

The UN says UK development aid to commercial private schools could violate children's rights

(London, 10 June 2016) In an unprecedented [statement](#) made public on 9 June 2016, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) expressed concerns about the UK “**funding of low-fee, private and informal schools run by for-profit business enterprises**” through its development aid as it could have been contributing to violating children’s rights in recipient countries.

The CRC recommended that the UK “**refrain from funding for-profit private schools**” and “**prioritise free and quality primary education in public schools.**”

The UK has been spending millions of pounds in the last years to fund commercial private schools in developing countries. Public funding has particularly been channelled through the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to the highly [contested](#) and controversial chain of for-profit standardised schools Bridge International Academies, which operates in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and India.

Delphine Dorsi of the Right to Education Project reacted: “*The CRC confirms the suspicion we had raised in our report that UK funding to Bridge International Academies and similar commercial chains could be violating international law. Development aid should prioritize the realization of free quality education for all, particularly marginalized groups and this is not what the UK does when funding such schools. This is a serious warning for all donor countries to respect their human rights obligations abroad.*”

Kevin Courtney, Acting General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), the largest teachers’ union, said: “*The NUT welcomes the recommendations of the CRC which endorse our concerns about sub-standard education being provided to the poorest in the recipient countries as the result of the growth of so called “low fee” private schools. The British Government, which claims in the UK that it is against profits being made from state education, should respond to this damning criticism and immediately launch a review of DFID’s financial support for and promotion of these privatised schools in the Global South.*”

Sylvain Aubry of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights said: “*Research we conducted with partners in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana has clearly shown that commercial for-profit schools operating there were undermining children’s rights. DFID funding to these schools is thus illegal, and the UK should now take steps to stop this funding and fulfil its obligations under international law.*”

David Archer, a Civil Society Board Member of the Global Partnership for Education emphasised: “*I hope these important CRC observations lead DFID to re-think their support to for-profit low quality private schools that clearly contradicts their otherwise good work to support education, especially for girls.*”

Documents

- Recommendations from the CRC: <http://bit.ly/1OeyD1M>
- Summary of the report on UK aid in education: <http://bit.ly/27QPwpw>
- Statement on Bridge International Academies (May 2015): <http://bit.ly/1JgKrrM>

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