Human and Trade Union Rights special edition

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On 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. It enshrined the concept that, by virtue of our humanity, we all have an equal claim to respect for our inherent rights, which are universal and indivisible.

Since then, international law has broadened to uphold the rights of minorities not formerly protected: indigenous people, disabled people, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people.

The recent election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president of the United States, is testament to the struggle and sacrifices of civil rights activists who, like Martin Luther King, had a dream of racial equality in America and around the world.

Unfortunately, for millions of children the right to education is still a distant dream. In many countries, the rights of trade unionists are still violated with impunity. Nonetheless, teachers everywhere inspire students and others by asserting those rights with dignity and conviction, despite the high costs.

Seven years ago, EI adopted its Declaration on Professional Ethics to articulate our commitment to promote teaching as a principled practice based on universal values, which are central to the worldwide debate about quality education today. By quality education, we mean education in being an active citizen—a participant, not a bystander—and being empowered to assert one’s own rights, while respecting the rights of others.

Fred van Leeuwen, EI General Secretary

Good news:

Former teacher

By Tiina Tikkanen, with files from Ritva Semi and Airi Vuolle

Martti Ahtisaari has travelled a long way from the classroom in Oulu, Finland, where he began his career half a century ago. From primary school teacher to distinguished diplomat, President of Finland, and now Nobel Peace Prize winner, Ahtisaari has always raised his voice for education, human rights and peace.

Ahtisaari qualified as a primary-school teacher in 1959, and right away began reaching out across cultural boundaries to help manage a home and school for Pakistani students.

He began working for the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the mid-1960s, was appointed Ambassador to Tanzania, Zambia, Somalia and Mozambique in the early 1970s and, by the end of the decade, was made UN Commissioner for Namibia. He served as the President of Finland from 1994-2000.

Ahtisaari was awarded the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize for his work as a mediator in Namibia, the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Iraq, Kosovo, Indonesia and other international conflicts over three decades.

Sometimes peace negotiations are as broad as they are long. For example, Ahtisaari was at the helm of the Namibian independence process for 13 years. In 1990 he finally succeeded in leading Namibia into independence as the commander of 8,000 UN soldiers and civilians. He and his wife Eeva were made honorary citizens, and many Namibian boys are still named Martti in honour of the independence negotiator.

Sometimes things move more quickly. The negotiations Ahtisaari brokered between the Aceh independence movement and the Indonesian government were completed in
wins Nobel Peace Prize

just six months in 2005. The outcome was an end to the civil war that had been raging for over 30 years.

He says a mediator, like a teacher, needs delicacy and directness, analytical skills and decision-making competence. He or she must learn to talk about difficult matters in a friendly tone. And as a teacher, Ahtisaari also knows that repetition is the mother of learning.

“Peace negotiation is a teaching process in which you have to present your arguments so effectively that they are accepted. You have to convince the parties that this solution is worth supporting,” he says.

In Ahtisaari’s opinion, developing education is the key to progress. Given the opportunity to learn, people achieve wonderful things, he says. And in a rapidly changing society, the role of the teacher becomes increasingly important.

Ahtisaari’s greatest worry is that in the next 10 years more than a billion young people will reach working age and barely a third of them will be able to find jobs. “If these young people fail to enter the job market, the danger of radicalisation would be acute.” That’s why he is engaged in developing employment opportunities for young people through his Crisis Management Initiative, CMI.

With age, this architect of peace has learned to live at peace with himself, and with the people close to him. “You get on in the world when you have self-confidence,” he advises. “Inspire, support, encourage—these are also the teacher’s most important tasks.”

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Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Enduring relevance 60 years on

By Nancy Knickerbocker

"I don't pretend to have been a Thomas Jefferson," Humphrey told me in 1984, in an interview from his office at McGill University in Montreal. "The declaration really has no one father. But I did include a lot of things I especially cared about."

