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Education International

Statement to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education

Educators Committed to Quality Higher Education in the Coming Decade

Paris, 5-8 July 2009

I. Preamble

1. Education International, representing 30 million teachers and education workers in 172 countries and territories, welcomes the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education. This gathering, coming a decade after the first World Conference on Higher Education, takes place against the backdrop of significant global challenges. The economic recession, the most severe in the post-war period, is destroying the jobs and livelihoods of millions, and increasing inequality within and between nations. The crisis also threatens the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including Education for All. The threat of global warming, despite attempts to develop a coordinated international strategy to curb greenhouse gas emissions, remains one of the most serious risks for humanity and the planet. Meanwhile, wars, conflicts, and violence continue to disrupt and destroy the lives of too many of the world's peoples.
2. Education International believes higher education and research have a critical role to play in assisting local communities, nations, regions and the global community to confront these challenges. Higher education and research have a proven record in promoting the social, cultural and sustainable economic development of nations, and of building a culture of peace.
3. Education International affirms that higher education and research are vital public goods that contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of communities, regions, and nations. Consequently, higher education institutions should operate according to clearly defined public service principles: equality of access, affordability, high standards of quality, and public responsibility.

II. Academic Staff: The Heart of Higher Education and Research

4. For higher education and research to meet the ambitious social, economic and cultural goals and to promote the public good, it is critical that governments and institutions recognize that academic staff are at the heart of the academic mission. Governments and institutions must make it a priority to provide the appropriate terms and conditions of employment and professional rights that are required to nurture a talented and committed corps of higher education and research personnel.
5. Education International notes that this year marks the 12th Anniversary of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel affirming that:
 - a. higher education teaching personnel and research staff are entitled to academic freedom which includes the right, without restriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies;

- b. the right to education, teaching and research can only be fully enjoyed in an atmosphere of academic freedom and autonomy for institutions of higher education;
- c. tenure or its functional equivalent, where applicable, constitutes one of the major procedural safeguards of academic freedom;
- d. higher education teaching personnel and research staff should enjoy the right to freedom of association, and the right to bargain collectively as promoted in the standards and instruments of the International Labour Organization (ILO); and,
- e. working conditions for higher education teaching personnel and research staff should be such as will best promote effective teaching, scholarship, and research.

Education International calls on all Member States to fully implement the principles set out in the 1997 Recommendation in order to advance higher education and research that can fulfill its social responsibility and that is equitable, accessible, and of the highest quality.

III. Re-Affirming Our Commitment to Quality Higher Education and Research

- 6. Education International and its higher education affiliates believe that the quality of higher education and research cannot be reduced solely to quantifiable outcomes or subject to any simple performance-based assessment. Simplistic rankings and assessments of higher education institutions based upon research output or student learning outcomes cannot on their own adequately measure quality. Quality has to do with the conditions and activities of teaching and free enquiry, and higher education is about learning and research that moulds a lifetime and shapes one's future.

Education International calls on Member States to ensure that higher education not be reduced to mere measurable outcomes such as simplistic ranking or classification exercises.

- 7. The quality of higher education and research is best assessed through rigorous and regular reviews by academic peers. What constitutes quality teaching and research should be debated, established, and reassessed at the institutional level through effective academic senates or councils that have meaningful representation from staff and students. It is primarily the responsibility of the academic community to assure the quality of their programs through these collegial processes.
- 8. The work of all higher education employees contributes to the success of their institutions and the students they serve. To be successful, higher education and research institutions and systems must offer academic staff adequate and assured salaries with the prospect of pursuing a full-time career with tenure or its functional equivalent. Without respect for these basic conditions, no academic institution or system can hope to succeed in providing a high quality education.

Education International demands that Member States and higher education institutions improve the attractiveness of academic careers and the remuneration, working conditions and terms of employment for all staff, as a basic component of assuring quality in higher education and research.

- 9. The quality of higher education is inseparable from the quality of all education sectors, from early childhood education to post-secondary. The ability of students entering higher education is directly dependent upon the quality of the entire education system. The role of higher education institutions in the initial education and continuous professional development of teachers and in educational research to be recognised and sustained.

Education International calls on Member States to provide improved resources for the whole education system and increased support for teachers at all levels of education.

