



Statement on President Obama's FY2012 Budget Request for Basic Education

The undersigned members of the Basic Education Coalition express our gratitude to President Obama for his fiscal year 2012 International Affairs budget request, which would invest responsibly in development and humanitarian programs to ensure a better tomorrow for the world's poor. In a challenging budget environment, the President has offered a sensible overall proposal, which will help to alleviate poverty, strengthen societies, foster stability and security, and spur economic growth, at home and abroad.

We are, however, disappointed by the President's request of approximately \$741 million for international basic education programs. Overall, the request reflects a reduction of \$185 million from the FY10 appropriated level of \$925 million, and is more than \$100 million lower than the FY11 request -- itself a significant reduction of \$137 million from the prior budget request for FY10.

While the Administration's request takes positive steps to increase funding in certain countries, the overall level reflects an unfortunate scale back at a time when global needs for quality basic education are vast and the lasting benefits are immense. As noted in the Administration's budget document, more than 300 million school-age children and youth do not have access to the quality education needed to become productive, healthy adults, and that many have missed education opportunities entirely. Reducing the US commitment to basic education is particularly unfortunate given the laudable, time-bound goals that USAID has set in its new education strategy, which seeks to improve reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades by 2015, and increase equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments for 15 million learners by 2015. Further, such a reduction could undermine this Administration's clear focus on supporting economic and leadership opportunities for women and girls, which lie at the heart of our investment in basic education.

With its limited resources, it is more important than ever for the U.S. Government to invest responsibly in programs -- like basic education -- that address key priorities for both the Administration and Congress, produce meaningful results, and have a lasting impact on the future.

- **Security:** These programs are particularly crucial today, when millions of children and youth across the globe are uneducated, marginalized and without hope for gainful employment. The problem includes not only the Mideast, where instability is pervasive, but sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and many other regions. By 2050, there will be 1.2 billion youth around the world -- with nine out of ten living in developing countries. In these increasingly complex and dangerous times, the U.S. must proactively work to ensure that children and a burgeoning youth population are learning in school, so they are better able to make good choices and participate in the economic and political life of their country. Fortunately, investing in basic education is one of the best ways to strengthen security and stability, build civil society, and reduce the need for future involvement in conflict. By equipping populations vulnerable to civil war and regional conflict with the skills and capacities to shape their own future, the U.S. can better promote lasting peace. Every additional year of formal schooling for males reduces their risk of becoming involved in conflict by 20%.
- **Economic Growth:** Today, the fastest-growing markets for America's goods are in developing countries, representing 40% of U.S. exports and one out of every five American jobs. For every 10% increase in U.S. exports, there is a 7% boost in U.S. employment. Educating the world's poor is essential to building the stable trading partners that growing U.S. export markets require. Education reduces poverty and stimulates economic growth. 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills. And no

country has achieved rapid economic growth without investing in education and reaching an adult literacy rate of at least 40 percent.

- **Effective and Sustainable Development:** Quality basic education programs are also extremely cost-effective, stretching our development dollars. For example, young people who have completed primary education are roughly half as likely to contract HIV and AIDS as those with little or no education. A recent study found that half of the reduction of child mortality, totaling 4.2 million lives saved over the past 40 years, was due to better education of women. Better educated farmers are considerably more productive, enhancing their country's food security. In many countries, the school is the center of community life and can serve an important role in facilitating other development efforts. These facts bolster the case for a robust basic education program that would maximize success in other current U.S. development priorities, including global health and food security.

In order to stretch our taxpayer dollars, investment in basic education should be a high priority, along with other international development and humanitarian programs. With relatively modest investments and innovative, low-cost measures, we can greatly expand our reach. For example, \$10 million in spending means that an estimated 100,000 more children annually can receive a good quality primary school education. With some 70 million children out of school, and over half in conflict countries, basic education programs represent a relatively low-cost way to improve security and stability around the world.

While we are concerned that this budget moves us away from, rather than toward, the goal of achieving Education for All, the Basic Education Coalition remains committed to working with the President and Congress to restore quality basic education as a pillar of our foreign assistance. By so doing, and by ensuring program accountability and impact, we can help alleviate poverty, strengthen societies, foster stability and security, and spur economic growth, at home and abroad.

Sincerely,



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