Freedom of the press, the status of women and racial discrimination were key areas of work during Humphrey’s distinguished 20-year career at the UN. Other drafters of the Declaration came from all regions of the world and all legal and religious traditions but, despite his modesty, today Humphrey is acknowledged as the principal author of the magnificent document which came into effect 60 years ago.

On the night of 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in a unanimous vote. In a post-Holocaust world painfully aware of man’s atrocious capacity for inhumanity, it was a poignant statement of hope and a shared commitment to global peace, social justice and human dignity.

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people ...
the news was like taking a crash course in human rights activism.

Rights defenders across the country raised their voices in passionate condemnation of the new weakened Human Rights Act, which they described as "a fascist law," a "sham," a "disgrace," and even "a green light to racists and bigots." They insisted that the government's actions were in violation of the Universal Declaration, both in spirit and in substance.

The provincial government claimed that the Declaration was not legally binding, but scholars like Humphrey disagreed vehemently. "It has been invoked so many times, both in and out of the UN, that it has become part of international law, of the customary law of nations," he said. In that sense, he added, it is "a much, much greater achievement than I could have hoped for in 1948."

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status...

On the 60th anniversary of the Declaration, it is time to look back and reflect upon the progress that has been made by the international human rights movement. The scope and depth of human rights law has grown to include conventions on the rights of the child, of indigenous people, and of people with disabilities, as well as conventions against torture, enforced disappearance and genocide. The rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people are protected today in ways that would have been unimaginable in 1948. Roosevelt, an ardent feminist, would have heartily approved of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The CEDAW came into force in 1981 and is vigorously invoked by women's rights activists worldwide.

However, decades later, half of the world's population of girls and women still face daily discrimination throughout their life cycle. Millions of impoverished children labour in unspeakable conditions. Trade unionists risk their lives to assert union rights. Teachers are increasingly targeted for attack. Indeed, around the world we still see inequity, injustice and pervasive violations of human and trade union rights.

Has the Universal Declaration really made a difference over the past 60 years? Most people would say yes, it has. Not all governments have become parties to all human rights treaties, but all countries have accepted the Universal Declaration. It continues to affirm the inherent dignity and worth of every person in the world, without distinction of any kind. Millions more people have been made aware of their inherent rights, and therefore are more willing and able to take action in defence of those rights. And as we struggle to create a better world, it is helpful to have our hopes and dreams articulated in such a poetic and powerful form that is accessible to all. In 366 languages, the Declaration holds the Guinness World Record for the most translated document in the world.

A Caribbean teacher and human rights activist once said to me: "The Universal Declaration is like a prayer." In a globalised world fractured along economic, cultural, gender and religious lines, it is ever more important that we emphasize the things that unite us, and that express our common humanity and universal values.

Nancy Knickerbocker is EI Senior Coordinator of Communications. III
Guest speaker

Brendan O’Malley

Brendan O’Malley is a journalist with decades of experience covering education issues around the world. He is the author of Education Under Attack, published last year by UNESCO. To date it is the only global study on targeted political and military violence against education staff, students, teachers, union and government officials and institutions. In September, O’Malley made a presentation to EI’s Executive Board, after which board members adopted a series of recommendations centred on the concept that schools be universally recognized as safe sanctuaries, and that teachers and students be afforded protection from violence in times of conflict.

Persecuted teachers: Targeted attacks increase

Southern Thailand: Two distraught teachers embrace the burned bodies of two colleagues, shot to death and set alight on the road outside their school.

Baghdad, Iraq: A teacher is raped, mutilated and her body is strung up and left hanging outside the school gates for days.

Arauca, Colombia: Three education trade unionists are ordered out of a house where they are meeting and shot in the back.

Zabul province, Afghanistan: A teacher is beheaded for running a co-educational school.

