



Joint Message on the occasion of World Teachers' Day 2017

Teaching in Freedom, Empowering Teachers

5 October 2017

Teachers are a critical foundation of every society's long-term strength -- providing children, young people and adults with the knowledge and skills they need to fulfill their potential.

But around the world, far too many teachers don't have the freedom and autonomy they need to do their vitally important jobs. That is why the theme of this year's World Teachers' Day – “Teaching in Freedom, Empowering Teachers” – reaffirms the value of empowered teachers and recognizes the challenges to their freedom encountered daily across the globe.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel. The 1997 Recommendation complements the 1966 UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers. Together, these instruments constitute the main reference frameworks on teachers' and educators' rights and responsibilities. Both instruments stress the importance of teacher autonomy and academic freedom.

Being an empowered teacher means more than having access to high-quality training and continuous opportunities for professional development, important as these are in themselves. It also means having the professional autonomy to make decisions in developing and organizing curricula and the freedom to choose the most appropriate methods and approaches that enable more effective, inclusive and equitable education. And it means being able to teach in safety and security during times of political change, instability, and conflict.

But in many countries, academic freedom and teacher autonomy are under pressure. For example, at the primary and secondary school levels in some countries, stringent accountability schemes have put enormous pressure on schools to deliver results on standardized tests, ignoring the need to ensure a broad-based curriculum that meets the diverse needs of students. Teachers are under increasing pressure to “teach to the test,” rather than use their autonomy to develop the holistic abilities of a learner.

Academic freedom is critical for teachers at every level of education, but it is especially critical for higher-education teachers, supporting their ability to innovate, explore, and remain engaged in up-to-date research. At the tertiary level, teachers are often employed on a fixed-term, contingency basis. This in turn can result in greater job insecurity, diminished career prospects, higher workload and lower wages – all of which can restrict academic freedom and undermine the quality of education that teachers can deliver.

Across all education levels, political pressure and business interests can curb the ability of educators to teach in freedom. Teachers living and working in countries and communities affected by conflicts and instability often face greater challenges, including rising intolerance, discrimination, and related restrictions on research and teaching.

As the world works together to realize the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals – particularly SDG 4 which envisions a world in which every child, youth and adult has access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities – we need to do more to protect and preserve the ability of all teachers to teach in freedom, and to provide all teachers with the resources and support they need to do their indispensable jobs.

This World Teachers’ Day, we appeal to governments and other partners across the education sector to commit to doing their part to build a highly skilled, valued and empowered education workforce – the surest path to providing a quality education to every girl, boy, woman and man.

This means securing decent working conditions and fair wages for all teachers including at the tertiary level. It means providing teachers with training and development. It means increasing the number of quality teachers, especially in those countries with high numbers of untrained teaching personnel. It means removing

unnecessary restrictions on research and teaching and defending academic freedom at all education levels. And it means demonstrating once and for all that the status of teachers in society must be commensurate with the impact teachers have on the strength of society and the advancement of humanity.

This World Teachers' Day, join us in empowering teachers to teach in freedom so that, in turn, every child and every adult is free to learn – to the benefit of a better world.

Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO

Guy Ryder, Director-General of ILO

Anthony Lake, Executive-Director of UNICEF

Achim Steiner, Administrator of UNDP

Fred van Leeuwen, General-Secretary of Education International