## Special Congress Edition

### TEACHERS OF THE WORLD UNITE IN BERLIN

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Teachers fight for social justice

By Thulas Nxesi, EI President

Quality education and social justice: These are the two great goals that unite all teachers and education workers who are active in Education International and committed to its principles and values. More than 1,700 of us will participate in EI’s 5th World Congress in Berlin 22-26 July 2007. It will be an historic gathering of 383 unions that represent 30 million educators worldwide.

We all know that together we are stronger and, now more than ever, we need our collective strength to meet the threats facing public education everywhere.

Public education is a fundamental cornerstone of democracy, without which no society can claim to be truly democratic. But the globalization of neo-liberal ideology with its agenda of cost-cutting, destabilization and privatization has drastic implications for the universal right to learn.

It is clear that we must intensify our fight for the UN Millennium Development Goals that pertain to education, especially the worldwide campaign to achieve free quality Education for All by 2015.

We believe passionately in the inherent right of every child to a quality education — no matter his or her gender, colour, language, ethnicity, religion, abilities or disabilities. We urge governments everywhere to make the necessary public investments in strong and stable public education systems to meet the needs of every student. Without adequate resources, no teacher – no matter how gifted, experienced or well-trained – can provide a truly high quality educational programme.

All over the world our colleagues’ ability to provide quality education for every child is limited by harsh realities: war and conflict, flagrant rights abuses and other injustices, pandemics and poverty. Millions of teachers worldwide earn below the poverty line.

In Africa, where I come from, the main obstacles to quality EFA are poverty and AIDS, the most devastating pandemic in human history. Together, we must intensify the fight against HIV and AIDS because the virus is decimating populations across Africa, and the teaching force is not immune from its ravages. In fact, AIDS has become the main cause of death among teachers in several countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

But EI aims to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS through Education For All. Our teachers and their unions have come together to fight the pandemic and the stigma of the disease, to support one another, and most importantly to support the millions of children orphaned and grieving because of AIDS.

The urgency is increased by the fact that the world now faces a grave teacher shortage, with at least 13 million more qualified teachers needed in developing countries and 5 million more in industrialized countries if we are to achieve EFA by the deadline of 2015.

For more than a decade, EI has worked on research, policy development, advocacy, publicity and training on HIV and AIDS prevention. Our EFAIDS programme now is running in 35 countries of Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean, and has trained 150,000 teachers in...
quality education,

40,000 schools to date. We are saving lives and preventing illness. Teachers care, and we are making a difference!

As the global voice of teachers, it is also EI's role to speak up for their human and trade union rights. In Germany, where we will hold our Congress, teachers have the right to freely organize themselves into the democratic unions. Similarly across the rest of Europe and in North America, teachers can safely and successfully bargain collectively and advocate for education policies that provide for good teaching and learning conditions.

But in many other countries, being a trade unionist means putting your life on the line. At EI we work to defend the rights of those who are willing to risk everything to give the gift of education to the next generation.

We honour many courageous colleagues who are taking risks to defend the educational and labour rights we hold dear. Those who dare to teach girls in Afghanistan, the Iranian teachers who have taken to the streets, the teachers of Ethiopia who carry on despite years of government repression, the teachers of Colombia, one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a trade unionist. According to the Colombian Human Rights Commission, a total of 33 teacher trade unionists were assassinated in 2006 alone!

To show our respect for the legacy of these colleagues, we must hold to account those responsible and shine the spotlight of international attention on these atrocious rights abuses.

The EI Barometer, to be launched at Congress, is a comprehensive piece of research that examines education quality and human and trade union rights in every country of the world. The Barometer, and its accompanying online database, will provide a unique and powerful tool for education researchers, policy developers and human rights defenders.

There will be present at the Congress many teacher activists from these countries who have profound and moving stories to tell of their struggles to affirm their rights as professionals and as unionists, and to assert their students' rights to education.

