

1st April 2010 - A ground-breaking Right to Education Act has come into force in India legalising the right to free and compulsory schooling for all children between the ages of 6 and 14.

UNESCO welcomed the historic [Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009](#) which came into force on April 1. Apart from legalising the right to education, the act places the onus on governments and local authorities to provide schools and sets out standards and norms covering numbers of teachers, training and curricula. It includes a plan to train more than one million new teachers in the next five years and retrain existing teachers.

“This act is an essential step towards improving each child's accessibility to secondary and higher education, bringing India closer to achieving national educational development goals, as well as the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All (EFA),” said UNESCO New Delhi Director Armoogum Parsuramen. “UNESCO places the right to education at the heart of its mission, and stands ready to accompany all partners in their efforts to ensure its successful implementation.”

According to UNESCO's 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report there are an estimated eight million Indian children and young people between the ages of six to 14 out-of-school, the majority of them girls. Between 2000 and 2005, primary school enrolment in India increased by 22.5 per cent overall, and by 31 per cent for girls alone but despite this leap some 25 per cent of children in 2005 left school before reaching Grade 5, and almost half before reaching Grade 8.

Bringing these children, who often belong to disadvantaged groups such as migrants, child labourers or children with special needs, into school and retaining them and providing trained teachers and relevant curricula, will be a major challenge, Mr Parsuramen said.

UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova visited India in January. In her lecture at the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Indira Gandhi National Open University in New Delhi, she applauded the Government of India's dedication: “Your commitment was recently reinforced with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act passed by the parliament last August. This marks a historic step that makes education a fundamental right of every child between 6 and 14.”

Instrumental in driving the bill forward has been Minister of Human Resource Development Mr Kapil Sibal who is also President of the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO.

UNESCO New Delhi Director Mr Parsuramen paid tribute to him and Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh for their “unflinching commitment to the strengthening of education in India.”

Speaking after introducing the Bill Mr Sibal said: “We are trying to make India a knowledge hub in 15-20 years. This bill is the first step in that direction. We want to see India rise. The world is looking at India with hope”.

Without India, the world cannot reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of having every child complete primary school by 2015.

Source: [UNESCO](#)