

**International Labour Conference
Geneva, 8 June 2011**

***Intervention in the General Debate
Bob Harris, Representative of Education International,
on behalf of Fred van Leeuwen, General Secretary***

President, distinguished delegates,

Education unions, and the trade union movement as a whole, are important pillars of democracy. States that do not recognize fundamental labour standards, such as the right to organize and the right to bargain collectively, allow a democratic deficit to emerge which, simply put, will back-fire. Across the Arab countries and Africa, legitimate aspirations voiced today through independent labour movements bring opportunities for empowerment, equity, dignity and democracy.

We in Education International remain, however, deeply concerned about recent developments in many places, including in the US and Europe, where social dialogue is receding. Budgetary constraints are being used to justify anti-union measures. When democratic freedoms become merely cost items, we may soon find ourselves all together at the bottom of a deep, dark pit. The threats to social cohesion are real. We ignore them at our peril.

Multiple crises – financial, food, energy and climate – have set back progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and the Decent Work agenda. Without sound policy, resources, and opportunities for people to participate in their own development through independent unions, many hundreds of million will remain trapped in grinding poverty and indignity.

The world needs a new era of social justice. Resourcing of quality public services for education and health and social protection is the way to break circles of poverty and injustice. Quality education is the basis of democracy and social justice, precisely because young people from all backgrounds, from working families, from minorities, have a chance through education to acquire the core competencies and values that they will need for success in life.

Education empowers. Education is part of the solution. Investing in people is smart strategy. Nations that want to build a sustainable recovery must invest in primary and secondary education, in vocational education and training to upskill workers, in Early Childhood Education, in Higher Education and Research, and in quality Teacher Education Programs.

All the key global institutions agree. But there is a big gap between words and action. We therefore place special importance on ILO's Sectoral Activities, which can help to close the gap. The sectoral dimension of ILO's work must be strengthened, as part of ILO's strategic contribution, enabling unions, employers and governments to confront their visions, analyses and strategies. One way forward is through Global Dialogue. Soon we hope to see the completion of the ILO Human Resources Toolkit of Good Practices for the Teaching Profession, which will be a practical tool for public and private employers and unions.

Education International, with 30 million members in 170 countries around the world, will continue to work closely with ILO, notably on the elimination of child labour, and we must step up work on the

scourge of youth unemployment. We will work with ILO on skills and training, and life-long learning, building on the base of Education for All. Statistics may show more children in school. But quality standards are falling, teacher autonomy and professional standards are declining.

Empowerment of women and girls

The empowerment of women and girls is critically important, and joint efforts with ILO are appreciated. We support efforts to mainstream gender issues through measures that act against discrimination in the labour market, combat violence against women, address gender pay gaps, gender stereotypes, promote equity for women and girls in employment and education. Recognizing the right of women to collective bargaining work and facilitate work life balance.

The proposed Convention and Recommendation on Decent Work for Domestic Workers will have a positive impact on women and child labourers. Challenges still lie ahead for ratification and implementation, but based on the willingness of the ILO's tripartite partners to adopt these instruments, we are optimistic.

Promoting equality applies to all citizens, women as well as men, and includes minorities and vulnerable groups. All have a right to dignity. The ILO also needs to take a stand against discrimination at work on the basis of sexual orientation.

Core labour standards

EI welcomes the discussion on the strengthening of labour administration and labour inspection systems. The discussion on the adaptation and adequacy of social security systems is also timely. These are important in the employment conditions for teachers, which are declining, as the most recent ILO/UNESCO report of Experts – CEART – exposed. In education we are seeing de-professionalization on a massive scale. Volunteers or unqualified persons on low pay are replacing qualified teachers. The payment of wages are delayed, collective agreements are unilaterally revoked.

In many countries, core labour standards are not fully applied for the teaching profession, or not applied at all. The last CEART report made it abundantly clear that it is time for action on conditions for teachers. Action by governments to engage with education unions through social dialogue is the way forward, said the report, which was applauded by all groups. Our education unions are ready to play their role as social partners. But what are governments, in particular, doing to implement its recommendations?

EI supports ILO's continued assertion of the strategic importance of the decent work agenda and the social dimension of globalization. EI, with other Global Unions, supports ILO's role as a place where governments, employers and workers can work together. And we strongly support ILO's role at the G20.

At the same time, all ILO's constituents have to do a much better job to implement and respect the commitments achieved here through tripartite dialogue. It is time to "bell the cat" over the game of blocking dialogue at the Commission on the Application of Standards. Governments and employers should stop this game. It does not serve the ILO. It does not serve people. Take Colombia: five more teachers killed this year, r 45 over the previous two years. The trend now is to put Resources before Rights. The government says it will clean up the financial situation, and then do what it can to implement rights. That is not acceptable. For nigh on 100 years, the ILO has been based on the idea that rights at work form part of the fabric of society. They provide a basis for peace at home and abroad. Rights are the very essence of this great institution. That is the basis for us coming together as representatives of workers, employers and governments. And that should never be forgotten.