Some parts of the world are becoming deadly places to be a teacher, or even a student. These are just four incidents from hundreds I have come across during three months’ research into deliberate violent political and military attacks against students, teachers and academics. Within days of starting work on the global study for UNESCO, 70 Iraqi university students were killed and 170 injured in simultaneous targeted explosions at Mustansiriya University in Baghdad, and an elementary teacher became the 73rd education worker to be murdered in Thailand in the past three years.

The evidence points to a dramatic increase in targeted attacks on education staff, students and institutions in that period. The countries worst affected appear to include Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Nepal, Thailand, the Palestinian Autonomous Territories and Myanmar.

My study, published in April 2007, reported that in Iraq 280 academics had been killed since the fall of Saddam Hussein as part of an apparent campaign to liquidate intellectuals.

In Afghanistan, there were 150 bombing, arson and missile attacks on education targets in 2005-6.

In Colombia, 310 teachers had been murdered since 2000.

In Nepal, 10,600 teachers and 22,000 students were abducted between 2002 and 2006, and 734 teachers and 1,730 students were arrested or tortured.

Myanmar is the world leader in one category of attack: the recruitment of child soldiers. An estimated 70,000 minors were enlisted in 2002, many of them into the na-
tional army, some forcibly recruited as young as 11. Recruiting children under 15, voluntarily or not, deprives them of their right to education and is a war crime. In the worst-affected countries the impact of violent attacks on education provision is devastating. Given that up to 40 per cent of the 77 million children in the world who are not attending school can be found in conflict-affected countries, understanding the impact of these attacks is crucial to attempts to achieve Education for All worldwide, a goal agreed by world leaders in 2000.

In Iraq, for instance, the scale of incidents and deaths had reached a tipping point that threatened the collapse of the school and university systems. Only 30 per cent of Iraq’s 3.5 million pupils were attending classes, compared to 75 per cent the previous school year. Baghdad universities are reporting that attendance is down by 40 per cent and in some departments attendance is down to a third. More than 3,000 academics have fled the country. Muhammad al-Rubai, adviser to the Iraqi president on scientific affairs, told the BBC that universities have become a brutal battleground where abduction and murder of academics are a common event. Students are also targeted for violent crime and sectarian killings, especially in Baghdad and Mosul.

An Iraq Democracy Watch report said: “We are faced with an organised systematic operation driven by ideological, sectarian, and political motives.”

Across conflicts education is increasingly under attack, partly because it is a soft target but also because it is often a factor in the underlying tension behind the conflict. To reduce the attacks ways must be found to tackle this problem and that means looking beyond security measures to investigating and addressing the real reasons why schools and universities have become targets.

For instance in Thailand, while the government’s traditional response has been to step up armed guards for teachers and provide thousands of them with weapons training, it is now exploring with UNESCO ways to reduce the sense of alienation from the education system in the troubled southernmost provinces. Compromises made in the language medium and content of education – involving government schools teaching in the local language, Yawi, instead of Thai and offering Islamic moral instruction; and Islamic schools teaching national secular curriculum history and Thai language alongside their religious studies for instance – could ease the perception of schools as legitimate targets. But attacks on schools and universities will never end as long as the perpetrators escape without investigation, arrest or prosecution. Internationally the establishment of the International Criminal Court may help in this regard, because attacks on educational institutions are war crimes. They can also be crimes against humanity, when murders are carried out in accordance with a publicly declared policy of targeting civilians, for instance as perpetrated by the Taliban in Afghanistan, whose own military rule book calls for the killing of teachers who fail to heed warnings to stop teaching a “non-Islamic” curriculum.

But the ICC needs more resources. So far it has begun only one trial, and successful efforts to focus the application of human rights law on the child soldier issue need to be broadened to end impunity in the case of attacks against teachers, academics, schools and universities.

“Schools should be respected and protected as sanctuaries and zones of peace.”


