**QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES:**

**ACTION NOW!**

**Geneva, 12-14 October 2010**

***Presentation of the Geneva Charter***

***for Quality Public Services***

***Susan Hopgood, President, Education International***

Colleagues, sisters, brothers,

This was always going to be an important conference. Three decades ago politicians like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan promoted a theme that oversimplified the issues confronting democracies like the UK and the US, yet resonated with voters. The theme was: *“lower taxes and reduce government”*. A generation of economists pushed the notion that the road to prosperity was to be traced by unrestricted free markets, and that governments should get out of the way. This neo-liberal political and economic agenda served powerful interests. Globalisation of the economy raised the stakes even higher.

For three decades, the notions of cutting back government and taxes, and giving free reign to the market, were the source of unrelenting pressure on public services around the world – in the OECD countries, but also in the developing countries. Through the 1990s we set targets, at the Earth Summit in Rio, the Social Summit in Copenhagen, the UN Women’s Conference in Beijing, the Education for All Summits in Jomtien and Dakar. With the turn of the century, these targets were brought together in the Millennium Development Goals. But these targets remained and still remain unfulfilled aspirations. Instead of helping developing countries to build quality public services able to deliver on targets and commitments, the OECD countries cut back on their **own** public services, **and** their support for development.

So it was important for us to get back to basics, to get off the defensive, to articulate again why public services have such an important role in each of our societies. It was important for us to move beyond the defensive battles we were fighting in each of our own nations. It was important to show what public services mean for working families, for ordinary citizens, in **all** sectors – private and public.

Then we had the financial crisis. We saw the consequences of the decades of deregulation. And what was already important for us to do, has become **critical**. Given the environment we face coming out of the crisis and the move towards “exit strategies” and “fiscal consolidation” it really has become critical, (and we all understand this), for us to take action now. Action **together**, and action **now**!

The **Geneva Charter** is our common basis for this joint action. The Charter aims to bring together on two pages the main ideas that underpin our concerted efforts to win back the debate.

This statement of core ideas, principles and values provides the basis for our joint campaign. Here in Geneva we have had input from a variety of sources. We have representatives from a broad range of unions from countries around the world.

What is striking for me is the amount of common ground in the presentations and interventions. The main ideas come through again and again. From the beginning we have insisted on the notion of **quality**. This is about quality of public services, and quality in people’s lives. It is about access for all. It is about prosperity and equity. It is about solidarity and social justice. And it is about democracy.

It is also about the value of the work we do – and in many sectors that work is done by women.

One of the key issues that comes through clearly from all our discussions is the increasing tendency of governments to step away from their responsibilities. This Charter states that governments must work together with all stakeholders to create a new vision of public services to all.

We must make it clear that governments have a primary obligation to provide quality public services for all. Everybody, irrespective of his or her background, has the right to basic services. No one, woman or man, girl or boy, should be denied opportunity. Only quality public services can ensure these rights, and provide these opportunities for all. This fundamental responsibility cannot be outsourced by governments to the private sector.

Our Charter also makes clear that quality public services are fundamental to democracy. And democracy means – beyond the right to vote – the possibility for citizens to have a say in decisions that affect their lives. Democracy encompasses institutions of good governance, the accountable exercise of executive authority, independent and fair institutions of justice. And need we say it again, democracy encompasses freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association.

So this Charter conveys a powerful message. At one and the same time, quality public services provide the foundation for sustainable growth, equitably distributed, **and** the means for justice, good governance, and the exercise of democracy.

The message going out to those tempted by the tea-party and similar populist or demagogic movements in other countries is: Can you imagine a society in which public services and institutions have been dismantled? Is the dictatorship of populists where we want to go? Look where movements like that got us in the last century!

We have a positive, pro-active, powerful message to convey. And sisters and brothers, those of us in this room and those we represent, have a key role to play. This is the final important message we convey in this Charter.

Global Unions and their affiliates pledge to work with the key actors – with governments and their international agencies, with civil society, and with business and enterprises – to pursue a new vision of quality public services in the 21st century.

Taking the Geneva Charter as the expression of our consensus, we will have the basis for our joint plan of action. That plan of action will set out the hugely ambitious but necessary task of taking the messages of the Charter to the community level. It is unprecedented for Global Unions to come together in this way, to assemble, in the same room, affiliates from so many sectors, from so many countries. We do so because the time is right, because we must rise to challenges of the globalised economy and the fall out of a global crisis, for millions and millions of our members, working families and citizens, in the communities of the world.

Coming together as advocates for good schools, for decent health services and social services, for clean water and proper sanitation, for effective fire and security services, for affordable utilities, for accessible communications and transport, for public media and culture, and good public administration and municipal services, we recognize the common thread that runs through **all** our advocacy. We set forth our shared values and principles. We state a common platform for joint action.

Colleagues, sisters and brothers, on behalf of Global Unions, I present to you the Geneva Charter on Quality Public Services.