IV. Academic Freedom as a Basic Requirement of Meaningful Higher Education and Research

10. Promoting quality higher education and research also requires that institutions and governments guarantee and actively defend the academic freedom of staff. As described in the *1997 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel*, academic freedom includes the right, without restriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion; freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof; freedom in producing and performing creative works; freedom to engage in service to the institution and the community; freedom to express freely one's opinion about the institution, its administration, or the system in which one works; freedom from institutional censorship; freedom to acquire, preserve, and provide access to documentary material in all formats; and freedom to participate in professional and representative academic bodies.
11. Academic freedom involves both the pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination and application through activities such as research, teaching, public lectures, conference communications, publications, professional practice, the building of library collections, the provision of mediated access to information, artistic production and performance, and service. All such activities are closely related and involve different aspects of a single job or task. Higher education relies on active engagement in critical enquiry and research, both of which inform the teaching and learning mission of our institutions. The quality of higher education and the experience of students both suffer when critical enquiry and research cannot flourish. The creation of academic positions that do not involve a range of academic activities in the pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination and application, undermines the mission of a higher education institution, which must remain inextricably committed to critical enquiry, learning and service to the community.
12. Academic freedom must not be confused with institutional autonomy. Higher education institutions should be autonomous to the extent that they are able to set policies independent of outside influence. That very autonomy can protect academic freedom from a hostile external environment, but it can also facilitate an internal assault on academic freedom. To undermine or suppress academic freedom is a serious abuse of institutional autonomy.
13. Academic freedom does not require neutrality on the part of individual academic staff. Academic freedom makes intellectual discourse, critique, and commitment possible. All academic staff must have the right to fulfil their functions without reprisal or repression by the institution, the state, or any other source.
14. Education International notes with concern the continuing violations of academic freedom around the world. In too many countries, higher education staff, in the course of exercising their right to teach and research, risk punishment and retribution from political authorities, other vested interests, and their own institutions. In countries and territories where basic civil liberties such as freedom of speech, association, and movement are restricted, academic freedom cannot be exercised. There remain in all parts of the world serious violations of the basic labour rights of academic staff, including their right to organize trade unions and to engage in collective bargaining.

Education International calls on Member States of UNESCO to do more to ensure that these fundamental civil liberties and labour rights are fully respected, and that academic freedom is properly protected and vigorously defended.

15. The erosion of civil liberties in response to concerns about terrorism and extremism has also significantly affected academic freedom, as well as making unacceptable demands on academic

staff in some countries to 'police' their students. Restrictions on the movement of higher education staff and the stifling of unpopular opinions have become too commonplace.

Education International calls on all Member States to fully assert and follow through on their commitments to respect and defend civil liberties and academic freedom.

V. Tenure as a Means of Protecting Academic Freedom and Ensuring the Development of Higher Education and Research

16. Academic freedom is protected through tenure or its functional equivalent. Tenure or its functional equivalent, awarded after rigorous peer review, ensures secure continued academic employment. It is the means by which academic staff are protected against personal malice, political coercion, and arbitrary actions by their institutions. It is also the means by which to recognise the essential contribution made by academics to their higher education community, the advancement of their discipline, as well as the development of teaching and research within their institution.
17. Education international has serious concerns about the rapid growth in precarious and fixed-term academic labour – academic staff hired on a part-time and/or limited term basis without tenure or its functional equivalent. In many countries, a majority of academic staff are now employed in precarious positions with low pay, few or no benefits, and without procedural protections for academic freedom.

Education International stresses that higher education institutions and Member States must increase their efforts to fund and create more permanently and regularly employed staff.

VI. Collegiality as a Means for Effective Governance in Higher Education

18. Collegial governance of higher education institutions in which academic staff have effective and meaningful representation is a key requirement for the proper functioning of higher education institutions. Academic staff must play the predominant role through the appropriate bodies in determining curriculum, assessment standards, and other academic matters. However, traditional collegial governance structures in higher education are under pressure in many countries and institutions. Many so-called reforms enacted in recent years have weakened the voices of academic staff in governance, and have granted more authority to representatives external to the academic community. Academic senates and councils have seen their authority wane as administrative boards, increasingly detached from the academic community, take more control. In some countries, senates and councils are increasingly dominated by a relatively narrow range of business interests and the place of academic staff in them is marginalised.

Education International urges higher education institutions and Member States to enable academic staff to play a decisive role in making educational decisions and setting educational policy, if higher education institutions are to fulfill their public responsibility for the creation and transmission of knowledge and for the education of students.

VII. The Risks of Public-Private Partnerships in Higher Education and Research

19. Academic freedom is facing new pressures as a result of direct links between higher education institutions and the private sector that have been increasingly promoted, particularly in the form of industry sponsored university research. These research partnerships, when managed in a transparent and open manner, can help improve productivity and raise living standards through the discovery and commercialization of new innovations. However, such arrangements, if not

adequately regulated, can also raise significant risks to the integrity and independence of academic research. Many high profile cases have shown that industrial sponsors can exert undue pressure on academic researchers and delay publication of research results that are not favourable to a company's financial interests.

