



Global Response to Commercialisation of Education

JOINT STATEMENT

Uganda, 5th October 2016

Learners before profit: Teacher Unions and Civil Society unite to put an end to schooling the poor for-profit

This year's World Teachers Day theme: "**Valuing teachers, improving their Status**", is a reminder to all that qualified, well-supported well-respected teachers are at the heart of the achievement of free quality education for all.

According to Article XVIII of the Constitution of Uganda, the State "shall promote free and compulsory basic education." It also requires all non-state actors wishing to operate educational institutions to comply with "the general education policy of the country and maintain general standards."

The Education Act of 2008 emphasizes that "No person shall teach in any public or private school of any description unless he or she is registered as a teacher or licensed to teach under this Act." Regarding school facilities, buildings must be "inspected and approved by the appropriate authorities."

Sadly, many of these principles, which define the teaching profession and establish the foundation of quality education, have been disregarded by some private service providers including Bridge International Academies.

Bridge International Academies (Bridge) is a multinational chain of low-fee profit-making private primary schools targeting poor families in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, among other countries. In Uganda, Bridge has expanded rapidly since February 2015, with an estimated 12,000 fee-paying students in 63 schools.

The school chain has recently come under scrutiny over its failure to ensure basic/minimum standards in schools including the recruitment of qualified teachers. On 6th April 2016, the Permanent Secretary- Ministry of Education & Sports (MoES) of Uganda decided to 'halt the expansion' of Bridge citing concerns regarding the legality of these schools in violation of the Education Act 2008, due to: 'the quality of the infrastructure, teacher issues, methodology, curriculum among others.



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In August 2016, the Minister of Education and Sports announced the closure of Bridge schools due to the company's failure to meet the Government's educational and legal standards.

Bridge also fails in its mission to provide 'affordable' education for all children in Uganda. Families with an average household income have to expend up to 23 – 27% of their earnings just to send one child to a Bridge school for one year.

The expansion of Bridge is a manifestation of the growing commercialization and privatization of education in Uganda.

This commercialisation and privatisation of education represents one of the greatest threats to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals adopted in September 2015.

This threat has also been recognized by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. In March 2016, the African Commission expressed its deep concerns about the growth and lack of regulation of private schools in Uganda, which could be in violation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' rights. The African Commission expressed its worry that "the increase in the establishment of private schools could result in discrimination against children from low-income households".

Teacher unions and civil society therefore, call on the government to:

- Ensure compliance in relation to minimum national standards with respect to the provision of education. Registration of schools must be conditional on full compliance with minimum standards.
- Fulfil its obligations consistent with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4. By adopting the Sustainable Development Goals governments have committed to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Target 4.1 requires governments to *ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes*.



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- Fulfil its primary obligation to properly and adequately fund free quality education for all children regardless of the background. This is crucial to Uganda's future prosperity.

Signatories to the statement are:

1. National Chairperson, Uganda National Teachers Union (UNATU)
2. General Secretary, Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU)
3. Executive Director, Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda (FENU)
4. General Secretary, Kenya National Union of Teachers' (KNUT)/President Education International Africa Region
5. Chief Regional Coordinator, Education International Africa
6. General Secretary, South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU)/Vice President Education International
7. General Secretary, National Teachers' Association of Liberia (NTAL)
8. General Secretary Syndicat des Professeurs du Senegal(SYPROS) /Executive Board Member, Education International