Many other critical issues facing educators worldwide will be raised at the Congress and international experts will be there to share their knowledge and expertise. On July 23, the entire day will be devoted to dozens of seminars and round tables on a vast range of educational and political topics including:

- Rights of the child
- OECD and UNESCO policies and research
- Teacher migration and brain drain
- Role of education unions in combating discrimination
- Education for peace and social justice
- The value of early childhood education
- Prevention of child labour

Teachers have a key role to play in educating for peace in times of intolerance. Many people talk about Muslims when they speak of religious intolerance, but there is fundamentalism among Christians and other religious communities too.

Last year EI and the World Confederation of Teachers, a Christian body, took the final significant steps to join up and create one of the world's largest labour bodies. It's a very positive development, but an important question remains: Now that we are achieving unity at the international level, how do we promote unity at the local level? There are still deep divisions within some national and regional contexts, and the teacher trade union movement needs to reduce that fragmentation.

EI strives to speak for educators everywhere, whether they work in one-room schools in remote villages or large institutions in cosmopolitan cities. In the end, it comes down to our commitment to the children, and to educating them for active participation as global citizens.

A child's eyes light up with the flash of new understanding, young voices soar in a choir, a junior scientist finds the joy of discovery. Every day teachers and students are learning together, often despite great odds. I salute you all!
Barometer rising
Human and trade union rights at risk

By Nancy Knickerbocker

More than 200 years after the official abolition of the slave trade, 100 years since women first won the right to vote, and 60 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, millions of children and adults around the world are still denied such fundamental rights in school and society.

“We tend to think we’ve got rid of bonded and slave labour, but it is still there in virtually every country,” says Sheena Hanley. “Slavery is back, and it’s back with a vengeance.”

Hanley is author of the 2007 edition of EI’s Barometer of Human and Trade Union Rights, a comprehensive analysis of the quality of education and the respect (or lack thereof) for human and labour rights in every country recognized by the United Nations. A distinguished teacher and trade unionist who has served as President of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation and as a Deputy General Secretary of EI, she spent more than two years researching and cross-checking multiple sources of information to compile the most detailed Barometer yet. In addition to looking at early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education, this year’s Barometer explores issues including academic freedom, gender equality, special needs students, refugee and minority children, and child labour.

“What really struck me was the strong link between who is under-represented in government and whose rights are violated throughout a society,” Hanley said. Take women, for example.

Even though the Dakar goals aimed to eliminate gender inequality from primary education by 2005, it still persists around the world. Violence against women and girls is endemic in industrialized and developing countries, and human trafficking is on the rise. Women and girls are most often sold into the sex trade or domestic service, while men and boys are usually trafficked into hard labour. In both cases, “trade unions need to take a strong stand.”

Is there any good news? Yes, indeed. “Some countries are making heroic efforts. Enrolment is up, they’re providing scholarships for girls, they’re providing school meals, they’re helping AIDS orphans, building dorms for them, and so on. Still, these are very small initiatives in the overall scheme of things.”

One very positive development in 2006 was passage of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled, the first human rights convention of the 21st Century and a tremendous victory for champions of inclusive education. “In some developing countries almost 90% of handicapped children are not in school,” so it’s much-needed, Hanley said. The next step is to create the national debate to get member states to ratify this new convention.

Another useful feature of the Barometer is that it identifies which of the human and labour rights conventions each country has ratified – or not. With its on-line data base, the Barometer offers teachers, education researchers, journalists, students and other concerned citizens a powerful research tool.

Hanley noted progress in India, even though the caste system remains a powerful obstacle to equity in education. Tanzania also shows real commitment to positive change.

“The Tanzanians don’t have a lot of money, but they are really trying to provide quality education, including for refugee children,” she said. By contrast, Australia has significantly more resources for education, yet school doors are closed to refugee children.

It’s difficult to find solid information on children with special needs and minority children, Hanley said. “They are almost invisible.” The situation for indigenous children is “appalling,” both in rich and poor countries. “In Canada, for example, the situation is desperate on many [First Nations] reserves. We have not come to terms with how to educate
In a landmark decision that could have international implications, the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that collective bargaining rights are protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In a stunning reversal of earlier rulings, the Court found that a law passed by the British Columbia provincial government in 2002 trampled on the rights of health care workers, in particular their right to freedom of association.

