

EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL
6TH ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE
“Asia Pacific Teacher Organisations’ Response to the Global Crises”

28 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2009

Keynote address by Fred van Leeuwen, EI General Secretary

Colleagues,

One year ago a financial hurricane swept the planet. The global hurricane has calmed recently, but it is only now that we are seeing the full extent of the damage. Some years ago, in 1997 we had the Asian financial crisis, which began here in Thailand and rapidly affected all the countries of the region. We now know that the Asian crisis was the fore-runner of the global crisis of 2008.

There are some remarkable similarities between the two crises. In 1997, the economies of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Korea developed into “bubbles” fueled by “hot money”. Distorted incentives created large pools of credit that pushed up asset prices until they could no longer be sustained – and the bubbles burst.

That is precisely what happened globally a decade later. A big “bubble” grew in the United States, in the housing market, fed by distorted incentives, easy credit, and debt that could not be sustained. But there was an even bigger bubble out there – the bubble of global finance. For a time, the players could make huge fortunes. But when the US housing bubble burst, the financial bubble burst too. Lehman Brothers collapsed, and the whole global system faced meltdown.

The earlier Asian financial crisis may have even lulled politicians and international agencies into a false sense of security. When the Asian crisis was successfully “contained” according to the IMF, many of these people thought they knew how to handle a crisis. They went back to business as usual. They failed to heed warnings from the trade union movement that fundamental imbalances remained in our economies: the imbalance between the real economy and the virtual economy of the financial wizards; and the imbalances between purchasing power of ordinary wage-earners and those who made fortunes out of these booms. They failed to listen, and so, a decade later, the world faced an even bigger crisis.

More fundamentally what was behind these imbalances?

For nearly 3 decades there had been a global consensus in favor of de-regulation of the private sector and downgrading of the public sector. The rise of this policy – or should I say this ideology – often described as “neo-liberal”, was promoted strongly in Asia but also in other regions. It accelerated globally with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union and centrally planned economies across Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

We now know that the boom in North America from 2001 on – the Bush years - was driven by debt. It was a private sector boom and it was linked to constant downgrading of public services. So was the boom in certain countries of this region and in other parts of the world – a private sector boom, with stagnation of funding for public services. When the boom in the United States turned to bust, and the bust spread rapidly around the globe, the impact in all regions was great. It was rapid, it was dramatic, and the consequences are far from over.

In this region, we have feedback from member organizations in Australia, new Zealand, Mongolia, Tonga, Japan and Taiwan on budget cuts in education, and threats of salary cuts for our members.

The G8 and the G20

Japan, with the world's second biggest economy, has of course been a major actor at the G8. Last year, I joined Global Unions in a meeting with the then Prime Minister before the G8 summit in Hokkaido. Since then, in 14 months, Japan has three new Prime Ministers, and we hope, Mr President (Nakamura) that the new government that has swept into office, with the support of NIKKYOSO and RENGO, will make a huge difference. But back then, in July 2008, the G8 leaders failed to heed the warnings we gave them. The crisis broke **only one month later**. I also had the chance, on that occasion, following discussions with you and your colleagues, to point out that Japan was slipping badly in the commitment of the national budget to education, even though education had been a key factor in the Japanese economic miracle between the 1950s and the 1990s. Today, we are glad to hear that the new government is more responsive to NIKKYOSO's emphasis on education of the whole person, and a good balance between work and life.

Now the global crisis has brought other major economies in Asian countries to the forefront of the world scene. They include India, Indonesia, Korea, Australia and China. No longer can a few big economies get together by themselves at the G8 to deal with issues confronting the whole planet. When the G8 met in Italy this July, they were joined by the leaders of 20 other countries.

We are starting to make progress on education. The G8 leaders in Italy, supported by 20 other leaders, took up and reiterated EI's two main messages: *"Investing in education and skills developments is crucial for sustainable recovery"*, and *"We affirm the right to education for all"*. That did not happen by accident. It happened because of strong work together with our coalition partners – Global Unions, and the Global Campaign for Education.

