

**18th CONFERENCE OF
COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION
MINISTERS**

**Mauritius
28-31 August 2012**

**STATEMENT FROM THE
TEACHERS' FORUM**

ORGANISED BY

**The Commonwealth Teachers' Group
(Education International)**

AND

**The Ministry of Education and Human Resources
(Mauritius)**

INTRODUCTION

Teachers, their organisations and others from 19 Commonwealth countries met in Mauritius on 28-31 August 2012, concurrently with the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM).

The Forum conveys its sincere thanks to the Government of Mauritius for hosting the Teachers' Forum, and to its staff for their kindness and courtesy.

As Commonwealth teachers we recognise that there remains much work to be done in many Commonwealth countries to engender trust in teachers, recruit sufficient qualified teachers and increase access to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) targets.

There is a need for continuing efforts also to develop sustainable models of school leadership; improve pupil/teacher ratios; progressively reduce the use of para teachers and create pathways to their becoming fully qualified teachers; work positively with teacher unions/associations as partners; improve pay and conditions; and enhance teacher autonomy to ensure that teaching is an attractive profession.

We assert the rights of teachers to be organised in trade unions to promote their rights as workers and the rights of children to education. Research suggests that unionised teachers and teacher unions contribute positively to a progressive agenda.

Set out below are the key points raised on the future of education in the Commonwealth and three teacher and pupil focused, interrelated themes with associated recommendations.

SECTION 1 – Overarching Issue

The Future of Education in the Commonwealth

We, Commonwealth teachers, note:

- ◆ Existing plans for the reorganisation of priorities within the Commonwealth Secretariat and in particular the proposal from the Secretary General that the Commonwealth Secretariat diminish its focus on education and consequently close down the Education Section that implements it.
- ◆ The continuing importance of the MDGs and EFA targets for education, notwithstanding the continuing challenges faced by many Commonwealth countries and their education systems in realising those goals.
- ◆ The need to develop models beyond the achievement of universal primary education and towards an investment in early childhood education and secondary education.
- ◆ The importance of continuously improving the quality of public education for all beyond 2015.

We call upon Commonwealth Ministers of Education to:

- ◆ Recognise that education has a key role to play in the aspirations and principles of the Commonwealth, including those of democracy, good governance, human rights, respect and understanding, knowledge based economies and youth development.
- ◆ Ensure that education remains a core priority of the Secretariat's work, given the central role of education in development programmes throughout Commonwealth countries, especially its key role in nation building, developing economies, citizenship, personal aspiration, and meeting the needs of the very high number of people aged under 25 in many Commonwealth countries.
- ◆ Ensure that the Commonwealth fully participates in the debate concerning the post 2015 agenda and that human rights and the right to education is an explicit foundation for a new development and education framework.
- ◆ Set aside plans by the Commonwealth Secretariat to divest itself of responsibilities related to education in the future, particularly in light of the fact that some Commonwealth countries still face the greatest challenges in achieving the MDGs on education. The plans should be replaced by a process of review and evaluation of current work within a time scale which allows for meaningful consultation with all stakeholders.

SECTION 2 – SPECIFIC AREAS OF FOCUS

Developing Respect and Understanding

We, Commonwealth teachers, recognise:

- ◆ The role of education in promoting respect and understanding throughout life.
- ◆ The need to develop a curriculum that promotes respect and understanding.
- ◆ The role of teachers in promoting positive attitudes towards diversity and equality.
- ◆ The importance of respect and understanding in reducing the potential for conflict.
- ◆ The responsibility of governments to ensure that all citizens have access to high quality public education appropriate to their needs supported by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and a series of international, multi-lateral instruments.
- ◆ The need to promote equality of opportunity and access to all levels of education. No-one should be disadvantaged because of perceived differences, including those based upon gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, faith, cultural or economic background, or personal characteristics.
- ◆ The need for school leadership to promote respect and understanding.

We call upon Commonwealth Ministers of Education to:

- ◆ Develop systems which recognise and address the specific needs of groups of children and young people in order to achieve equality, leaving no one

disadvantaged because of perceived differences, including those based upon gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, faith, cultural or economic background, or personal characteristics.

- ◆ Develop measures to ensure that the teaching workforce including school leadership is fully representative of the diverse communities in which schools are located.
- ◆ Involve educationalists, teachers and their unions in the development of a curriculum which promotes respect and understanding.
- ◆ Provide high quality teacher training to promote respect and understanding and a holistic development of the child.
- ◆ Ensure that those in school leadership roles are equipped with the skills, knowledge and resources to promote respect and understanding.

Privatisation in Education

We, Commonwealth teachers, recognise:

- ◆ That education is a human right and a public good and that governments have responsibility for its provision.
- ◆ That many governments, in the context of the global recession, are reducing public sector spending.
- ◆ That privatisation of education:
 - can result in there being less democratic accountability to the communities served by the education system
 - reduces the capacity of civil society and parents and communities in particular to influence educational processes and outcomes to ensure maximum public benefit
 - is driven by interests other than the public interest
 - increases inequity and lessens access to high quality public education
 - exacerbates the risks for children who are disadvantaged
 - threatens the achievement of MDGs and EFA goals
 - puts at risk the professionalism of teachers through the erosion of teachers' pay and working conditions and agreed and negotiated national standards.

We call upon Commonwealth Ministers of Education to:

- ◆ Demonstrate their commitment to providing education as a human right.
- ◆ Recognise that public spending on education is a priority, a national investment and a core component of sustainable development and democratic responsibility.
- ◆ Resist reliance on privatised provision and funding of education and, where such arrangements already exist, take steps to reduce and ultimately discontinue them.
- ◆ Provide an adequate revenue base to support high quality public education systems.
- ◆ Eliminate tax avoidance and tax evasion to provide revenue for public education.
- ◆ Spend at least 6% of national GDP on public education.

- ◆ Ensure that public education benefits from public resources.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

We, Commonwealth teachers, recognise:

- ◆ That ICT provides a rich and powerful resource for teachers to assist with the teaching and learning process.
- ◆ That access to hardware and software is highly variable across Commonwealth countries.
- ◆ That ICT is evolving fast and teachers are lifelong learners in ICT.
- ◆ That using ICT to its fullest potential requires improvements in teacher training, curricula, teachers' workloads and educational institutions' infrastructure.
- ◆ That effective use of ICT in education requires major investment in the professional development of teachers.
- ◆ That ICT cannot replace classroom teachers.

We call upon Commonwealth Ministers of Education to:

- ◆ Provide appropriate equipment throughout the education system to ensure that teachers can prepare pupils for life and work in a world increasingly dominated by technology .
- ◆ Invest in ICT as an innovative tool for teaching and learning.
- ◆ Provide adequate funding to ensure universal access to ICT
- ◆ Identify and address all infrastructure problems such as a lack of electricity.
- ◆ Develop and resource ICT policies which provide an entitlement to learning about and through ICT for all pupils.
- ◆ Provide ongoing professional development for teachers for pedagogical purposes in ICT as well as giving them technical training.
- ◆ Ensure that the increasing use of ICT as a tool for education does not increase the workload of teachers.

CONCLUSION

The Teachers' Forum has engaged in detailed and in depth discussion related to the 18th CCEM theme. The Teachers' Forum commends this statement to Ministers.

Adopted by the Teachers' Forum at the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, 30 August 2012, Mauritius