“Recognizing that workers have the right to bargain collectively as part of their freedom to associate reaffirms the values of dignity, personal autonomy, equality and democracy that are inherent in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms,” the judges said.

EI has taken two complaints to the International Labour Organization on behalf of its Canadian affiliate to protest similar legislation imposed at the same time on public school teachers and education workers. The British Columbia Teachers’ Federation intervened in this case and its arguments played a substantial role in the court’s precedent-setting decision.

“In British Columbia, collective agreements negotiated in good faith by school boards and teachers were stripped of many clauses by provincial legislation,” said Winston Carter, President of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation. “Teachers in other Canadian jurisdictions have faced stripping of negotiated rights and contracting out as governments have interfered in the bargaining process. This Supreme Court ruling will protect teachers from such extreme uses of power.”

The ruling means that more than 8,000 sacked health-care workers could get their jobs back, and the provincial government is facing a potential compensation bill of as much as $1 billion.

“It is a tremendous victory for workers across Canada because it applies not only to British Columbia but to all governments at all levels. As a result we now expect governments everywhere to abide by both the letter and spirit of this ruling,” said James Clancy, President of the National Union of Public Employees.
Raquel Castro and Samuel Morales

Courageous Colombians defend rights

“Dignity and intellectual freedom transcend, like a phoenix, the bars and cells of repression and state tyranny.”

These words of hope and defiance flew out of Samuel Morales’ prison cell in an open letter to supporters around the world and in his native Colombia, the most dangerous place to be a trade unionist.

A former teacher in a one-room rural school and regional president of the Colombian Trade Union Confederation (CUT), Morales was captured along with Raquel Castro, an activist with the Teachers’ Association of Arauca, on 5 August 2004 after a military operation in which they witnessed government soldiers shoot and kill three other trade union activists.

Morales and Castro were convicted of “rebellion” in November 2006, despite serious doubts about the reliability of evidence against them. Amnesty International has expressed concerns that they may not have received a fair trial, especially since neither accused had a lawyer or was even aware the trial had occurred. Morales is appealing the conviction.

Both Castro and Morales were elected officials of the CUT from Arauca, an oil-rich region in north-eastern Colombia where indigenous people and peasants have suffered human rights abuses by right-wing paramilitaries and have been uprooted from their lands by multinational oil companies. Their only “crime” has been involvement in a peaceful democratic CUT campaign to protect the environment and safeguard their community.

While in prison, Castro was subjected to psychological torture, such as mock execution and being bound hand and foot and thrown into a helicopter with the bodies of her three murdered colleagues. Conditions for both prisoners were harsh, with fears for their lives being the daily reality. Nonetheless, both continued to teach and advocate for human rights while in jail. Castro also writes poetry from prison.

Morales was released on 28 April 2007 but, as of press time, Castro remains incarcerated in the political prisoners’ wing of Bogotá Women’s Prison. Neither activist is expected to be able to attend the World Congress in Berlin to receive the Human and Trade Union Rights Award.

While Morales’s release is welcome, he and his family continue to be at high risk of attack by paramilitaries who have previously threatened them. Education International joins Amnesty in calling on the Colombian authorities to ensure the safety of both teachers and their family members.

Colombia has one of the worst human rights records in the world, but remains a major recipient of UK taxpayer’s money and British Petroleum is implicated in the abuses. For these reasons, UK trade unionists have been at the forefront of campaigns to defend their Colombian brothers and sisters.

Amnesty International estimates that 4,000 trade unionists have been assassinated or “disappeared” in the past 20 years. The Colombian Human Rights Commission lists 33 teacher trade unionists killed in that country last year alone.

In honouring Raquel Castro and Samuel Morales, EI also honours the thousands of other teachers and trade unionists who have paid with their freedom and even their lives for union principles, social justice and quality education for every Colombian child.

