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COP21 Remarks
Education International
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This week all eyes are transfixed on this conference, on the future of earth's climate. And that is how it should be. Within the context of the negotiations, Education International fully supports the three main demands put forward by the ITUC. Suffice it to say that being in Paris we will lobby for a strong and binding agreement, for a fair and just climate finance accord supporting low income countries and for the recognition or establishment of social dialogues.

I will not address these demands at this time, nor will I discuss the responsibility of trade unions, including education unions, to engage and mobilise their members in and around climate change issues.

No, I would rather take the opportunity to share some thoughts about the significant role which the teaching profession and our school systems play or can play in achieving "Global Climate Consciousness". In fact, most already do. It would be difficult to find schools where teachers do <u>not</u> address climate change and environmental challenges; most of the time at their own initiative, and sometimes at the initiative of their students. And not only in Kiribati, where, for the past couple of years, students get their wet feet when they attend class at high tide. Just yesterday in the New York Times I read that Fiji, also home to an affiliate member, has agreed to allow the people of Kiribati to relocate there – all 100 thousand of them.

Among the 400 member organisations of Education International, there are many for whom climate change is not a future threat, but a current reality.

One relatively small example involving a small nation shows the severity of climate change. A change in temperature and environment is set to create scores of new refugees, and with them conflict is almost assured. What we are currently bearing witness to across Europe should serve as a preview of things to come.

I am not here to preach doom and gloom, far from it. But we must accept reality and advance our communities, cities, and countries to learn to live in an ever-changing landscape.

Today is education day at COP21. The moment to shine a light on the importance that education plays in not only preparing the next generation to live with a rapidly changing climate, but to hopefully empower them to alter our ways to live a more sustainable existence on earth.

It is too bad that education only gets one day. And it is puzzling why education, why our school systems have not been given a more prominent place in article 8 of the draft agreement.

In September the United Nations adopted the new Sustainable Development agenda for the next 15 years, including the goal to achieve free primary and secondary education for all children.

When I look through all of the 17 goals, from gender equality, to clean water and the eradication of poverty, I see education as a central component in all of them.

From the earliest age to advanced university and tertiary studies, education is an equaliser, it lifts people out of poverty, and it fuels innovation. For our organisation and our affiliates in 170 countries, along with their 32 million members, we are certain that the pathway to a sustainable future travels through the classroom. The responsibility to make this happen lies with our public authorities; from sowing the seeds in kindergarten to properly funded public research. This is up to our governments to lead on instead of placing their bets on "philanthro-capitalism," or the corporate world.

Over the past year much focus has been dedicated to global citizenship education. More simply, how to prepare our future generations for a world that is increasingly connected, socially, economically, and of course environmentally.

To properly prepare our children for these challenges which lie before them, education must be a key component to a climate deal. A serious commitment must be made to ensure that sustainable development education is fully integrated in school systems. It should be mandated within the curriculum.

However, it is going to take far more than just words to make sure that our students receive the education they need. Education International has three major components required to make sustainable development education a reality.

First-off, schools and school systems must be recognised as the drivers for creating global awareness. As important as an agreement here in Paris is, any achievement of the goal to make our world liveable for the long term depends on a process, and requires a discipline not to deviate from it. An integral part of that process is making sure that our

children have the knowledge and the tools to not only prevent a two degree temperature rise, but to grow-up with an appreciation of both the world around them and of their fellow citizens.

Altering a curriculum goes beyond rewriting text books. The success of any change to a curriculum comes down to the teacher's ability and freedom to integrate it into her lesson plan. As an organisation which represents the teaching profession, we know that educators must be given both the professional space and teaching and learning tools to not only include sustainable development lessons, but to properly adapt them to their own methods and geographic realities.

Teachers must be given the freedom to move their curriculum away from the focus of economic growth, which has been the case for too long. As we are all too aware, economic growth, at the least the way it is currently designed, flies in the face of sustainability. Education must return to a holistic approach and away from the zero sum game of dollars and cents. And our teachers must be freed from oppressive standardised tests which put teachers in a corner, forcing them to only teach what is tested.

The second component to making sustainable development education a reality involves a couple of international reports and agreements.

Nearly twenty years ago, a ground breaking UNESCO Report by Jacques Delors proposed a blueprint for creating a harmonious society. Delors identified four pillars of education – Learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together - were at the heart of that blueprint. Well, what was ground breaking in 1996 holds even more true and relevant today. Unfortunately, we did not take the pillars as seriously as we should have.

This year, UNESCO revisited Delors' ideas for the up-to-date publication "Rethinking Education." This report has not yet received the attention it rightly deserves. The report not only stresses the importance of education in combating our changing environment, but it puts great emphasis on Delors' learning to be and to live together; something we are going to have to improve at as global warming and conflict force entire populations to get up and move.

In conjunction with the UN SDGs, the Incheon Declaration on education and the Framework For Action later adopted to support it here in Paris have laid the foundation to enable our advocacy in promoting sustainable development education throughout the world.

And finally, our third requirement to making education central to a sustainable future is to build the actual curriculum required to do it. As I have said, this is going to require more than just adding a chapter to a text book. We are tasked with rethinking the entire curriculum in order to make sustainable development, within the guise of global citizenship education, a component of all subjects. Because as we know, dirty air over Beijing is not only China's problem, the polluted waters of the Black Sea do not only affect Europe, and the disappearing Brazilian Rain Forest has consequences that are felt far from South America. This is the interconnected world we live in. But unlike the global economy, a financial collapse can be overcome, an unliveable climate cannot. Let us make education the pillar to creating a better, more sustainable world.