**Opening Address by Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe at the Education International Sixth World Congress, Cape Town**

22 July 2011

Programme Director;

Education International President Ms Susan Hopgood;

Premier Helen Zille;

Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande;

Minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshega;

Education International General Secretary, Mr Fred van Leeuwen;

Guests and Representatives from Fraternal Organisations, OECD and the World Bank;

Dear Delegates:

I am deeply honoured to welcome you to the Education International Sixth World Congress, an event which draws together educators from across the globe to try to tackle challenges in education so as to help bring about a better world.

We are indeed humbled by your decision to have this conference hosted by our country. In turn I trust that you will find our country and people warm and welcoming.

I am sure you have noticed since your arrival that our country is rich in cultural diversity with remarkable offerings in heritage, adventure, wildlife and tourism, among others.

Let me take liberties to invite you to sample some of these offerings on the sidelines of the conference in order to enrich your holistic experience of South Africa.

Programme director,

Two weeks ago I came across an inspiring story in the local press about a young lady, Thabisa Xhalisa, who was born in prison in 1983 during apartheid and was released, together with her twin brother, into the care of her 13 year old sister, who was a domestic worker at the time.

By the time she turned 13 Ms Xhalisa had become a domestic worker herself and had to take care of an unemployed mother as well as her siblings.

Today, this young lady has, despite these odds, managed to become a lecturer at the University of Cape Town and is a PhD candidate.

Needless to say that on the whole Ms Xhalisa’s experience of incredible human triumph over heavy odds made possible by access to public education is an exception rather than the rule.

I am aware that the world is teeming with boys and girls who are trapped in similar social conditions.

I am also aware that often such disadvantaged souls find it well-neigh impossible to scramble out of their disempowering social conditions.

Access to education to the majority of the world’s people trapped in miserable socio-economic conditions remains a key challenge around the world today.

I therefore believe that the deliberations of this Education International Sixth World Congress can provide insights and solutions as you exchange ideas and share knowledge of best practices in the various parts of the world.

Programme director,

I believe that the overall theme of the Education International Sixth World Congress– “Building the future through quality education” – is both timely and inspired. This theme is further broken down into sub-themes.

As a consequence I wish to delve into the four sub-themes around which this Congress is organised. They are as follows:

* Achieving Quality Education;
* Inclusive quality education for an inclusive society;
* Trade unions working together at national and international levels; and
* Future of education beyond the economic crisis.

For us in South Africa the sub-theme, ‘Achieving Quality Education’ speaks to the single most important test facing our education system.

Since the advent of democracy in 1994 we have successfully integrated the many racially and ethnically-based education departments into one unitary national system.

We have achieved near universal access to basic education, and are now seeking to roll out universal Grade R and pre-school provision, as well as expanding further and higher education.

But the quality of education leaves much room for improvement. With this in mind, our government has declared education a national priority. We have sought to work with teacher unions to address the problem.

In this regard, two initiatives stand out. Firstly, the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC): which is a joint initiative of the Department of Education and teacher unions – in which we recognise our separate and joint responsibilities and seek to hold each other accountable for carrying these out.

On the one hand we have requested teachers to commit themselves to be on time, on task, well-prepared and professional at all times.

As government we have said that our task is to provide a conducive environment for education to take place: to provide the necessary infrastructure, learning materials and coordination and to provide training and support to teachers.

The second initiative is the launch of the Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Developmentearlier this year anchored on the following 3 premises:

* That well-trained and motivated teachers are key to the delivery of quality education;
* That as government our role – amongst others – is to facilitate training and support for teachers on an ongoing basis; and
* That a vibrant teaching profession is one in which teachers themselves take responsibility for their own professional development.

As part of this process we have sought to promote a debate about professional accountability aimed at improving the quality of teachers so that in turn, learning and teaching and educational outcomes can be enhanced.

In all these areas, we believe that Education International and teacher unions in general have much to contribute.

We note the role played by teacher unions in developing the historic document: *‘Recommendations Concerning the Status of Teachers’* in 1966 – which did so much, not only to define the rights and conditions of teachers, but also to establish their responsibilities and professional status.

With this in mind, Education International’s ‘*Declaration on Professional Ethics’* adopted at the Third World Congress in 2001, raised the bar and committed teachers to the highest ethical and professional standards.

We are hoping that this conference will also make history by completing the work on the development of a universal policy on education.

Programme director;

The second sub-theme of the Congress - ‘Inclusive quality education for an inclusive society’ - speaks directly to the South African experience of racial segregation and current challenges we experience in building a unitary nation based on principles of unity, democracy, non-racialism, non-sexism and social and economic justice.

Of course in the modern world, I would like to think that there is no country where immigration and diversity is not an issue. Education and schooling have to develop to meet these challenges.

It goes without saying that only public education can fully address the challenge of diversity. In general, private education sector tends to cater for more privileged groupings.

So in defending and promoting public education we also equip ourselves to meet the challenge of embracing diversity and promoting greater social justice and equity.