The use of emergency education programmes in refugee camps and other post-conflict situations has already shown how education can aid stabilisation after fighting. The challenge now in conflict countries is to create student-friendly, inclusive schools and universities, free of sectarianism and political interference, giving all sides a stake in their protection. They can then be come safe sanctuaries or zones of peace, promoting tolerance and understanding, reducing tension and aiding efforts to resolve the wider conflict. Teacher trade unions and their members have a vital role to play in helping to ensure that the protection of teachers and students is put higher on the international agenda, and that more effort is made to help schools become agents of peace. III

Teacher who defied the Taliban paid ultimate price

O’Malley’s report and presentation were dedicated to the memory of Safia Ama Jan, an Afghan teacher who risked her life by turning her home into a school for girls, despite threats from the Taliban. She was shot and killed outside her home in Kandahar on 25 September 2006.

“Safia Ama Jan’s courage was an inspiration to us all,” said Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO. “And her violent death serves as a grim reminder that those working to defend human rights, especially women’s rights, the right to education and education for girls, are often working on the front line, with their lives constantly under threat.”
Everyone has the right to education

Everyone has the right to education; Education shall be free; Elementary education shall be compulsory ...

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is very clear: for 60 years, children throughout the world, regardless of race, class, gender, abilities, or disabilities, should have enjoyed the right to education. However the truth is: 72 million children are out of school and one in five adults (one in four women) in the world, 774 million individuals, have no basic literacy skills. According to the 2008 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, 101 countries are still far from achieving universal literacy.

Education is the key to social development and enhances the opportunities open to each individual. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of these unschooled youngsters and illiterate adults can be found in the poorest countries on earth. The direct link between poverty and lack of educational opportunities has been demonstrated many times over.

In 2000, 164 governments committed to dramatically expand educational opportunities for children, youth and adults by 2015. At the half-way mark, few developing countries are even remotely close to the Education For All target.

Since 2000, 33 countries including Bhutan, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore have established legal provisions for compulsory education. However, 38 countries still have no provisions in their constitutions mandating free and compulsory primary schooling.

Basic education is a fundamental right, and it is the responsibility of governments to provide it. The huge gaps in opportunity that we witness in our world are just one form of injustice, and states are bound by duty and by law to strive for justice. Quite simply, governments are not investing enough in education, thereby condemning millions of children to be poor labourers, just as their parents were.

According to UNESCO, governments should increase to 6% the share of their gross domestic product each year on public education. In 2008, the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report noted that 34 countries in fact decreased their share of GNP to education since 1999, including some of those countries furthest from the Education For All goals. In addition, 24 countries allocated less than 3% of GNP to education.

On the positive side, 14 countries completely abolished the tuition fees, thus providing learning opportunities for the most disadvantaged in countries such as Cambodia, Timor Leste, Vietnam, Yemen, Benin, Kenya, Lesotho and Zambia.

Many leaders of poor countries argue that the cost of providing decent educational opportunities is prohibitive. However, this is not really a problem of lack of resources, but rather a problem of resource allocation, both within developing countries and on the part of the wealthier countries. The resources necessary to provide quality educational services exist; it is just a matter of changing the priorities and redirecting them so that they benefit the needy of the world.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.
Rights at risk

The end of education in Somalia

By Abdurrahman Warsameh

Five teachers and eight students have been killed, and nearly 30,000 more students have been deprived of the right to education after the last schools still operating in Somalia’s capital city of Mogadishu were closed in mid-October due to the unacceptable risk of violence.

Osman Mohamoud, President of the Somalia National Union of Teachers (SNUT), said in a statement that schools have tried to operate close to “a war zone” for long time, but it is now impossible to continue to put the students and their teachers in harm’s way. "As teachers, we have persevered as long as we could to keep teaching in the most dangerous situations, but it has become impossible to expose young children to any more danger," Mohamoud said. "It is unacceptable to turn the last of our schools into military bases. School should be a safe haven for our children."