By Nancy Knickerbocker
Ernestine Akouavi Akakpo-Gbofu

El honours a pre-school teacher and creator

Pre-school teacher, trade unionist, educational game creator and author: small wonder that the Albert Shanker Education Award should go to this multi-talented Togolese woman!

Interviewed after being told that she was to be honoured, Ernestine Akouavi Akakpo-Gbofu congratulated all her colleagues “in this noble profession of teaching” and urged them “to stay united in Education International.”

“We are the ones who instil values in the generations of tomorrow. For us to fail in our weighty responsibility may put the future of humanity in jeopardy,” she said.

Surprised and delighted, she thanked the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats de l’Éducation du Togo and its sister organisation, the Fédération des Syndicats de l’Enseignement du Burkina Faso, for putting her name forward.

As the daughter of teachers and trade unionists who were her constant role models, she felt her vocation very early on. And as the eldest of a large family, she often had to help take care of the younger children.

In 1981, young Ernestine became a teacher. Having observed with other colleagues that “there was no one to champion the children in our care and pre-school teachers,” she worked to help set up Togo’s national pre-school teachers’ union, the Syndicat National des Educateurs du Préscolaire du Togo (SNEPS-TOGO) in 1994.

As a trade union activist she was elected General Secretary of SNEPS at its founding congress, then General Secretary of FENASYET in 2002, and a member of the WCT coordinating committee in 2005.

Akakpo-Gbofu brought 26 years’ experience to bear in helping pre-school teachers to produce and use educational games to develop children’s nascent personalities. Her teaching materials were so popular that she won commissions from UNESCO. Her works have often been exhibited at cultural events and seminars.

One of her books, La chèvre vaniteuse, won the 1992 children’s literature prize awarded by the Agence de la Francophonie. She draws her inspiration from the society that surrounds her and this book shows how ludicrous “any girl who marries an old man from motives of power or greed” can be.

The death of a friend infected by HIV/AIDS prompted her to write La sorcière et le SIDA to help tackle the pandemic. This as yet unpublished novella aims to inform children and their parents about the different ways of contracting HIV and to dispel the belief that “it is not germs or viruses that kill Africans, but sorcerers and witches.”

She also calls on African women “to set up writing workshops and create books that speak to children’s sociocultural environments.”

“We women,” explains Akakpo-Gbofu, “are guardians of our traditions, and have to look into our own customs for games that can be educational and instructive for the majority of these children, because play is children’s main activity and a powerful educational tool.”

A forceful advocate of women in positions of responsibility, she has also moderated a series of training sessions on women and leadership; “to help women trade unionists develop self-confidence and put themselves up for decision-making positions.”

When asked about the key challenges for education in Togo and Africa, she unhesitatingly points to the desperate shortage of quality teachers, learning materials and classrooms.

Finally Akakpo-Gbofu emphasizes the importance of girls’ education, “It saddens me that in the 21st Century, thousands of young girls are being denied education because of their parents’ poverty.”

“This discrimination is part of the reason for the under-development of our states,” she laments.

By Claude Carroué
Teachers expand struggle against stigma

By Delphine Sanglan

Last December an extraordinary event took place in Nairobi. On the surface it was just another meeting, but underneath was a fundamental change in attitude. The teacher representatives who came from six East and Southern African countries on that day were HIV positive and they were actively seeking to work with their unions, ministries of education, UN agencies and international NGOs to help fight the most deadly pandemic in human history.

The action of the African unions in reaching out to teachers living with HIV and AIDS is only one example of the many ways in which Education International’s EFAIDS programme is maturing. In 2006, EI began a promising five-year stage of the new EFAIDS programme, which at present involves 46 teacher unions in 35 countries. To date the work has been mainly focused on Africa, but now is expanding in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The key working areas in the EFAIDS programme are: policy development, training, advocacy, publicity, and research. In the last year the programme has expanded thematically to include issues such as gender dynamics, stigma and discrimination against HIV positive people, greater involvement of those living with HIV, and advocating for comprehensive pre- and in-service training on HIV/AIDS for teachers.

