



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

### **Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Children and Youth through Education: A Focus on the Role of Self-Teaching in Play**

**June 28, 2017**

**1:30 – 3:00 PM**

**2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

### **Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery**

Good afternoon. I join my esteemed colleague and Commission Co-Chair Randy Hultgren in welcoming you and our distinguished witnesses to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on defending the rights of vulnerable children through education and play.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to education,” that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,” and that “It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups.” These ideas are reiterated and elaborated in the international Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These are lofty ideals under normal circumstances. They are enormously more difficult to achieve for the most vulnerable of children – those affected by natural disasters like earthquakes or floods, or caught in armed conflicts, or who have been forced to flee their homes due to violence or persecution. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises currently disrupt the education of over 75 million children in some 35 crisis-affected countries. That is an astonishing number.

As a father, and the brother of two public school teachers, I know how important education is. It lays the groundwork for people’s lives; it informs our social, political and economic participation. Education can be incredibly empowering, and it is tragic when children miss out on learning because of circumstances entirely beyond their control.

The thing about kids is that they grow up fast. But the crises and conflicts that are depriving children of their access to education can take a very long time to sort out – the conflicts in Burma, Sudan, Colombia and Syria come to mind. So we need to find ways to educate even when there are massive disruptions in kids’ lives, and we don’t have time to lose.

This challenge is the reason we are here today. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses today, and learning about their experiences. I am especially interested in the lessons from those experiences – the best practices they’ve

identified. I would like to hear what difference it makes to use a rights-based approach in developing innovative educational models.

And I would like to understand how a child's right to education intersects with other rights, especially the right to food. Food insecurity can be both a cause and a consequence of violence and conflict, and hungry kids have a hard time learning. How is that link being addressed?

Thank you again and I yield back my time.