But we all know there is a big gap between words and action. Back in January the Heads of the World Bank and the IMF both called for global stimulus. The IMF Head, in particular, called for investment in public services, including education. Great, we said! The IMF seemed to be changing. But as we have pointed out repeatedly, there is a big contradiction between the calls of the IMF leadership for stimulus through the public sector, and the budget ceilings, including public sector wage ceilings, imposed on countries through IMF conditions. In this region, that is the case for Sri Lanka and Mongolia.

Now, the G20 has become the center of action on financial and economic issues. It was announced on Thursday that the G20 Summit will become a new institution. The 19 countries and the EU together account for 85 percent of global GDP, 80 percent of world trade, and two-thirds of the world's population. Out of the 19 countries, 6 are from this region! ASEAN also attends.

Through Global Unions we have called for G20 countries to: *Invest in a "Global New Deal" for publicly owned services that will rebuild economies on the solid foundation of primary and secondary education, vocational education and training, and higher education and research*. Copies of the Global Unions' Declaration are available here at the Conference.

[Check against G20 communiqué on 25/9:

Colleagues, I am pleased to announce today, that the G20 has endorsed the Goals of the ILO Global Jobs Pact, and recognition of the Importance of Skills Development to Sustainable Economic Growth. The G20 has called on the ILO to convene its constituents to develop an employment-based training strategy. Early in 2010, the US will host a G20 workforce Ministries meeting to include Labour Ministers from the G20 (including 6 countries from Asia and the Pacific). Part of the agenda will be devoted to education and job training, with senior education officials leading these discussions.]

Social and political factors

We are also acutely aware that you cannot look at the financial and economic crisis in isolation from other major challenges. The food crisis was already with us in many countries especially in South Asia and the Pacific as well as in Africa and in Central America.

Climate change confronts us all – especially low lying countries and around the India and Pacific oceans. Last week, world leaders spoke at a special session of the UN General Assembly in New York. Important commitments were made, not least by China and India. There is an enormous challenge to combine economic recovery with protection of our life-space – the earth’s biosphere. That issue is addressed too in the Global Unions’ Declaration.

HIV/AIDS confronts all our societies. Education is the key to combating both the pandemic and the discrimination that is linked with it.

Another grave social issue for our societies has been the ongoing evil of child labour. One year ago the ILO reported progress. But the crisis may turn back that progress, especially for girls. We are working with our Global Union partners in the textile industries, and in agriculture, food and tourism. We work closely with the Global March against Child Labour, our partner in the GCE. While many member organizations in your region are actively engaged in combating child labour, some, I regret to say, are still too hesitant. In Central Asia, where child labour still seems to be a state sponsored phenomenon, and where teachers are sometimes even forced to send children into the cotton fields, we expect our member organizations to speak out against this intolerable practice. I am fully aware of the risks involved in confronting (less democratic) governments that do not abide by international human rights and labour standards. But, frankly, our moral and democratic duty as independent education unions leave us no choice but to challenge any public authority or private enterprise that denies a child one of its basic rights, the right to education.

[Yet another issue of critical importance in the Asian-Pacific region is migration. In a global economy, people will simply move more across national borders, within a region, and around the world. No country can erect a fence today and hope to keep out people from other countries, bringing with them their own cultures and identities. EI’s longstanding work to build bridges between cultures is today more important than ever.]

Human and Trade Union Rights and economic justice

You know of the importance that EI attaches to the defense of human and trade union rights. What has become clear in the present crisis is that the moral imperative of respect for the rights of workers also makes sense for sustainable recovery. For economies built on purchasing power of consumers are more solid than those built on debt and financial bubbles. Trade union economists have shown that in addition to global imbalances, the imbalance between the bargaining power and incomes of employers and employees was a significant cause of the crisis. Wherever collective bargaining was weakened, purchasing power dropped, leading to employees being financed by debts. The best hope for sustainable recovery is a restoration of purchasing power to working families. That requires real bargaining power for wage and salary earners. The application of ILO’s international labour standards – the right to collective bargaining and the right to form independent trade unions – is part of the solution.