Recent experience in Honduras provides a good illustration of the rapid progress that can be made when teachers’ unions unite against the common enemy of AIDS. Due to the high incidence of HIV and AIDS in Honduras, the five teachers’ unions recognised the urgent need to act, and act together. Within only two months of their first meeting, they had formed a national committee that brought the issue forward to all union congresses. Now they are working jointly on inclusion of HIV and AIDS prevention in the national curriculum. Together they hold a great deal of potential to step up the response to AIDS in their country.

The Education Development Center, EI’s partner in the EFAIDS programme, has developed two new tool kits for teacher unions. The first entitled “Building a gender-friendly school environment”, is aimed at creating healthy, safe schools. It sets out to challenge and change negative gender stereotyping, and to promote equal opportunities for girls and boys to develop a healthy gender identity and complete a quality basic education.

The second tool kit is “Inclusion is the answer - Unions Involving and Supporting Educators Living with HIV”. Here the emphasis is on eliminating stigma and discrimination against teachers living with HIV, benefiting from their experience and knowledge, supporting them and involving them in all union activities so that the unions may learn from them as well. Teachers living with HIV and AIDS must be able to count on their unions as a strong platform for advocacy, and be able to use their negotiating strength to ensure their needs are met.

In Kenya and in Uganda, where 25% of teacher deaths are attributed to AIDS, the national unions recently conducted studies on HIV positive teachers. Researchers for the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) found that: “Stigmatisation is the most common problem for teachers infected with HIV/AIDS, followed by lack of support from colleagues and a heavy workload.” Similarly, the Uganda National Union of Teachers (UNATU)’ study states that: “Discrimination and stigmatisation of teachers with AIDS discourages them from attending school, even if they feel strong enough to teach.”

Both studies recommend that teachers living with HIV should have prompt access to care, services and treatment. Julius Kisakye, a member of the Ugandan Teachers Anti-AIDS Action Group, notes that this is in the best interests of teachers and students alike.

“Every day a teacher spends in line to pick up ARVs [anti-retroviral treatment] is a day that learners will go without education,” Kisakye says. He is calling for coordinated action between ministries of health and education to ensure that strong HIV and AIDS policies are implemented.

Although the road ahead is long, one more milestone has been achieved in getting teachers unions in Africa to work with HIV positive teachers. It is hoped that their example will be followed and their policies benchmarked by teachers’ unions around the world.
Standard world maps are drawn based on a single variable: land mass. But what happens to our view of the world when a map is drawn based on a different variable? Child labour or HIV prevalence, for example? Then we see radical changes to the familiar outlines of countries and continents.

Factor in “girls not in primary school,” and India swells like a big yellow balloon while the Americas shrink pencil-thin. Deep global inequities become starkly visible, but that’s only part of the unsettling appeal of the 366 striking colour maps available on: www.worldmapper.org

Known as “equal area cartograms,” they are unique in that they resize each territory according to the particular variable being mapped. They portray all 200 territories of the United Nations, covering about 99.99% of the world’s population. They illustrate different variables ranging from Access (to health, education and other services) to Zoos (species therein).

It’s the brainchild of Prof. Danny Dorling, who leads the Social and Spatial Inequalities research group in the Geography department at the University of Sheffield. In cooperation with Mark Newman, a professor of physics and computer systems at the University of Michigan, they are re-envisioning planet Earth.

Indeed, their web site is sub-titled: “The world as you’ve never seen it before!”

The Worldmapper team uses a wealth of data and a special computer program to create their maps, which are always fascinating and sometimes surprising. Good news for teachers is that each map links to an educational poster with a higher-resolution map and extra information, designed to be printed out.
Child labour targeted

By Donatella Montaldo

Freeman and other former child labourers speak out at the European Parliament.

His name is Freeman, but he has worked in bonded labour since he was five years old.

Fortunately his days of slavery are over, but latest ILO figures report that hundreds of millions of other youngsters like him are still trapped in child labour.

"Now I have started my education and I want to become an architect. Education has given me freedom of speech. Please, keep your promises," he said.

Freeman was one of six former child labourers who appealed to world leaders at the European Parliament on 2 May 2007, at one of the most critical education funding conferences in recent years. Sadly, child labourers and students and teachers and parents around the world were sorely let down.