Most schools in Mogadishu closed their doors long ago because of the intense unrest, but a few remained open – despite the increasing violence and rising death toll. In the previous three months, at least five teachers were killed and more than nine others were wounded. In the same period, eight school children were killed while fifteen others were severely wounded in shelling of the neighbourhood known as K4. "We closed the last 34 schools and universities that remained open in Mogadishu because Somali government forces deployed around the K4 area where schools had moved to," said Mohamed Saeed Farah, spokesperson for the Somali Association for Formal Education (SAFE), a local umbrella group. At least 27,200 students were concentrated in the K4 neighbourhood because of its relative stability compared to the rest of the capital. Now, even that one oasis of relative calm is gone, and along with it any opportunity for learning.

The closure marks the end of all educational activities inside the capital, where violence and lawlessness have been the order of the day for the past two years since Ethiopian-backed Somali government forces retook the south-central part of the country from an Islamist group that had been in control. Schools in south and central Somalia have long been closed due to two decades of violence. Both Ethiopian and Somali government forces have targeted schools, while insurgent groups launch their attacks against the soldiers close to school premises. However, education as usual is clearly impossible in the current context. The SNUT has written many times to local government officials and to successive education ministers urging them to put a stop to the militarization of schools and the targeting of students and teachers, but to no avail. Officials of the SNUT, the only teacher trade union in the country, have faced constant harassment from warring sides, and the union’s main offices in Mogadishu have been closed down by Somali government soldiers. Mohamoud issued his statement on the school closures via email from Sweden, where he is seeking asylum. He fled Somalia over a year ago following repeated death threats from local groups and harassment from Ethiopian and Somali government forces. Meanwhile, Somali teachers continue to try to uphold their professional responsibility. Some have been volunteering to teach in the internally displaced people’s camps on the outskirts of Mogadishu. According to the United Nations, more than one million displaced people, almost half of the residents of the capital, live in squalid conditions in makeshift shelters.

To support themselves and their families, teachers are also compelled to take on additional jobs, such as construction workers, market vendors, bakers, etc., while others are engaged in small businesses. Teachers who are not fortunate enough to find jobs are surviving with the support of their working colleagues. The SNUT has been instrumental in arranging solidarity partnerships between working teachers and those who are unemployed.

"Despite being in an existential struggle, SNUT members and officials are in constant touch and are trying to help each other get through this difficult period in our history," Mohamoud said.

Abdurrahman Warsameh is Vice-President of the Somali National Union of Teachers. III
Unions care

Teachers defend children’s rights

By Donatella Montaldo

Although legal frameworks are in place to protect children’s rights, millions of children are still deprived of their fundamental rights.
The right to life, to an identity, to health care, to free education, to be protected from abuse, exploitation and any form of discrimination are among those fundamental rights. All these rights are closely interrelated. For instance the right to education is denied when children, instead of being in school, are working often under unbearable conditions. Teachers and their organizations are well aware of this problem and are taking action to find solutions. Through their advocacy of the Education for All goals and their direct involvement in projects, teachers are significantly contributing to children’s rights worldwide.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is 19 years old. It is the international human rights instrument that has been most widely-ratified in the shortest period of time. Similarly, the two ILO Conventions related to child labour, Convention No. 138 on the minimum age of employment and Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, are also being ratified at a speedy pace. At regional level, there are human rights mechanisms fostering and overseeing the implementation of children’s rights. Finally, national laws (including often constitutions), courts and other institutional bodies promote and protect the rights of children.

But shamefully, too many children still see their fundamental rights violated every day. The global statistics are dramatic, and may even be underestimations.

- 9.2 million children die before their fifth birthday
- 15 million children die every year from poor sanitation and unsafe water
- 2.1 million children under 15 live with HIV
- 15 million children under 18 are orphaned of one or both parents due to AIDS.

Some groups are even more vulnerable: children in rural areas, those belonging to ethnic or minority groups, and those with special needs. And among all these groups, the most vulnerable, marginalized and ostracized: the girls.

