

The UK's financial support to low-cost private education in developing countries in contravention of human rights, says again UN experts

Press Release, Geneva, 5 July 2016

In a [landmark report](#), which has just been published, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) expressed its concerns that in some cases the UK's development aid "has been reportedly used for activities in contravention of economic, social and cultural rights in the receiving countries." This is the [second time](#) within less than a month that UN experts have spoken out on the legality of UK development aid under international law.

The CESCR is "particularly concerned" about the UK "financial support provided (...) to private actors for low-cost and private education projects in developing countries, which may have contributed to undermine the quality of free public education and created segregation and discrimination among pupils and students."

This statement confirms the findings of a [report](#) submitted to the Committee by 26 British and international organisations, which includes evidence from [research](#) conducted in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana showing that low-cost private schools, supported by the UK in those countries, were undermining the right to education.

The Committee recommends the UK "adopt a human rights-based approach in its international development cooperation" by

- Conducting systematic and independent human rights impact assessments prior to any project,
- Monitoring, effectively and regularly, the human rights impact of these projects,
- Ensuring access to complaint mechanisms.

In early June, the Committee on the Rights of the child (CRC) [expressed similar concerns](#), recommending the UK to "refrain from funding for-profit private schools" and "prioritise free and quality primary education in public schools".

Funding by the UK, international commercial private school chains targeting poor people, such as [Bridge International Academies](#), has been particularly [criticised](#) as pursuing UK's own business interests while undermining the realisation of the right to education in developing countries.

These two UN clear statements in just a few weeks confirm that donor funding of private commercial schools in developing countries, including by the UK, could constitute a serious breach of international law.

The organisations endorsing this statement call on the UK to uphold its legal obligations and immediately stop any project that could constitute a human rights violation abroad. This requires that the UK implement the recommendations from both the CRC and the CESCR, starting by:

- Reviewing its funding to private schools in developing countries,
- Stopping all funding to commercial private schools,
- Clearly integrating any funding in education into a plan to develop free quality public education, and
- Remedying any negative impact of its previous and existing funding to private schools.

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Endorsements

- ActionAid International
- CRIN
- EACHRights
- Eastern Africa Collaboration for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (EACOR)
- Global Campaign for Education
- Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Global Justice Now
- ISER-Uganda
- National Union of Teachers (NUT)
- Public Services International
- Right to Education Project