

# Remarks by Fred van Leeuwen, General Secretary of Education International

## AFT CONVENTION 2014

*Los Angeles, 11 July*

Greetings on behalf of Education International, your global professional union. Together, we are 30 million teachers and support professionals in 171 countries.

Special thanks is due to you and all of our AFT colleagues for standing with our colleagues in the Ukraine, in Israel and Palestine and in other parts of the Middle East, as well as in Nigeria, in Pakistan and Iraq, where, as we speak, extremist groups try to stop teachers from teaching and students from learning.

Only two weeks ago the president of the Iraqi Federation of Teachers was murdered by ISIS, together with his wife and children; the Nigerian group Boko Haram assassinated 177 teachers in the past five years and abducted their families; in Pakistan, the Taliban hunts after women teachers working in girls' schools. Several were shot in the past twelve months. Colleagues, these teachers were our front line soldiers. They stood up for the rights of their students. They refused to stop teaching and close their schools. But they paid the highest price. Please, colleagues, let us not forget them.

It is a stark reminder of the fact that there is no stronger antidote against extremism than education; and we know that there is no better medication against poverty and no stronger stimulus for economic and democratic development. No wonder we find ourselves at the center of a global debate, a vicious debate at times, about the future of our children, and the kind of society they will grow up in.

Clearly, your struggle for quality public education in America, your struggle against privatization, against the restriction of union rights and professional freedoms, "has gone global". Education has become a global business. I thank your President, Randi Weingarten, for guiding EI's work at the OECD, the cradle of PISA, the mother of all standardized testing. We are not against testing. We invented it. To help our students grow, not to break them down.

The attack on our profession, on our schools, on our unions has little to do with concerns about quality and excellence. Those attacks are, in my opinion, a (smartly) orchestrated effort (by some business corporations and conservative politicians) to create space for a multi-billion dollar education market, based on the illusion that education can be delivered more cheaply and efficiently by the private sector with fewer and less qualified staff, without tenure of course, and a liberal dose of one-size-fits-all on line programmes. Suffice it to say that this is not our vision.

We do not want education businesses to tell us what and how to teach, we do not want them to tell us if, when and how to grade our students. We do not want our profession to be dumbed down to an army of teaching pawns. No, we will not be "Pearsonized".

We want our governments to fulfil their duty. Our vision of public education is grounded in the understanding that education is a public good and a human right; that high quality, high professional standards and strong professional unions go hand in hand.

We are a profession of qualified teachers, who need the professional space to help our students to be creative, to think critically and acquire 21st century skills.

It is this vision, colleagues, that shapes our global Unite for Quality Education campaign in 171 countries. Together with AFT we are reclaiming the promise of public education internationally; the promise of quality teaching, quality tools and quality environments.

Our adversaries may spend billions to badmouth our unions, our profession and our schools, but we are on the front lines and we are united. No power can break the passion of 30 million educators determined to deliver on the promise made to every child, every student, the promise of peace, justice and quality education.

I bring you greetings on behalf of these colleagues. They are standing with you. Thank you, AFT, for standing with us.