Kailash Satyarthi, president of the Global March Against Child Labour, gave an impassioned plea on behalf of the 218 million victims of child labour, and especially the 77 million who have no access to school at all – two thirds of whom are girls.

"Education is vital to all rights," Satyarthi said. "It is vital to health, to reducing HIV and AIDS. It is vital to escaping poverty and contributing to the benefit of the society. We can't achieve any of the Millennium Development Goals without education."

In a recent interview, Satyarthi said that "free, quality, meaningful and compulsory education is one of the most effective and sustainable strategies for the eradication of child labour." Its benefits are preventive, curative and rehabilitative, he said.

"These children are at work because they are a form of cheap labour and they can be exploited easily... They are deprived of a precious childhood and later face an insecure future as unemployed adults," he said.

World Day Against Child Labour, 12 June, is a crucial day in the calendar for child labourers, teachers and their unions, and the international community. This year's theme was dedicated to eliminating child labour in fields and farms.

Harvest for the future: Agriculture without child labour is the title of a new publication brought out by EI and the ILO, through the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). It provides current facts and ideas teachers can use to support the growing movement to tackle child labour. The booklet contains exercises in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. We hope members will find this a useful tool to increase knowledge about child labour, facilitate the discussion within unions, and provide practical exercises for classroom use.

Harvest for the future is available at www.ei-ie.org/childlabour
Another new and relevant EI brochure is *Child Labour: Quality education is the right response*. It explains EI’s overall strategy and the link between child labour, the EFA initiative and HIV/AIDS prevention. It is available in English, French and Spanish at:  [www.ei-ie.org/child-labour](http://www.ei-ie.org/child-labour)

Kinshu, age 12, India

“I have been liberated from my work as a domestic child labourer, and now I am going to regular public school. In school I have learned about my rights, so now I know how to speak out.

“Political leaders, please don’t make any more promises. Just implement the ones you have already made so children like me can fulfil their dreams.”

> Teachers’ rights

**Schools are key to post-war peace**

*By Wouter van der Schaaf*

“T**here is a key role for the education sector in building a society characterised by social justice and good citizenship.” So says Memunatu Pratt, a lecturer on Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Freetown in Sierra Leone, a country torn apart by civil war for more than a decade.

In the wake of civil conflict, educators must pose crucial questions and seek answers to prevent tragedies from recurring, Pratt said. “Why did people behave the way they did? Why were good governance and recognition of social justice almost completely absent from this country for so long?” she asks.

Rebuilding after war means psychological as well as physical reconstruction, she said. “The school is the social hub to train youngsters about good citizenship and social justice.” However, the teachers who are able to get training in peace education programmes often cannot implement them because of overcrowded curricula and resistance from heads of school, she said.

> Teachers’ voices are powerful

*By Fred van Leeuwen*

I**n today’s media-saturated world, it is often difficult for the voices of educators to be heard. Indeed, many governments seek to silence teachers. Why? Because our voices are powerful! When teachers question injustice, when they advocate for their rights and those of their students, and especially when they organize themselves into unions, teachers demonstrate skills and knowledge that can be transformative.

The universal story of teaching and learning is political as well as pedagogical; how we choose to nurture the intellect of the emerging generation illustrates, in a fundamental way, a society’s priorities for the future. Despite the many obstacles, now more than ever teacher trade unionists must speak out loudly and clearly. There is too much at stake for the future of democratic public education, and the life chances of hundreds of millions of children depend on access to free, quality schooling. All of which is why it is so important for Education International and its affiliates to raise a strong collective voice in the global dialogue on education. With your support, we certainly intend to do so!

Pakistan: Extremism threatens girls’ schools

At least four girls’ schools in the North-Western Frontier Province of Pakistan have been bombed over the past 12 months, and many others have received threats in letters or telephone calls, according to IRIN, the Integrated Regional Information Network of the UN.

