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Opening Remarks ISTP 2017

Ministers, Colleagues, I would like to begin by thanking the governments of Scotland and the United Kingdom for graciously agreeing to host this seventh Summit in this beautiful city. And thank you to Education International's affiliates on the organizing committee, the Education Institute of Scotland, NASUWT and NUT, and our members in BIGTU, for making this Summit possible.

"Truth springs from argument amongst friends," said Edinburgh's native son, David Hume. Well, colleagues, that is essentially the guiding principle behind the ISTP. Though, I must say, that possibly at no time during previous Summits has your commitment and candour been so dearly required.

A year ago in Berlin we were in the midst of a refugee crisis, or as Minister Fridolin put it best, a crisis of responsibility. The focus of that Summit was aimed at finding how we could better support teachers' professional learning and growth, and the education of refugees set the tone. Now, we are deep in the middle of another crisis, one challenging the resilience of our democratic institutions, a crisis also, if you will, of half-truths and outright lies.

You are not surprised to hear me say that one of the best ways to confront these turbulent times is to invest in those who work to impart truth and instill democratic values: our teachers.

Obviously, there is a corollary to the famous Delors Report of Learning to know, be, do and live together...it is TEACHING to be, know, do and live together. In many ways this forms the core of our professional obligations and of our responsibility to our students, to our societies and to truth itself.

There is a social, human dynamic at the core of quality teaching and learning. Teachers are part of the glue that holds society together. They create bonds within groups and create the bridges across groups and communities. Nation building, but also peace, are essential mandates and functions for education. This makes teachers vulnerable. Sometimes they are squeezed between political groupings, caught between ethnic, linguistic and religious rivalries, or targeted by public authorities, as we have seen in Turkey recently.

And not only there. Within our own ISTP community, where we share the belief that teachers' professional freedom and space are essential to quality teaching and learning, there are jurisdictions that are decreasing that space, limiting that freedom, for example by imposing one particular history syllabus or, even worse, have ideology creep into the curriculum.

Let me emphasize that we see our tasks in line with John Dewey's seminal text on Education for Democracy where it is the role of the profession to ensure that students grow up to be critical thinking and informed citizens who make informed decisions on fact and not on political ideology.

We take this responsibility even more seriously in the face of rising trends in some countries to undermine the fifth estate, the free press, as they ask hard questions and inform our societies. Media literacy in fact should become a key priority of the teaching profession the world over in light of the rise of fake news and isolated opinion bubbles of reinforced propaganda.

Therefore, we must make it perfectly clear that we have the right to use our professional discretion to interrogate and to reject curricular directives that defy facts, falsify history, or lead to xenophobia and hate. Whether that means

rejecting curricula written by the non-renewable fuel industry about clean coal, by big tobacco about health, or history written by misguided nationalists, there is a professional and ethical responsibility that may outweigh the authority of education employers, or even of government which have abdicated democracy and human rights. This is, I believe, what society expects of us and what we expect of each other. Beyond left and right there is true and false and it is our responsibility to prepare future generations to know the difference.

I hope that this particular responsibility will be in the back of your minds when in the coming days we will take a hard look at ways to improve and enhance teachers' learning and development.

Strengthening the teaching profession is the goal of these summits. A strong profession implies that its members - within agreed parameters set by the public authorities - determine their own professional standards, like doctors and lawyers do. Governments need to help create the necessary conditions. We have started developing global guidelines to support our education unions and their members who, I should add, are increasingly engaged in discussions on standards while connecting with each other online across continents. That is good news. We see their networks as rich avenues of professional exchange, they are professional learning's "final frontier", and we must ensure that they are not becoming prey of the markets, but remain free and open to all teachers and education professionals.

Colleagues. I leave you, with the words of another of Edinburgh's adopted literary heavy weights, J.K. Rowling. The head of her school of wizardry, Albus

Dumbledore, said of the truth: “It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution.”

Words to live by.

Thank you.