

**Kuwait Teacher Society – 39th Educational Conference
Kuwait, 21-23 March 2010**

***Address by Fred van Leeuwen
General Secretary Education International***

Colleagues, Friends, Distinguished Guests,

1. It is an honour to address your Congress and to present to you the greetings of millions of teachers around the globe. Your organisation is a proud member of the Education International, which brings together more than 400 education unions in 171 countries together representing more than 30 million educators.
2. We are a professional association, a labour union, a human rights organization and a development agency in one. And as all of you know, there is a lot of work to do in each of these four areas – in your country, in the Middle East and in the world at large.
3. Education International is your voice, the voice of teachers and the education sector at all the major international agencies whose debates and decisions affect educators.
4. Education International is also about solidarity. We bring colleagues together, to share, to exchange, and to support each other. Through development programmes, we help to build the capacity of our member unions, both their trade union capacity, and their capacity to raise professional standards and help their members to become better teachers.
5. Today we live in a global community, and global agencies of international cooperation have ever more importance for our work – yes more in the 21st century than in the 20th century. At the same time, regional agencies are growing in importance too, for each region has its own specific challenges to address. So the task for a worldwide Global Union like Education International is to facilitate effective advocacy at each of these levels – global, regional and national.
6. I do not need reminding you that we also live in dramatic times. In the global community of the 21st century, we confront several major crises, all at the same time.
7. We have the global financial and economic crisis, which began in late 2008, and continues to impact on the education systems of many countries. No region, no country, can isolate itself from this crisis. More than 50 million people are thrown out of work worldwide and the World Bank says that up to 200 million more people will fall before the

- poverty line. Social justice in the world is going backwards, not forwards.
8. But this economic crisis comes on top of other crises – the food crisis in many developing countries, movements of refugees and migrants, conflicts between cultures, between nations, and last but not least, climate change. The threats are real.
 9. But it is also in times of crisis – even multiple crises like these – that new opportunities are created, that history is made. I strongly believe that quality education for all children and young people is part of the solution; and that together we can help shape a new global economy – built on a stronger foundation – based on the education, the skills and the capacities of citizens, based on equity and justice.
 10. Being a teacher means belonging to the most honorable of professions. But, unfortunately, in many countries being a teacher also means not being treated fairly, not being paid properly, and sometimes even living in poverty. It is not surprising that the world faces an unprecedented shortage of qualified teachers. In the coming years more than 10 million primary school teachers must be trained and recruited if we want to achieve quality education for every child on this planet (and to eradicate child labour for once and for all).
 11. We must remind our governments that the right to education is the right (of every child) to a qualified teacher.
 12. Education quality is more than a matter of teaching basic skills. In today's global community, it also means imparting democratic values, teaching tolerance; it also means making every student understand his or her own cultural identity while being aware of the diversity of cultures that make up the richness of humanity. Teachers (must) build bridges of understanding, like we in Education International are trying to build bridges between the teaching profession in the developing world and our colleagues in the so-called western countries. And you, the teachers of Kuwait, have a very important role to play in helping build that bridge.
 13. Your theme on preparing future teachers could therefore not be more timely.
 14. Teaching/Education is about providing children, young people and adults with opportunities to realize their potential, equipping them with the capabilities they need to participate fully in society, as economic actors, as citizens, as members of their communities. We, educators, have a strategic role in providing these opportunities and in developing such capabilities. For policy makers, there is now substantial research indicating that the quality of teachers and their teaching are among the most important factors in student outcomes. Countries need to have clear profiles of teacher competencies, derived from objectives

for student learning based on profession-wide standards and a shared understanding of accomplished teaching. And we - teachers' organizations - should play a major - if not decisive - role in developing these profiles.

15. [Teacher profiles should encompass strong subject matter knowledge together with 21st century skill and the methodologies to teach them, pedagogical skills in general, the capacity to work with a wide range of students and colleagues. To achieve this, they often do three things well: First, they make entry to the teaching profession selective. Second, they develop these teachers into effective educators, through, for example, classroom practice, teacher training continuing into the classroom, developing strong school leaders and enabling teachers to share their knowledge and spread innovation. Third, they ensure that every child is able to benefit from excellent instruction. Teachers are able to use data to evaluate the learning needs of their students, to consistently expand their repertoire of pedagogic strategies to address the diversity in students' interests and abilities, pro-actively to share methods and best practice with colleagues, and interact with others locally and globally – through student and teacher exchange programs, and international on-line projects.]

Education is one of the most important tools to achieve democracy, equality and social progress. We do not consider religious education to be in contradiction with those ideals. On the contrary, religious education could enhance those principles and help students to better cope with the complexities of human values and to practice these values in their adult lives. I commend KTS for its active engagement in the development of curriculum for this sometimes contentious subject matter.

16. Teachers' organizations are the guardians of the teaching profession; we expect them to develop, to set and to protect the highest possible professional standards. But teachers also need strong, independent and democratic organizations to help protect their rights and professional freedoms and to improve their terms and employment conditions.
17. I congratulate you on having made so much progress in both areas. We are aware that this is not an easy task to accomplish in a country, in a society, where independent trade unions are a relatively new phenomenon. We want to support you and help you deal with the sometimes quite difficult political circumstances in which you operate. We want to demonstrate to you that solidarity, international solidarity is not just a word, but a state of mind, a value, a mission if you will, that fuels our international teachers' movement.
18. There can be no doubt that the development of independent teachers' organizations in the countries of the Middle East will contribute

significantly to the democratic and political future of the region, as will the accomplishment of our ideal of quality education for all children.

19. To conclude, colleagues, let me stress that we are passionate about realising that ideal; that the key to quality education lies with present and future generations of qualified and dedicated teachers; and that investing in education is the best investment any nation can make in its own future. *You* are conveying that message to your government and reminding it of its moral obligation to increase the national education budget - it is important that we keep reminding our politicians of their responsibilities. *We* will do this in the international arena. And together we will be able to make a tremendous difference for our members, our schools, our students and our countries.

20. We will continue counting on you, while you can count on your International.

21. Thank you.