20. Conflicts over academic freedom can arise between industrial sponsors and researchers because of differences in research cultures, motives and objectives. Effective commercial research requires non-disclosure to protect industrial secrets. Effective academic research requires sharing and disseminating of knowledge. Education International believes that all academic research should be made publicly available in appropriate ways.
21. Other threats to academic freedom may arise as higher education institutions rely more on private sector research funding. Certain disciplines and fields are favoured, while others receive little or no private sector support. Basic research is funded far less than applied research. Important research into social issues like poverty, the environment, or human rights are of less interest to companies who tend to favour research that will produce commercial outcomes. Alternatively, these research areas may be funded by government departments or agencies with a strong partisan interest in the research outcomes. These tendencies can distort academic research in a way that does not serve the public interest. In the area of medicine, for example, commercial pressures are leading to more research that produces minor modifications to existing medicines and treatments, rather than research into the prevention of diseases or to the study of health problems in the developing world.
22. It is therefore important that research sponsored by industry or other customers not drive the higher education research agenda. In the long-term, this would be counter-productive for industry itself. The value of basic research at the university level -- with its long time horizons, breadth of knowledge, and independent voice -- is that it is far more likely to make ground-breaking discoveries that will lead to unanticipated commercial applications.

Education International calls on Member States to provide better funding for independent, basic research in all disciplines, and to carefully assess the potential and actual dangers of public-private partnerships in higher education, in particular with reference to the manner in which they compromise the integrity and independence of higher education and research.

VIII. Educators as Advocates for Access and Equity in Higher Education

Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "everyone has the right to education" and that "higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit," Education International calls on Member States to take immediate action to ensure that quality higher education is more equitably accessible to all qualified individuals.

23. Promoting greater access to higher education must be a priority of all countries. Higher education and research nurtures individual talent and creativity, and is essential to the social, cultural and economic development of all nations. Higher education institutions, if fully accessible and adequately funded, can play a vital role in providing lifelong learning, and building a talented workforce and active citizenship.
24. Admission to higher education should be based solely on merit. There must be no discrimination in granting access to higher education based upon a student's ability to pay or on grounds of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, or physical disabilities.

Education International calls on Member States to ensure that all financial and non-financial barriers to participation are eliminated, in order to promote more equitable participation in higher education.

25. In many countries, tuition fees have risen dramatically in recent years. Education International is concerned about the impact of this trend on the ability of more and more people and their children to participate in higher education. Member States, through their tax base, have the primary responsibility to fund public higher education. Public funding is the most efficient and equitable model of financing higher education. Tuition fees should be reduced to as low as possible and preferably eliminated.
26. More action is needed to promote equity within the ranks of academic staff. Despite some progress in recent years, women still remain under-represented, particularly at the most senior academic ranks and within certain disciplines such as engineering and applied sciences. In many countries, women academics earn less than their male colleagues and in a number of countries their growth in the labour market has been disproportionately concentrated in the ranks of the low-paid, part-time, fixed-term academic staff. As well, visible minorities, members of equity seeking groups, and indigenous peoples are also under-represented amongst academic staff.

Education International stresses that it is the role of higher education institutions and Member States to work tirelessly towards eliminating all discrimination, both overt and systemic, and to ensure that the composition of institutions' staff is reflective of the composition of the general population.

IX. The Challenges and Opportunities of Internationalization and Globalization

27. Higher education has traditionally been international in scope, with students and staff crossing borders to study, teach and conduct research. Today, however, the emergence of a global "market" in higher education poses a number of potential risks for the academic mission of institutions. The international commercialization and privatization of higher education and research threatens higher education as a public service and therefore increases inequality, diminish quality, and undermine the integrity and independence of teaching and research.
28. The economic globalization of higher education is being facilitated by trade and investment agreements like the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) as well as a growing number of bilateral and regional treaties. These agreements have the effect of locking-in and intensifying the pressures of commercialization and privatization. Education International believes strongly that services provided in the public interest, and which sustain national and regional cultures and heritage, like education, must not be subject to the commercial rules of trade treaties. Transnational education is to be governed first and foremost by educational principles, not commercial imperatives.
29. Troubling questions have been raised about the impact of GATS on educational access and quality, on public subsidies and funding, and on domestic authority to regulate education providers. While many of these questions remain unsettled, the risk is that once a country has agreed to cover education services, GATS rules can enforce open education markets and enable offshore institutions and companies to engage freely in education activities. Local authorities, including accreditation and quality control agencies, may have little control.

Education International calls on Member States to ensure that their country neither makes nor seeks any additional education or education-related commitments in the current GATS negotiations,

and actively resists those made by others. Ministers are urged to assess, in consultation with the academic community, the full impact of GATS coverage of education services.

