

UAE launches landmark USD 60 million initiative to expand accessible education for visually impaired students in Ethiopia

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- In collaboration with the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, a USD 60 million (AED 220 million) investment by the Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation will fund the development of new schools and inclusive educational programmes
- Initiative reinforces the UAE's commitment to inclusive societies and its ongoing support for Ethiopia's efforts to expand educational access for the visually impaired nationwide

Under the directives of UAE President His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE announced a new USD 60 million (AED 220 million) initiative from the Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation for the development of schools to support the educational needs of visually impaired students across Ethiopia.

This initiative will be led by the Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation, a portfolio entity of Erth Zayed Philanthropies, in collaboration with the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It builds on the success of the Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak School for the Blind in Addis Ababa, which was inaugurated in May 2024. The agreement was signed by His Excellency Mohamed Haji AlKhoori, Director General of the Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation, in the presence of His Excellency Sheikh Shakhboot bin Nahyan Al Nahyan, Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trustee of Erth Zayed Philanthropies, along with Her Excellency Mrs Zinash Tayachew, First Lady of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, among other dignitaries.

With an estimated 1.2 million visually impaired individuals in Ethiopia, including 332,000 classified as blind, this initiative directly addresses a pressing humanitarian need by reaching rural areas where educational and healthcare services remain limited. Ethiopia also has one of the highest global rates of trachoma, a preventable eye disease that disproportionately affects underserved communities. With the support of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, the new schools will serve as centres of excellence, integrating cutting-edge assistive technologies, specialised curricula, and tailored vocational programmes to empower visually impaired students with the skills necessary for higher education and workforce integration.

His Highness Sheikh Theyab bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Chairman of the Presidential Court for Development and Fallen Heroes' Affairs, Chairman of the International Humanitarian and Philanthropic Council, and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Erth Zayed Philanthropies, said: "The UAE remains dedicated to supporting people of determination worldwide. A key element is ensuring that visually impaired students in Ethiopia can access inspiring and inclusive learning environments that meet their specialised needs, thereby enabling them to reach their full potential. This initiative represents the shared commitment by the UAE and Ethiopia to ensure that everyone, regardless of the challenges they may face, can thrive in an inclusive and equitable global society."

His Excellency Sheikh Shakhboot bin Nahyan Al Nahyan, Cabinet Member and Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said: "The UAE has long recognised that sustainable development and strategic collaboration are the key drivers of lasting change. This initiative reflects our unwavering commitment to uplifting communities, creating economic opportunities, and expanding access to essential services. Our partnership furthers the vision of African states to invest in education as a catalyst for future prosperity, empowering youth to realise their full potential and drive sustainable growth."

Her Excellency Mrs Zinash Tayachew, First Lady of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, added, "We are grateful to the UAE for their continued partnership, which supports our goal of ensuring that every citizen, regardless of their abilities, has access to quality education. Together, our shared commitment will help to create a more inclusive society where every student has the opportunity to succeed."

His Excellency Mohamed Haji AlKhoori, Director General of the Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation, said: "Education is a fundamental right, and every child deserves the opportunity to learn in an environment that supports their unique needs. By strengthening educational systems, we are laying the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable future. This initiative reaffirms the power of global partnerships in driving lasting impact, ensuring that education remains a catalyst for opportunity and empowerment for generations to come."

Together with the Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak School for the Blind, the new schools announced today will create a network across Ethiopia to expand access to inclusive education. The UAE's commitment to strengthening Ethiopia's educational infrastructure ensures that every visually impaired child, regardless of socioeconomic background, can thrive in a supportive learning environment that empowers them to contribute to society.

Fikeru Bejo, IT Teacher at the Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak School for the Blind, said: "I am inspired by the incredible resilience and determination of our students to overcome challenges, grow in confidence, and achieve their goals. Their progress is a constant reminder of the transformative power of education. Thanks to the generous contribution of the UAE, we have enhanced our facilities, provided specialised training for our teachers, and introduced assistive technology that greatly improves our students' learning experiences."

He added that this support has equipped students for success and raised the quality of education they can offer. "Moreover, it has brought a sense of hope and optimism to our students and their families, knowing that they have access to better opportunities and a brighter future."

Erth Zayed Philanthropies will support cross-sector initiatives to accelerate global progress and empower underserved communities worldwide.