South Africa: Teachers join public sector strike

El President Thulas Nxesi, who also serves as General Secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers Union, led SADTU’s 230,000 members out on strike on 1 June. Along with thousands of other public sector workers, the teachers were demanding better wages. By press time, the unions had not decided whether to accept the government’s final offer, which included a 75% pay rise.

Ethiopia: Tortured teachers re-arrested

Three members of the original Ethiopian Teachers’ Association are in prison after the latest attacks against their union. Tilahun Ayalew, Meqcha Mengistu and Anteneh Getenet were detained in December 2006 and tortured until their release on 22 March 2007. However, their freedom was brief. Ayalew disappeared on 28 May after learning that security agents were coming to re-arrest him. Mengistu and Getenet were re-arrested on 30 May and Wolde Dana was arrested on 4 June. El urges affiliates to help stop the repression of teacher trade unionists in Ethiopia. For how you can help, see the EI web site under Urgent Action Appeal.

Richest nations break their promises

“Keeping Our Promises on Education,” the most significant donor conference on education in five years, took place in Brussels on 2 May. It was co-convened by Louis Michel, EC Development Commissioner, Gordon Brown, then-Chancellor of the UK, and Paul Wolfowitz, former president of the World Bank.

They invited education ministers and representatives of EI, NGOs, and others to a gathering that was expected to be the fulfilment of years of promises from the G8 countries about their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals.

The Global Campaign for Education brought together young activists from all over the world to speak from their own experience about the urgent need to achieve Education for All.

However, despite the eloquence of the children and other civil society voices from across the globe, the G8 donors failed to meet their fair share of the $16 billion annually that will be needed to achieve quality Education for All.

The Global Campaign particularly singled out the United States, Germany and Japan as falling far short of the 0.7% of GNI needed in overseas development aid to meet the EFA goals.

For more information on the urgent need for increased international funding for education and an assessment of the rich countries’ performance in investing their fair share, visit: www.campaignforeducation.org

Brigitte, Colombia

I worked for eight years as a street vendor with my sister, selling bread and snacks. Now I am able to go to school because a teacher paid my school fees. I am so happy to be in school. I hope all of the children of the world will be in school one day.
Just imagine 5,000 Indian students, teachers and parents all joining hands together to form one long human chain of hope and determination to achieve education rights now.

That major demonstration was only part of the massive worldwide mobilization for Global Action Week, 23-29 April. EI affiliates on every continent mounted campaigns that displayed great energy and creativity to capture public and media attention, and to put quality Education For All at the centre of the national debate.

Campaigners in some countries had tremendous success. In Korea, for example, Global Action Week was the culmination of a long campaign to ensure education rights for disabled people; the legislation was passed on 30 April.

In Ghana, government and civil society are working together on Education for All. Education officials participated in Global Action Week events, praised the work of the national coalition for EFA, and called on civil society to help implement the national action plan.

In Argentina, Niger, Kyrgyzstan and DRC, as well, the week involved thousands of participants and all education stakeholders including schools, teachers’ unions, national and international NGOs.

In Albania, the teachers’ unions have succeeded in making Global Action Week a major national story, with extensive media coverage of activities organised in many cities. As a result, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to quality Education For All.

In other countries, where such partnerships do not yet exist, the week provided opportunities for unions to raise awareness about critical education issues.

In Lebanon, the union met with government to deliver a report on Children left out of the education system.

In Liberia, media reported on the union’s sharp criticism of the government for spending too much on debt repayment while many citizens are denied their constitutional right to education.

In Ivory Coast, teacher trade unionists held a news conference to denounce the severe drop in enrolment since the beginning of the war and the government’s inaction on the national plan to achieve Education for All.

In countries such as Finland, Canada, the UK and the USA, the focus was on solidarity with children deprived of an education. Unions provided their members with information and lesson plans, and also lobbied their governments for increased development aid.

Colourful activities involving tens of thousands of children, adult activists and politicians at all levels took place in Netherlands, Sweden and Spain, where they also made human chains to symbolize their unity in the struggle for quality education for all children worldwide.