Some governments are – to put it in educational terms – slow learners. In the recent past we had to remind the governments of Korea, Cambodia, Taiwan and Fiji that they must respect our professional freedoms and core labour standards. The dismissal of Tevita Koroi, President of FTA and President of the Council of Pacific Education (COPE) for having called for a coordinated campaign to return Fiji to parliamentary rule, is an example of government brutality to not only neglect the international rules but even their own national legislation. Two weeks ago we have once again reminded the Fijian authorities of [their own Employment Relations Laws] as well as of ILO jurisprudence that clearly states that “The freedom of expression which should be enjoyed by trade unions and their leaders should also be guaranteed when they wish to criticize the government’s

economic and social policy." Colleagues, being dismissed for exercising legitimate trade union rights, is one thing, being thrown in jail or worse is another. We are deeply concerned about the situation in Myanmar and in Iran where education unions are outlawed. Last year a young Iranian teacher and activist, Farzad Kamangar, was sentenced to death on charges of "endangering national security" and "enmity against God". We believe that the international campaign that we launched last year has saved Farzad from execution which, however, is still pending.

Quality Teachers for Quality Education

Colleagues,

For educators, our key reference remains the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers, as well as the new UNESCO Recommendation on Higher Education, and the ILO conventions. This month, the ILO/UNESCO Experts (CEART) will meet again. EI's submission to them shows how far we still have to go to fulfill the Recommendations on both the union and professional objectives. Last year, CEART experts went to Japan. Their recommendations were clear enough. The starting point to address teaching personnel effectively is to establish healthy social dialogue with the education unions. I hope the new government of Japan will take up these recommendations and apply them.

As we said at our last World Congress, the issue of recruitment of unqualified teachers is one of the most serious challenges we face as a profession. Too many governments are taking the short cut of hiring unqualified people, and then claiming they are making progress towards Education for All.

Colleagues, we must insist, again and again we say it: **We are for quality education for all. And quality education needs quality teachers.** That is our message on World Teachers' Day next week.

And colleagues, as we decided in Berlin, now is the time to bring the thousand of unqualified teachers into the ambit of our existing education unions. They must be supported. We must help them become qualified. We must defend them against low salaries and poor conditions, which would otherwise drag down the salaries and conditions of everyone.

This is the thrust of our major **Quality Education** project, with Oxfam/Novib. It is the thrust of our advocacy with the World Bank, as also with the other EFA agencies, UNICEF, the UNDP, and of course UNESCO. Our delegation will put that case to the UNESCO General Conference next week. I should also inform you that these agencies are working more closely with the private sector. So we are taking our advocacy for quality education with quality teachers to the World Economic Forum (the WEF).

UNESCO and WEF have an agreement to promote Multistakeholders Partnerships in Education (MSPEs), bringing in the private sector and civil society to support the goal of EFA. EI participates – with reservations. Two weeks ago our Officers adopted a Draft Protocol on EI participation in MSPEs. We will contribute a chapter on Professional Educators to a Toolkit which will be sent out by UNESCO and WEF to Education Ministries next year.

But we have also looked carefully into the trend towards Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) that is strong across this region. The Taskforce set up by the Executive Board after our World Congress has prepared a major report on PPPs in Education. That report shows that governments trying to save money through commercially-driven PPPs in education will end up, most of the time, **losing** taxpayers money, not saving it. Private enterprises go into these PPPs for what they can get out of them. Politicians who think otherwise are deluding themselves – and the voters. **There is no substitute for public investment in public education.**

This is the same battle as the one we continue to fight to keep public education out of GATS and other similar trade agreements. GATS and PPPs are all part of the neo-liberal agenda to cut back on public services. That agenda has been badly shaken by the crisis. But mark my words, colleagues,

that agenda still has a lot of supporters, who are keen to get back to business as usual. That is why Global Unions, with EI and PSI in the lead, are convening a major international conference in Geneva next year on “*A Global Agenda for Quality Public Services*”. As we emerge, hopefully, from the economic crisis, the battle of ideas must be engaged, for it will have a major impact on political decision in all of our communities.

We have had the experience of governments in this region trying to wear us down, trying to diminish the strength of education unions – from Japan to Korea, to Australia. We have also, let us be honest with ourselves, played into the hands of those who oppose our movement, by allowing too many divisions among ourselves. Of course, that is an issue in all regions. That is why our outgoing President, Thulas, called at the last EI World Congress in Berlin, for us to look for ways of promoting EI’s constitutional objective of building unity in the teaching profession. Circumstances are of course specific to each country. But we do know that throughout this vast and diverse region, whether in the biggest economies, in the emerging economies, or in the poorest countries, much could be done to build stronger and more effective education unions. This is a major challenge for all of us.

