This is the right campaign at the right time.

The Joint Advocacy for Education Campaign comes at a moment when India has made tremendous progress in dramatically reducing the numbers of out-of-school children, achieving universal primary education and improving literacy rates. These are major contributions to global progress in reaching Education for All.

I salute this progress and the political will that has driven it forward – including such strategic approaches taken by the Government of India as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and the Saakshar Bharat. The Beti Bachao Bei Padhao initiative, launched by His Excellency Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is benefiting girls in the most poor and remote areas, and creating the right conditions for quality education to happen.

Led by the Prime Minister’s bold vision, the Government is also taking ground-breaking measures to harness new technologies to extend the reach of quality education to all citizens.

Most notably, I see “Digital India” as an ambitious programme to transform India into a digitally-empowered knowledge society, including by advancing education using smartphones, mobile apps and internet services in far-flung areas. The Government is aiming also to train 1.3 million Anganwadi educators to use digital tools as teaching aids and to make school books accessible in digital form. In his historic speech at UNESCO on 10 April, 2015, Prime Minister Modi was clear: “We
have launched the most ambitious programme to provide skills to our youth; and education for every child in the remotest villages."

These are remarkable measures to tackle challenges through effective and clearly targeted action. While the number of out-of-school children has declined sharply, too many children above 14 years old still drop out before completing eight years of schooling. This calls for greater investment in teacher recruitment, deployment, and training, in order to enhance access to quality learning to every girl and boy, to empower them to participate fully through education, training, and decent jobs.

This is especially important in this turning point year, when the world will adopt the new global sustainable development agenda. Proposed Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals calls on Member States to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." In this spirit, I am pleased to note that the Government of India has put forward a National Education Policy to meet changing dynamics with regard to quality education, innovation and research, with the aim to make India a true knowledge superpower. UNESCO will stand with the Government and people of India every step of the way. I wish every success to this campaign and thank the United Nations Country Team for its leadership.

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