education is the lack of opportunity for quality education at the next level. In too many cases there are few good opportunities, particularly for
   - poor children who cannot afford the fees and hidden costs of further schooling,
   - rural children in sparcely populated areas with poor roads and limited transportation who would have to travel to larger towns for secondary education
   - girls -- for whom travel on public transportation may be unacceptable, parents may be reluctant to have living away from home, social norms may limit co-education and issues of personal safety and sanitation are significant.
   - Where the child is poor, rural and female the lack of affordable schools, close to home, of acceptable physical and pedagogic quality and with some degree of community oversight and accountability typically makes further schooling all but impossible.

   A priority area for research and development, requiring collaboration among a number of countries and high quality technical cooperation is the development of new models of lower secondary operating at smaller scale with integrated learner-centered curriculum, cross-trained teachers, intelligent use of media and technology to support teachers and new approaches to funding, management and community oversight. There is every reason to think that such a new approach could outperform the conventionally-scaled and staffed secondary school, would be at least as cost-effective as the conventional school and would be more responsive to learner needs and parental preferences.

6. Youth and young adults. More program attention is needed to youth and young adults, both through curriculum improvements in the schools to

increase work-related skills – including "soft" skills of problem-solving, teaming and information acquisition – and through apprenticeships and skills training outside of school, preferably involving employers as directly as possible. This should be priority area for working with local NGOs and for involving the private sector employers.

7. Information systems and analytic capacities. Greater and more sustained support for education research capacities and generally for improving education management information systems (EMIS), monitoring and reporting systems. Such activity can be supported as components of other projects and can be supported through collaboration with international programs such as those supported by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (which in turn supports other international monitoring programs and works closely with national statistical systems in OECD countries including the United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics.)
8. Media and information technologies. Most countries in the region have some program assistance and assistance from private sector IT firms for increased use of computers in the classroom. For example, Education Development Center is working with instructional technology including interactive radio approaches in Yemen. Cisco Learning is developing a sophisticated computer-supported mathematics curriculum in Jordan. More help is needed in using such technologies to improve systems management and monitoring. There has been good success with the use of multimedia approaches, particularly television and radio both to support instruction in the schools and to enrich the learning environment in the community generally. The US-supported "Alma Simsim" program in Egypt, managed by Sesame Workshop with Alkarma Edutainment in Egypt, has been extended to 21 countries, including a new initiative in Bangladesh. RTI is developing, with Alkarma, a major youth multimedia initiative to be broadcast and used across the Arab world. The development of additional applications of such media and technologies is an area in which the US has unique strengths and substantial experience internationally and domestically.

There also needs to be more attention to assistance modalities, particularly the reliance on bilateral projects looking for short term results directly attributable to the project resources. Program effectiveness and impact can be improved through increased collaboration with other international funders, seeking ways to fund large, comprehensive education reform jointly. Such strategies also reduce the transaction costs for countries as they try to cobble together assistance from multiple funders -- typically 6-8 significant partners; 13 in the case of Jordan – operating with differing priorities, timelines, modalities and monitoring systems.

- **At what level should the U.S. be focusing most of its efforts, i.e. primary, secondary, or technical/vocational education?**

A balanced approach is needed. It is not possible to make quantitative or equitable progress at the secondary level or in skills training if the primary education system is not moving toward full and equitable enrollment and acceptable quality. On the other hand, it is difficult to motivate children (and households) to make the investments to complete primary education without some expectation that it will lead to further opportunity.

Most efforts to date have focused on primary schooling. Most countries are now aiming for 9 or 10 years of education as the basic education goal. For those countries still far behind on the quantitative objectives of basic education – Yemen, Pakistan, Bangladesh – primary education expansion and distribution with increasing attention to instructional quality and continuing emphasis on the enrollment and completion rates for girls must remain the priority. For all countries, including those lagging at the primary level, help at the secondary level would be welcome and appropriate.

More attention is needed to work-related skills development at the secondary education level, but I do not recommend vocational-technical education initiatives at the secondary level. The preferred strategy is to concentrate on work-related skills development in the general secondary curriculum, including some aspects of information technology and computer skills, real problem solving and critical thinking skills but focusing as the first priority on competence in mathematics, basic science, and reading and communication skills. Beyond secondary, more attention is needed to school-to-work strategies firmly linked to demand-side assessments of the expected skill requirements and training plans in the employing sectors. Strategies should include variants of the US community college system, including the consultative mechanisms with employers.

- Can you discuss the benefits of linking education policy to overall reform efforts in countries, such as Jordan and Pakistan?