Invest in education

In the light of the global financial and economic crisis, the EI Executive Board believes that it is not enough just to assert that education funding must be defended. That it is not enough to resist the pressures from finance ministries as well as the complex game played between these ministries and agencies like the IMF, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. By the way, the latest report of the ADB says a rebound is on the way. But the ADB Chief Economist warned that the region is still too vulnerable to financial instability. We have to give a clear message that **education is part of the solution, that education is not a consumption item but an investment, and that investment in education is the key to each nation’s future**. We are backed up by a top World Bank economist Mr Ghani who stated on 27 July: “*South Asia spends too little on education, health, roads, power, and water compared to the rest of the world. Increased and better expenditure with a greater focus on improved outcomes in social and physical infrastructure, and safety nets will speed up the recovery consistent with long-term growth*”. This also means investing in quality teachers and support staff. Colleagues, we have a very strong case to put for investment in education and training. This is the time for our nations to build up their **Vocational Education and Training**. As our global union colleagues have put it: “In a downturn, its time to upskill”. We must re-assert that investment **in the primary and secondary** years of schooling is investment in the next generation – in every nations’ future. And let me add here that investment in **Early Childhood Education** will pay off by giving all children an equitable start and enabling women to return to the workforce. We must also emphasize the need for renewed **public** investment in our **higher education institutions**. Reknown economists have calculated that every dollar invested in education generates a return of 8 to 12 percent.

Values

There is also a more profound message to be conveyed, that goes to the heart of the experience of the countries of this region. It is a message about **VALUES**. The values of public education are essentially the values that underpin democracy as well as our prosperity. They encompass the principles of equity and equal opportunities, of non-discrimination and social justice. They embrace collective responsibility as well as individual liberty, solidarity as well as opportunity. Their foundation is respect for fundamental human rights. This is the ethos that must drive our action forward.

Mobilization

We must pursue a strategy of action, that combines all the forces we have at our disposal. We must link together our global strategy, our work across the Asian Pacific region, and your national action. There must be a single unbroken thread from the global to the local. To succeed, we must combine

ideas with actions at each of these levels. We must combine the work of analysis, and research and arguments – the ideas – with actions, with mobilization.

Colleagues, we know how to mobilize. Education unions can be very effective. The challenge is for us to mobilize in such a way that we will maximize our impact on political decision. To achieve that in today's global economy, I repeat, we must link our global advocacy at the IMF and the World Bank, at the ILO and UNESCO with our national and local action.

We do that in many countries in Global Action Week for Education for All. We will do it again on World Teachers' Day next week, the 5th of October. Now we have to step up our level of mobilization, not on one day, but on every day.

MDGs and EFA

Together with our partners from civil society, we have succeeded in keeping the Millennium Development Goals firmly on the agenda in the midst of the crisis. But UNESCO warns us that the next Global Monitoring Report will show how far we have to go to achieve Education for All by the year 2015. Governments are overstating their progress, by declaring children enrolled in school, even if they do not attend. Moreover, the resources reported to achieve EFA according to UNESCO, are greater than previously stated.

We have to get the commitments from the G8 and the G20 and the United Nations applied at the national level. That is where you – the national leaders – come in. The coherence between our global action and our national action is critical. And it must be a two-way process.

The capacity to act

EI's action is your action. EI is you, the member organizations. Together we must march forward with:

- A clear vision for education and society
- Powerful arguments for investing in people
- A capacity to mobilize globally, regionally, nationally and locally, and
- A strategy of proposition for the well-being of our communities and nations.

Writing in *"El Pais"* in Spain recently, the former Director General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, said now is the time for citizens to act, ceasing to be passive spectators and commencing to participate actively. Only then, he wrote, will governments be authentically democratic, acting upon the will of their citizens, while hearing and respecting their opinions. Dr Mayor, who was with us at the founding of EI in 1993, put his finger on a key element – the capacity of citizens to act is never more important than in a time of crisis.

Who better to take up this challenge than educators? And who more able to exert leadership than trade unionists like you? Our challenge, brothers and sisters, is to exert that capacity to act, and to provide leadership, not just for ourselves, but for all of the communities in which we live and work.

Thank you