

ITUC 2nd WORLD CONGRESS, Vancouver, 21-25 June 2010

Statement by Fred van Leeuwen, El General Secretary

President Sharan, Sisters and Brothers,

Thank you, Guy, for your outstanding introduction and for your excellent and challenging theme report. We share your analysis although it is not complete. We want to push it further. As we confront the latest phase in the crisis, we believe the ITUC World Congress should make a clear declaration in its priority strategies for global social justice, **a seventh priority** if you will. And that is the priority we must give to quality education for all children and public services in general.

As we have heard the experts say, the crisis is far from over. I understand that today, because of panic in bond markets and the cynicism of speculators, there is a rush to the exits. And as we speak, the public sector is facing the full brunt of it. Already thousands of teachers are being laid off in Central and Eastern Europe. By the end of summer, as schools resume, we are facing hundreds of thousands of lay-offs across the United States and Western Europe.

But this is not just about the jobs of our members. This is about major cuts in educational quality for millions of schoolchildren, young people and workers in need of retraining. This is about mortgaging their future.

Let it be clear. Investment in education is not the problem. It is the solution.

In the developing countries, we were making some progress towards the Millennium Development Goals on primary education for all children and equity for girls. But aid budgets in the OECD countries are down 30 per cent since the crisis began. So the rush to the exits is crushing resources for public services in the OECD countries **and** in the developing countries alike.

Members of Education International are on the frontline now. But, again, this is not just about job-losses in education. It is about the services which are fundamentally important to working families everywhere. It is about the prospect of social justice being destroyed. It is about the very fabric of democratic societies being threatened.

After listening carefully to Mr. Strauss-Kahn when he spoke to us yesterday, I still want to ask him: What is the point of bailing out speculators and failing to fund education for young people and training for workers? And should any of us be surprised when young people reject our talk of social justice and democracy and fairness, and social cohesion, and simply revolt? For a young person today, what is the

difference between a street corner hustler and a wheeler-dealer in the global economy? I'd like answers to those questions from Mr. Strauss-Kahn, and the IMF, and all our leaders at the G20 and the UN!

And I also want to challenge ITUC. I challenge **our** movement to mobilize around the principle of a strong public sector. We suggest that quality public education, quality public services be added as a seventh challenge, seventh priority in the resolution on the theme report.

Let us not forget that the basic building block of decent work, better quality of life and a greener economy starts in the classroom.

The defense of public services must be part of every intervention we make, every statement on behalf of the movement. The challenge is to link together all of our organizations, national and international, into a powerful and dynamic new movement able to withstand the forces that confront us.

Today is World Public Service Day. We **must** set an agenda for action. There is no time to lose.