30. Opportunities for staff mobility remain very low. Academics have little opportunity for mobility, particularly for their teaching duties, due to barriers that exist in terms of visa and language requirements, among other social and cultural barriers. Education International advocates the importance of voluntary mobility in the professional and personal development of academics and urges Member States to help mobility become a real possibility for academic staff – by, among other things, easing visa requirements, offering possibilities for portability of pension schemes, and addressing issues of language learning in schools from a very young age.
31. While more academic staff need to be able to have the opportunity to take up teaching and research opportunities in a foreign country, Education International is convinced that decisive action is needed now to address the “brain drain” of highly qualified personnel from developing countries to the OECD countries. We strongly support labour mobility rights, but it is also clear that the export of teachers, researchers and other highly skilled labour is crippling to poorer societies, and in particular to the Africa region.

Education International asks Members States to consider ways to mitigate the damaging effects of the brain drain, such as providing financial compensation to countries losing skilled people, assisting developing countries in building their domestic higher education and research systems, enhancing student and staff exchanges to promote two-way knowledge transfer, and encouraging collaborative projects and research networks between nations and institutions.

32. Education International welcomes the special attention paid by the WCHE to the needs of Africa. The strengthening of higher education in Africa is essential for the long-term development of the continent and will require, among other things, significantly greater development assistance commitments from the developed world. UNESCO should also facilitate ways to strengthen higher education in the continent. Education International is determined to do its part by strengthening links between staff unions within Africa and internationally, and to assist in establishing employment conditions and professional rights that allow for high quality education and research to flourish.
33. In many parts of the world, higher education and research suffers because of situations of conflicts and war. UNESCO and its Member States have a critical role to play in assisting regions emerging from conflict to revitalize their higher education systems to contribute to building a culture of peace.

Education International calls on UNESCO and its Member States to step up efforts of re-building higher education systems in post-conflict situations, with particular attention to be paid to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine.

X. Sustainable Funding of Higher Education and Research

Educational International calls upon Member States and inter-governmental organizations to affirm that higher education and research is a public good and a public service.

34. As higher education and research is a public good and a public service, it is therefore the primary responsibility of States to ensure that institutions are adequately funded.
35. Education International notes with concern that public investment in higher education in most countries has not been sufficient to meet growing enrolment demands. Funding shortfalls are

compromising quality and accessibility. In many cases tuition and student fees are rising dramatically or being introduced for the first time, institutions are relying more on contingent academic labour, programs are being cut back or eliminated, infrastructure needs are going unmet, enrolment is being capped, faculty and staff are being laid off, and admission requirements are being raised to levels that are excluding more and more qualified applicants. Education International affirms that funding for higher education and research is a public investment, not a cost.

36. The status of higher education and research as a public good is being threatened not only by reductions in State financial support, but also by policies and pressures that foster its commercialization and privatization. These trends must be reversed, and Member States must guarantee that public institutions of higher education are properly financed so that they can fulfill their mission of contributing to the public good.
37. The current global economic crisis is adversely affecting the finances of many higher education institutions. Endowment and pension funds, many of which were unnecessarily exposed to risky investments, have been hit by the sharp declines in global stock markets. In the face of the downturn and rising budgetary deficits, some governments have reduced spending on higher education and research, leading to staff reductions, caps on enrolment, research funding cuts, and reductions in course offerings. Other governments are using the crisis to justify cuts in funding. Such actions and their consequences threaten to undermine the public service mission of higher education and research, and to impede economic, social and cultural development.

Education International calls on Member States to recognize that investments in higher education and research are not costs but critical to building long-term sustainable economic growth, social cohesion, and a culture of peace.

XI. Conclusion

38. Higher education unions and staff associations recognize the continuing and new challenges in the sector. Academic staff should be included as key players in developing any responses and approaches to meet these challenges.
39. Education international reaffirms that higher education and research is a public good and should be provided as a public service. This means that governments must provide adequate funding to allow higher education institutions to fulfil their missions. It also means that higher education should be operated on a not-for-profit basis and made universally accessible to all qualified individuals. No financial or non-financial barriers to participation should exist. As providers of a public service, higher education institutions have a responsibility to the public to ensure they provide a comprehensive range of educational opportunities.
40. Education International firmly believes that Member States urgently need to give more attention to the status of higher education teaching personnel. To be successful, higher education institutions and systems must offer academic staff adequate salaries, full-time career opportunities with appropriate job security and tenure, an effective voice in academic governance, and firm guarantees of academic freedom. It has been 12 years since UNESCO members expressed their commitment to these in the *1997 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel*. It is now time that these principles be fully implemented and respected.