



Education International  
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## EI statement to mark the twentieth anniversary of abolition of apartheid in South Africa

As over 1600 teacher unionists are about to converge to Cape Town for the 6th World Congress of Education International, EI, on behalf of its 30 million teachers and education workers worldwide, expresses its admiration with all the South African colleagues for their struggle to abolish apartheid<sup>1</sup>, overcome profound injustice and discrimination and shape a new society respectful of human rights, democracy and diversity.

Union mobilisation and international workers' solidarity played a key role in the abolition of apartheid. Having contributed during the last twenty years to the building of a democratic and multicultural country is a proud achievement of the South African trade union movement and teachers. Quality education for all remains one of the most important objectives to be achieved, so the dream of equity and justice that accompanied the end of apartheid, will come to fruition.

EI was founded on the fundamental principle that organised teachers achieve greater dignity; improve the status and the welfare of teachers and deliver the highest quality services to children, the public and the community as a part of a union. The last twenty years in South Africa perfectly illustrate the role trade unions play not only in labour successes, but also gaining rights for all citizens in building a more equal, more democratic and more respectful society. South African unions defend the rights of all workers, including migrants, and fight poverty and marginalisation. Teacher unions continue to defend public quality education systems as the key to economic progress with justice.

Among the countries where EI has members, we see that human and trade union rights are most at risk in times of economic, political and social crisis, giving rise to increasing privatisation and insecure employment conditions which undermine the union capacity to organise and bargain collectively.

In times of crisis, the daily commitment that teachers and education workers make to providing quality public education is also challenged by the short-sightedness of some governments which have opted to cut their education budgets, thereby reducing the access to and quality of education. Along with these cuts, when teachers themselves are also under attack there is a double assault on the education of children and young people.

Quality education opens doors and enables individuals to make choices throughout their lives. Funding in education is essential for ensuring an educated citizenship, able to participate in democratic decision-making and societal well-being – and able to safeguard the democratic way of life.

We congratulate the South African teachers' union movement for continuing to stand up for the rights of teachers, education workers, students and marginalised groups, and for their commitment to quality public education for all.

In solidarity,

Fred van Leeuwen  
General Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> On 17 June, the South African government voted the *Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act* which was promulgated on 28 June and commenced on 30 June 1991. This brought an end to racial segregation in education, medical care, other public services and public spaces.