The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that: "Everyone has the right to education".

This landmark document, adopted on 10 December 1948, also declares that: "Education shall be free... Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms".

Educators around the world are committed to these goals, but almost 60 years after the Declaration became international law, its promises remain unfulfilled for millions of children who are still denied their right to education.

On the occasion of Human Rights Day, 10 December, Education International and its 30 million members are ready to take a lead role in achieving full universal access to education for all. However, the global shortage of properly trained and qualified teachers further threatens this fundamental human right.

Estimates of the number of teachers needed in the next years to reach the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015 vary but UNESCO projects that over 18 million teachers will be needed to achieve universal primary education by 2015.

A new EI survey carried out in six Anglophone Sub-Saharan African countries revealed a serious shortage of qualified teachers, both at primary and secondary levels, in Gambia, Lesotho, Tanzania and to some extent Uganda. In Lesotho, for example, 44% of primary school teachers and 42% of the secondary school teachers were unqualified. Teacher shortages are particularly acute in remote rural areas and in certain subjects, such as mathematics and science.

"Globally speaking, the teaching profession is not valued highly enough - in terms of recognition or salary," says Fred van Leeuwen. "It's unfortunate that governments tend to regard education as more of a cost than the crucial social investment it is."

Vernor Muñoz Villalobos, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, said: "There is a need to recognise education as a human right rather than an economic good." He told delegates at EI's World Congress last July that: "The right to quality education requires that the learning process and the school environment aim at building"knowledge into a society with human dignity, diversity, peace and cooperation."

Throughout next year, EI will participate in activities celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2008. For more information, please go to:

www.ohchr.org
www.knowyourrights2008.org

To read the full text of the Education International study, see:

www.ei-ie.org/statusofteachers/