Good education reform involves much more than the pedagogic variables. It is not necessary to explicitly link education to the other sectoral or strategic objectives. A more powerful approach is to link the other strategic objectives -- including the strengthening of democratic practices, the moderation of dangerous movements and the reconstruction of national identity following violent conflict -- to the efforts to achieve universal education objectives, for all, within national education policies and reform strategies. Jordan has made education reform and improvement one of the drivers for its economic growth strategy. Egypt since the early 1990s has made education progress one of its national security objectives.

One of the lessons from other countries, e.g. South Africa, is that the commitment to education reform and the achievement of universal education objectives must be categorical, treated as a national political, economic and social imperative. Broad political support is essential, not just more purposeful reform efforts within the education sector. Universal education goals cannot easily be achieved, and few countries have come close to achieving them, without affirmation of education as a right and high level political support (thus budget and administrative support) for the public sector

responsibility to make it happen, fully and for all. This is in fact one of the most powerful lessons from the US education experience.

- **What approach should the U.S. adopt regarding madrassahs?**

There is good reason to be concerned about the political agendas of some of the organizations supporting madrassas and other forms of Islamic education, such as the pesantrens in Indonesia. The respective governments are very aware of the political agendas, which in most cases are directed as much against the secular nature of the government, issues of corruption and illegitimacy, as they are against the "West" in general and the United States in particular.

The influence of the Islamic schools themselves is of lesser concern. The major danger to these societies is the lack of education opportunities of any kind for many children, and the poor quality of existing schooling for most children, particularly for the poor and rural. It is true that many of the religious schools have inappropriate texts, often with biased and hateful content. This is also true of many of the public schools. The major problem is that too many of the religious schools, particularly those with little government support or subsidy, are very poor schools – with limited facilities, poorly trained teachers, few pedagogic materials aligned with the core subjects of the national curriculum and little oversight or professional technical support. The remarkable phenomenon is that many parents still prefer these schools to the government schools. This is for a variety of reasons, but most fundamentally a judgment by parents that the public schools are not much better and may be worse in some respects.

It is difficult to see how countries can achieve their education goals without some reliance on privately-initiated, funded and managed schools – including religious schools, including Islamic schools. There simply are no short-term solutions; the political costs of trying to shut them down are intimidating; it will be some years before the public education system can provide public education capacity of acceptable quality for all children in all areas.

In any case, most Islamic education already is in the public sector, including Islamic content in public schools, publicly managed and funded religious schools, public subsidy to privately managed schools. Most Islamic schools, particularly in the Arab region but also in Indonesia and elsewhere in the region, are publicly funded, with substantial public oversight and monitoring against national education policies, including core content. In several countries, (e.g. Indonesia, Bangladesh, Mauritania, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and most of the Gulf states), there are parallel systems of publicly funded and administered religious schools providing secular and religious education for another 10-15 percent of the school-age cohort, with more at the primary level than at the secondary level. In many countries (e.g. Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan) there are "hybrid systems" with public subsidy either in-kind (secondment of teachers, provision of texts) or financial along with various forms of registration and monitoring.

The madrassah education systems grow for a number of reasons besides religion. First, in many communities there is no available public education – or the schools which exist are even more inferior than the community supported Islamic schools. Second, parents and community leaders have more direct control over the madrassahs, through participation in advisory and oversight bodies or through access to religious leaders who are respected by the community and have oversight of the madrassahs. In many cases the local public school is not considered "their" school, parents do not feel welcome in the school, and the school is associated with a government and government programs that the community does not fully trust or consider fully legitimate. It is instructive that in many of these schools there are more girls than boys and in some places, e.g. West Bank/Gaza, there are children of other religions. Third, the madrassahs typically are part of a larger set of social services supported by Islamic organizations and charities providing benefits to the households and communities. The Islamic schools are, in short, part of the Islamic community and are considered legitimate by the community.

The main focus should be on extending the reach of the public education system to all areas and for all children. The recommended policy focus includes three linked strategies: increase attention to private schooling generally, focusing on policies for registration, policies affecting exam participation and policies affecting access to land and funding; include the private schooling systems, including the religious schools, as much as possible in the development of national education plans and strategies, training for teachers and headmasters/mistresses, student registries and statistical monitoring and reporting systems; focus public funding on expanding both administrative presence and public schooling capacities in all areas, including mechanisms for local participation in school governance and oversight.

Strategies of direct support for madrassas with externally funded inputs are not recommended. Many, perhaps most, Islamic education associations would be reluctant to accept such support, particularly if it is explicitly aimed at influencing content or reducing their autonomy and community support. Further, the political backlash against any initiative perceived as externally-directed or influenced may reduce the ability of governments to work with external funders on other aspects of needed reforms and improvements of the public education systems.