Organizers everywhere were pleased that the campaign has gained new visibility and the global movement for Education For All is gaining a new momentum. Perhaps most important, children could make their voices heard.

“My students have become passionate about the cause of Education for All,” said teacher Louise Miller, who brought four of her students from the UK to lobby at the European Parliament in Brussels. She said that an exchange program with a Kenyan school was a powerful learning experience.

“They feel very strongly the injustice of it when kids in the UK take education for granted while their friends in Kenya cannot,” Miller said. “It’s a life-changing experience.”
The latter range from killing friends and members of their own families, to dismembering bodies and drinking human blood. This shocking statement comes from the latest UNESCO report Education under attack: A global study on targeted political and military violence against education staff, students, teachers, union and government officials, and institutions. The report analyses the violence directed against students and educational personnel worldwide and into what can be done to improve their safety and security.

In Afghanistan, girls’ education is targeted. Indeed this report is dedicated to the memory of Safia Ama Jan, a former Afghan teacher who worked tirelessly to champion efforts to get all Afghan girls back into school, and to provide professional and vocational training for women. She was shot and killed outside her home on 25 September 2006.

In Colombia, trade unionists are “in the firing line,” because of “their political role in taking a stand on human rights or social justice on behalf of their community. They come under pressure from both sides in the conflict because, as the most educated members of the local population, many of them have become spokespeople on local issues for the communities in which they live, such as disagreements over the extraction of local resources by multinational companies and human rights violations.”

“There is no single, exhaustive global database dedicated to monitoring violent attacks on education workers, students and institutions that can provide a reliable picture of the number of attacks,” the report decries. However, deliberate attacks have dramatically increased over the past three years.

The report gives examples from Russia (Beslan), Iraq, Colombia, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, all countries where Education International has been active. It shows that “traditional policies for preventing attacks have included providing armed guards or escorts to school or giving weapons training to teachers. But in many places these provisions do not exist or do not appear to have made sufficient impact on their own. Other methods being encouraged include providing monitoring and warning systems, mobilising communities to confront attackers and relocating classes or providing distance learning.

Recent international efforts to press for the application of human rights instruments on issues related to children in armed conflict, which have focused mostly on the recruitment of child soldiers, could be broadened.”

“If the international community is serious about attempts to achieve Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals on education it should focus attention urgently on these issues and provide the political will and resources required to tackle this growing problem,” the report says.

UNESCO quotes Jan Eastman, EI Deputy General Secretary, saying: “We believe in quality education for all. Children should not have to suffer the loss of education and worse, the actual violence, no matter what reason for the conflict.”
Donors are failing children in conflict-affected fragile states

Seventeen-year-old Kalume quit school to go and fight with a rebel group in his homeland of the Democratic Republic of Congo. He was a child soldier from 1999 to 2003.

“I saw my friends going to school. They had gone a long way – some were in sixth year, some were in fifth year of humanities, some had already finished their studies. So, I started asking myself so many questions. We say all things without education are worth nothing.”

Kalume went through the formal demobilisation process and was reunited with his family He is now in the third year of secondary school.

“All that blood – when we think of all the blood that covered everything, it demoralises us. Now, everything is in the past. Tomorrow or after tomorrow we will help our country develop. In the future, I hope to be an engineer,” Kalume says.

Last in Line, Last in School: How donors are failing children in conflict-affected fragile states is the latest report from Save the Children. It shows that this hope for a better future is shared by many children who are denied their right to an education because they happen to live in conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS).

“One in three children born in these countries does not have the chance to go to school, so they miss out on the opportunity to enjoy the benefits a good education can bring for themselves, their families, their communities and their countries” the report says.

It explains that “aid is critical to ensure that CAFS achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of all children being able to complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. Yet CAFS are underfunded when taking their populations’ size and needs into account.”

The report calls on bilateral and multilateral donors to urgently:

- increase overall education funding to meet the US $9 billion annual financing required to provide universal primary education
- increase allocations of education aid to CAFS in line with their needs
- make education a greater priority in CAFS
- include education as part of the humanitarian policy and response.

To read the full report, please go to: www.savethechildren.net