I should also mention that recent South African studies indicate that school drop-out rates are higher amongst the rural poor and those living with disabilities.

These challenges have to be addressed if we are to build a truly inclusive education system and society.

In a similar vein, the advent of the HIV and Aids pandemic not only raises medical issues, but also raises the spectre of stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

As educators some of you are in daily contact with learners and families infected with and/or affected by HIV and Aids.

You have a special responsibility, both as role models and as educators, to educate around prevention and treatment, and to combat stigma.

I am aware of the policies and programmes adopted by Education International in this respect. We need to underline that the struggle against HIV and Aids continues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The third sub-theme, ‘Trade unions working together at national and international levels’, is best captured by the slogan: ‘an injury to one is an injury to all!’

The strength of a trade union lies in numbers and unity of purpose. Workers who are divided are unlikely to prevail during the bargaining process.

South Africa benefited from international solidarity – particularly from the trade union movement.

I am aware that many of the unions represented here today played this important role in the international anti-Apartheid struggle and we encourage you to continue providing concrete support to struggling trade unions around the world

For as long as there is ignorance, poverty, injustice, inequality and exploitation, for so long will international and trade union solidarity remain a necessity. In a rapidly changing world this is truer now, more than ever.

The history of Education International is instructive: over the last two decades you united four international teacher organisations and in the process produced the largest global union with over 30 million members.

We congratulate you on that achievement. The Education International unity process no doubt spurred on the search for a wider unity and the formation of the multi-sectoral International Trade Union Confederation four years ago, with an initial membership of 168 million.

Looking at the broader picture, previous resolutions and documents of Education International talk about the search for a new global order based on social justice, peace and security and a commitment to defending human rights.

We need to engage as governments and as civil society around what such a vision would mean – and the contribution of the international trade union movement would be key in any such debate.

The relatively weaker unions of the developing world at this stage have limited resources and owe a debt of gratitude to the established unions of the industrialised world for the material support and solidarity they have received.

Education International’s development cooperation programmes are testament to this. Still and all, I remain confident that this imbalance in resources will never be allowed to dictate the terms of solidarity within the international labour movement.

I am sure that I am preaching to the converted, but we need to keep this in mind: that solidarity is a two way street and all programmes need to be developed and implemented jointly on the basis of equality between the partners concerned.

Programme director,

The final sub-theme of this conference, ‘Future of education beyond the economic crisis’, is a timely reminder that we need to look forward. We need to plan, and we need a vision of a better future to come.

The 2008 financial crisis caused huge suffering in terms of unemployment and reduced public services for working people who had no hand in causing the crisis.

 As South Africa we took some solace from the fact that our financial system was relatively insulated from the problems in the USA and Europe – but even so over 1 million of our people lost their jobs causing hardship for them, and an estimated 6 million dependants.

For the developing world the ongoing crisis puts at risk the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and in particular the goal of Education for All.

Dear delegates,

In responding to the 2008 global financial crisis, the Education International resolved that “investing in education is part of solving the economic crisis”.

This remains an important approach to stimulating the economy and accelerating growth by ensuring adequate skills are in place when the economy ultimately recovers.

As it turned out South Africa’s thinking in this connection was in keeping with this broad approach, which suggested that as a country we should continue to prioritise education and refrain from cutting public spending, whilst greatly expanding the skills development programme.

Programme director,

As it is to be expected of a conference of this nature you will have to grapple with the question of using quality education to create an inclusive world society.

As workers and members of unions your interests in education naturally go beyond bread and butter issues and extend to social commitment of building a better world for all.

Therefore some of the questions you will have to respond to will touch on how we can use education to advance our struggle against poverty, exploitation and the complex and challenging inequalities in global relations.

We look to you as education workers, who have greater skills and knowledge above that of ordinary workers, to continue to enlighten us about ways to deepen the relationships and solidarity amongst workers of the world.

More importantly, we are hoping that you will discuss ways of equipping those you teach about the importance of international solidarity and the need for upcoming generations to struggle for a world free of exploitation and a world that places more value on the common good for humanity.

To achieve these ideals you will have to contemplate various educational approaches towards research, teaching and the content of your work.

I am confident in your burning desire to foster values that can produce learners who can consciously use their talents to contribute to the resolving of future political, economic and social problems confronting the world.

We hope that this conference will come up with strategic resolutions and active plans to ensure that through quality education we can develop global citizens who are aware of their interconnection with the rest of the world, who will embrace the cultural diversity, share and exchange knowledge and promote contact amongst nations.

In this connection, we cannot help but cite the memorable line by the late American education reformer Horace Mann that (I quote): "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of man (*sic*)..." (Unquote)

When we educate people we fit them out with the intellectual and cognitive tools and means not only to understand their world, their lived social experience, but also, to change it.

This, then, is the reason we have gathered here today and over the next two days to try to make education accessible to all the people of the world.

Once again, let me take this opportunity to welcome you to South Africa and wish you a fruitful conference.

I thank you