

100m children get no schooling: UNESCO

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MANILA, Nov. 19:—More than 100 million children across the world still have no access to schooling, UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor said today, reports Reuter.

Mayor said the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation was battling to make basic education a major issue on global and national agendas.

But efforts to educate more children in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa were being undermined by crushing external debt, domestic unrest and deep-rooted poverty, Mayor said at the opening of a regional conference on education in Southeast Asia.

Literacy rates in several of the poorest Third World countries remained above 50 per cent.

Mayor said education was under challenge for many reasons.

For many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia, for example, crushing external debt, internal strife and absolute poverty conspire to make literacy and EFA (education for all) goals an ever-receding target," he declared.

Even if they spend proportionately more of their budgets on education than other countries and receive larger amounts of external assistance, both quality and participation rates seem to be eroding, Mayor added, without identifying the countries.

He said in richer industrialised nations, the problems were different but equally serious.

In the countries of the north, there is sometimes reluctant acknowledgement that universal primary schooling can conceal potentially explosive problems beneath the surface.

These included declining levels of quality and achievement, "even compared to countries spending only a fraction of what they spend on schooling, a growing rejection by the young of irrelevant programmes of study, and persistent neglect of special groups not catered for by standard schooling systems."

Mayor said that in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe there was "a frightening realisation that difficult educational reform must accompany with equal vigour and speed the global transformation of their societies."

Enrolment in the world's primary schools had risen 38 per cent to 597 million in 1988 from 433 million in 1970, while the numbers in pre-schools had doubled in the same period.

"However, there are still well over 100 million children with no access to

schooling," Mayor stated.

Opening the three-day Manila conference, Philippine President Corazon Aquino said it was important to link education to economic growth.

Citing the experience of South Korea, she said that its success as a "tiger economy" had been sustained by "an optimum mix of manpower training and adequate labour supply."