This is an unjust and unacceptable situation for millions of children worldwide. But the positive news in this shocking picture is that teachers and their organizations are very much aware of these realities because they face them every day, and they are addressing them.

More and more teacher organizations are getting involved in the Global Action Week for Education within the Global Campaign for Education coalition, to demand the right to education for all children. They are also active in organizing regional meetings and workshops to discuss the most pressing issues related to children’s rights and how their organizations can respond effectively.

Teachers combating child labour

Teacher unions are also fully committed in the fight against child labour. Actions are taking place all over the world. For instance, in 2008, through a joint project supported by the Federatie Nederlandse Vakbewging (FNV-Dutch Trade Union federation) and EI, several member organizations are active in promoting the role of education as a crucial and effective tool to tackle the problem of child labour.

As part of the project, researchers in four different countries—Brazil, Ghana, Honduras and Morocco—carried out studies on teacher unions’ challenges and good practices in confronting child labour. The research was undertaken by national experts in the field. It was thoroughly discussed in meetings with key stakeholders (Ministries of Education, UN agencies and NGOs) to analyse, contrast and finally validate their findings. The results will be disseminated soon.
In addition, the project carried out advocacy work and national campaigns to raise awareness of every child’s fundamental right to education, and the urgent need to prevent and eliminate child labour. The campaigns culminated on 12 June, World Day Against Child Labour.

**Concerted actions**

Coordinating and reinforcing actions on children’s rights with other Global Union Federations, such as BWI, IUF and ITUC, has been a key goal of EI. This has meant calling international meetings to develop joint strategies, preparing advocacy documents and joint statements, and lobbying for the right to education in national, regional and international fora.

Actions need to be concerted to effectively promote and protect children’s rights. Partnerships are key. EI is actively working in this direction with its partners. In particular, it has strengthened its relationships with the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) of the International Labour Organization by developing materials on child labour for teachers, participating in workshops on education and child labour, and joining efforts to maximize the impact of their actions.

EI also works within the Global Task Force on EFA and Child Labour, comprising the ILO, UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Global March Against Child Labour. EI brings teachers’ voices and contributions to bear in the efforts to mobilize political will towards mainstreaming child labour issues into education policies.

Similarly, EI is seeking enhanced cooperation with NGOs active in the field of children’s rights, such as the Global Campaign For Education, the Global March Against Child Labour, the Stop Child Labour Campaign and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Numerous initiatives have been developed by teachers and their organizations to fight for children’s rights, particularly the right to education. Teachers know they have an extremely important role to play, and a lot remains to be done. Their commitment, hard work and strong motivation for children’s education and future can make the difference. After all, next to parents, teachers are the people closest to children. Who else could be better advocates for their rights?

Donatella Montaldo is the former EI Coordinator for Children’s Rights.
The law is on our side

Trade union rights are human rights

By Dominique Marlet

Trade union rights are human rights. They are protected by international and regional treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and others.

The international legal framework provides that states must protect trade union rights by creating a system for complaints about violations, adjudication, remedies, and punishment. For example, a government must not only refrain from punishing workers for trying to organise unions. It must also enforce mechanisms that deter employers from taking action against union organisers. This is especially important in education, where the government itself is often the employer.

Trade union rights, like any other basic human rights, should be respected no matter what level of development exists in the country concerned.

These are our fundamental rights

Right to freedom of association: This covers the right of individuals to ‘associate’ together, to form and join workers’ organisations to promote their economic and social interests. Some states have tried to curtail teacher unions by hindering people from joining, by imposing reprisals on those who do, or by obliging them to join state-approved organisations.

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right of everyone to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his or her interests. In a number of countries, teachers employed by the state are only guaranteed the right to form professional associations, not unions. This means that governments are guilty of restricting the rights of those they employ, and hence are violating the provisions of International Labour Organisation Convention 87 on freedom of association. The ILO Committee of Experts has repeatedly stressed that “teachers in public schools should be provided with a legal framework to exercise their right to form trade unions.”

