



**Fred van Leeuwen, EI General Secretary**

**Opening address to the First EI World Women's Conference – *On the Move for Equality***

20 January 2011

Good evening!

Good evening colleagues, sisters... and brothers. Welcome to Bangkok. Welcome to Education International's women's conference: on the move for equality. Many of you have travelled from very far to take part in this unique event. You will not regret it. I am proud to say that we have registered almost 400 participants. All regions are well represented. In the coming three days we will have a great opportunity to celebrate the progress made and explore the challenges still to be overcome in achieving true gender equity. We will also have a chance to recognise what we, education unions worldwide, have done, and what more can be done; we will have a chance to learn from each other and to strengthen and extend a global network for women's rights and gender equality.

EI and its members have been on the move for equality since our creation in 1993. Let me be frank and say that so far it has been a long and difficult journey, with some delays, a couple of de-tours and a few unexpected stopovers. Let me also make a very personal remark and say that on this journey I have become truly inspired by the many courageous, creative and determined women in our movement who stood up in their countries and communities, in their organisations and in their schools, against persistent discrimination and inequality, and who, despite strong social and political resistance, sometimes in a very hostile environment, were able to remove obstacles, who succeeded to enlighten other women, men and yes, ultimately society at large. We, in Education International, are privileged to have so many inspiring women activists among us, making up a tremendous global potential to achieve social and democratic change everywhere.

Gender equality is the very basis of what we call social justice, but it does not constitute social justice. Also, equality, equity, is not, as we all know too well, just a gender issue. Achieving gender equality is a first, and probably determining, conditional step, battle, if you will, towards full equity, with no space left for racism, antisemitism, islamophobia, xenophobia, homophobia...with no space left for all these other social evils, most of which deeply rooted in ignorance. Ignorance probably is our main enemy. And quality education our main weapon to defeat that enemy.

Colleagues, as you know, we had planned to be here 8 months ago. As you also know, political unrest compelled us to postpone our conference. I want to apologize for the inconvenience this has caused but at the same time I want to commend the people of Thailand and the Thai government for having been able to contain this - for outsiders somewhat complicated - conflict and to uphold the main principles constituting a democratic society. We are grateful to be in Bangkok this week, enjoying the hospitality of this great Kingdom.

I am honoured to introduce to you, as our first speaker tonight, the representative of the government of Thailand, the minister of education, the honourable Mr. CHINNAWORN BUNYAKIAT.

*Welcome address by the Honourable Mr. Chinnaworn Bunyakiat, Minister of Education, Government of Thailand*

Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. We highly appreciate your presence and your encouraging words.



Colleagues, Education International has four member organizations in Thailand, the Education Society of Thailand, the Federation of Elementary Education Teachers Associations, the Private School Teachers' Association and the National Thai Teachers' Union. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Dr Boonpun Sanbho from NTTU, who will welcome us to her country on behalf of the teachers' organizations of Thailand.

*Welcome address by Dr. Boonpun Sanbho, NTTU, on behalf of Thai EI Member Organisations*

Thank you, Boonpun.

Which brings us to our last speaker tonight. Susan Hopgood. At events like this the Master of Ceremonies (the role I am expected to play tonight) is expected to say: the next speaker, of course, needs no further introduction, and to then start a lengthy introduction. I will not do that. Susan is my sister. This may come as a surprise to you. No, but seriously, what else can I say (without sounding a bit patronizing) then that Susan Hopgood, the first woman Federal Secretary of the Australian Education Union, the third President of Education International, is our best guarantee to keep this International organisation on course, on the move for equality. Not because she is a woman, but simply because her strong belief in our capacity to build a more equitable world society through education.

*Address by Susan Hopgood, President*