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Press Release

Take a stand for teachers and education unions on October 5th!

For the occasion of World Teachers' Day (WTD) on 5 October, Education International (EI), the largest global union federation which represents about 30 million educators worldwide, will continue to stress the importance of quality teachers and educational staff. It will also highlight the fact that more attention needs to be paid to education organisations as they are essential for any effective education system. Education trade unions help to shape a profession which will continue to attract and retain the "best and the most committed" individuals to become educators.

In 1994, UNESCO created World Teachers' Day, scheduled annually on 5 October, to commemorate the "vital contribution that teachers' organisations make to education and development". EI is proud to have been associated with the creation of this special day; however, EI believes that the original message of WTD has become diluted and that public recognition of the role of educators' organisations in education throughout much of the world is lower than it has been over the last 18 years since the day was created.

Opposition to independent education organisations, worker rights for teachers and to related public employees has always existed. Clearly, non-democratic governments have tried to quash any attempt to establish independent unions, both public and private. Even in some established democracies, teachers are denied their core right to strike and bargain collectively. Now, there is a growing movement against educators' organisations and public education that is fuelled by conservative political forces under the guise of education reform and innovation.

In times of economic and financial crisis, education funding competes even more with defence funding as the highest single ticket item in most national annual budgets, and educators' salaries account for a relatively high percentage of education budgets. When budget cuts are necessary, education becomes a prime target. In most countries, tough economic times result in cuts in education funding, increased classroom sizes, and increased tuition or school fees for parents. Often, education unions are blamed for trying to defend their members' interests. The slogan of many conservatives, and even some liberal political groups, is, "We can't afford unions;" but educators' unions around the world have initiated, or are cooperating with, projects to help improve the quality of teaching in their respective countries.

"Being a teacher means being a member of one of the most honourable and rewarding professions," said EI General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen. He regrets that "the current debate on what teaching is about has been narrowed down to neat measurable outcomes that are generally limited to what is testable via a series of multiple choice items ... and teachers alone are held accountable for the results".

He condemned: "Time spent on anything that is considered off topic and off track. Teachers became teachers to make a difference in kids' lives and to build better learning communities, and they are now leaving the profession in droves because often in too many places the profession is being reverted to a service delivery industry that is based on unfair evaluations and merit pay."

He went on to say that, "The 2015 deadline for reaching the Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is fast approaching and we still have 60 million children who are being deprived of a quality primary education, and there are at least three times that number who are being further denied access to quality secondary education. Also, an additional 2 million new teachers are needed to meet the EFA and MDGs by 2015."

The joint report between EI and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) [new report](#) addresses this in detail.

According to the European Trade Union Committee for Education (EI European region) surveys on the crisis affecting teachers¹ and teacher education², teacher trade unions in 22 European countries have experienced serious cuts in the education budget, since 2008 in a range of 2-55%. Unions reported cuts in teacher salaries (in 12 countries), in teaching allowances (16 countries), and freezing of salaries (19 countries). Around 30-40% of European member organisations have experienced that the crisis has had negative effect on the initial education, induction phase, and professional development of teachers.

"On this World Teachers' Day, we must take a stand for teachers", van Leeuwen underlined. "Now more than ever we need the communities we serve to be with us – the future of our profession, our schools and our students depend on it".

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¹ http://etuce.homestead.com/Crisis/Crisis_survey/Minisurvey_Crisis_-_ETUCE_ACTION_and_Campaign_framework_on_the_economic_crisis_eng.pdf

² http://etuce.homestead.com/Publications_2012/Results_of_ETUCE_Minisurvey_on_Crisis_affecting_teacher_education.pdf

Education International is the largest global teacher organisation representing over 30 million teachers in more than 170 countries and territories.