



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación

EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL'S STATEMENT AT THE 37TH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO

PARIS, 11 NOVEMBER 2013

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

Education International is pleased to join UNESCO and its member states in debating and defining the future of education. As the UN's lead agency for education, science and culture, UNESCO is strategically positioned to promote and champion a bolder vision of education.

Education is a basic human right, but this right continues to be undermined due to a number of factors, such as the impacts of inequality, under-financing and, in some cases, a lack of political commitment. Education International is, therefore, calling for a renewed commitment to universal free quality education to be at the centre of the new global development agenda.

The right to education must be guaranteed for all people by the state throughout life. In that regard, a holistic and life-long learning approach to quality education must be promoted and supported, covering all levels of education, that is, early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary education, vocational education and training, higher and adult education, as well as adult literacy.

As we all know, the right to education goes well beyond access, retention and completion. All human beings have the right to an education that is, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms". This obliges us to ensure that all young people, including the most marginalised, have access to education that meets their needs and those of society.

That is why the over 30 million educators who are members of Education International are joining forces in a new campaign to defend and promote quality education for all. We call this campaign, *Unite for Quality Education: Better Education for a Better World*, and it was launched last month across the globe.

Through this campaign, EI, its member organisations and partners, are advocating for a broader notion of quality, one that covers all elements of the education process, including broad-based curricula, safe schools with adequate facilities and resources, and a wide range of outcomes enabling young people and adults to develop to their full potential and contribute positively to society.

EI's campaign, which will run for a year, puts particular emphasis on three critical levers for improving the quality of education, namely:

- Quality teachers, teaching and learning;
- Quality tools for teaching and learning, including ICT; and,
- Quality environments for teaching and learning.

This includes the right of every student to be taught by a qualified and well-supported teacher. Teachers make the dreams of young people, girls and boys, including those in difficult circumstances such as refugees, a reality. The training, recruitment, motivation and retention of qualified teachers are key to ensuring equitable access to quality education, and should thus be at the centre of efforts to improve the quality of education.

Improving the status of teachers and the teaching profession is of paramount importance. We cannot allow de-professionalization of the teaching profession, as evidenced by the recruitment of unqualified teachers, hiring of qualified professionals on fixed-term contracts, or restricting teaching to testing in the name of accountability to undermine the status of teachers and teaching. Restrictions on professional freedoms and trade union rights, including collective bargaining undermine the status of the teaching profession. Institutionalised social dialogue and the involvement of teachers and their unions in education policy development must be ensured in policy and in practice.

When looking at defining new post-2015 education goals, measurable targets for literacy and numeracy might be appealing in their simplicity and clarity. But however, they restrict the broader purpose and transformative role and potential of education, and may force teachers to teach to the test. While literacy and numeracy are necessary and part of the broader set of competences that a quality education offers, they are far from sufficient, and our aspirations for quality education must go beyond narrow measurable learning outcomes.

Building on the lessons learned from the implementation of the current EFA framework and MDGs, UNESCO and its member states play a pivotal role in framing the post-2015 development and education agenda. EI believes that this process is an opportunity to put in place a framework that is aspirational and courageous, and includes education as a priority in its own right and an indispensable means for achieving all other development goals, such as those relating to health, nutrition, gender equality and sustainable development, to mention but a few.

A renewed commitment coupled with increased investment in education is an absolute necessity. Tuition fees and the indirect costs of education still form the single biggest barrier to equitable access to quality education. Being a public good and a basic right, education must be publicly financed, and the long-term goal should be sustainable education financing sourced primarily from domestic revenue. We have an obligation to ensure that by 2030, no child is excluded from quality education because of cost.

World organizations and our nations cannot, should not, be co-opted or lured into gambling with the future. The path from poverty to prosperity for this generation and the next absolutely depends on quality education, not only for the few and the fortunate, but for all.

The global community must aspire to achieve more in the next fifteen years. We count on you as UNESCO and UN member states to renew your commitment to quality education through an ambitious post-2015 development and education strategy that will help us build a better world through quality education.

I thank you.

Fred van Leeuwen

General Secretary