Governments in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Eritrea curtail the rights of teachers employed in the public sector to form or join trade unions. China and India have not ratified Conventions 87 and 98, thereby curtailling the rights of millions of teachers. Other countries that have not ratified the Convention on freedom of association are Iran, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam. While Pakistan ratified Convention 87, teachers are only allowed to register as professional organisations. In Thailand, teacher associations have no right to bargain collectively. In Bangladesh, teachers are forbidden to form trade unions.

Some countries also have sought to limit union organising by imposing cumbersome registration processes; by requiring minimum levels of membership; by assimilating workers’ organisations into political associations; and by denying the legal status required to open bank accounts, to hire employees, and to rent or own premises. The right of association extends across borders, but some countries have tried to hinder participation by trade unionists in international meetings. This is a fundamental trade union right, and governments should therefore abstain from measures such as withholding travel documents.

Right to internal governance: The right to freedom of association also covers the right of workers’ organisations to draw up their rules and constitutions, elect representatives, decide on a programme of activities and undertake legitimate and peaceful activities.

Teacher organisations in a number of countries have suffered significant hostile and intrusive interference by governments in their internal affairs. The ILO has considered that the removal of trade union leaders from office by government is a serious infringement of trade union rights. Suspension of legal status and dissolution of a union should be subject to appeal to an independent and impartial judicial tribunal.

Right to assembly: This right should not be denied except in situations of national security or public safety. However, international standards limit the use of force by authorities and require that law enforcement officials should use force only as a last resort, in proportion to the threat posed, and in a way to minimize damage or injury.

Right to strike: Although the right to strike is not an absolute right, it is recognised in international treaties. The right to strike is often banned in the public services, and obstructed by cumbersome procedures. Some
governments include schools and universities under the scope of “essential services.” Germany persists in its long-standing denial of the right to strike of all civil servants, including teachers, despite repeated ILO criticism. In Japan and Korea, public employees are banned from striking.

**Right to collective bargaining:** The ILO’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work defines the “effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining” as an essential right of workers. In June 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada noted that: “The right to bargain collectively with an employer enhances the human dignity, liberty and autonomy of workers by giving them the opportunity to influence the establishment of workplace rules and thereby gain some control over a major aspect of their lives, namely their work.” Collective bargaining allows workers to achieve a form of workplace democracy and to ensure the rule of law in the workplace.

**Unions are the pillars of democracy**

A free and vibrant trade union movement is one of the pillars of democracy and an indicator of a nation’s progressive development. Trade union rights are well protected by international legislation which requests states to ensure that the trade union rights can be exercised. What is lacking is implementation. Teacher organisations are facing increasingly sophisticated attempts by governments to restrict their operations. EI has consistently supported its affiliates to become aware of their rights, to extend the scope of trade union rights in their country, and to make their governments accountable for respecting core union rights.

Dominique Marlet is EI Senior Coordinator for Human and Trade Union Rights. III

**EI Trade Union Rights Manual**

EI has put together a Trade Union Rights Manual to help member organisations uphold the trade union rights of teachers and education employees. Strong teacher organisations enhance the conditions of work and terms of employment of teachers and promote their professional status. Strong teachers organisations also promote the professional freedoms of teachers, and participate in the formulation and implementation of educational policies. This practical guide book suggests ways collective trade union rights could be better respected and monitored through international supervisory mechanisms available to teacher organisations. It is designed for teacher organisations, not for individual union activists, and therefore focuses on the rights of teacher organisations to exist, operate and represent their members. The EI Trade Union Rights Manual is available from the EI website, on CD, or in print on request.

**Help save the life of Farzad Kamangar**

Farzad Kamangar, a 33-year old teacher and former trade unionist from the Kurdistan Province of Iran, is being held in the notorious Evin Prison under death sentence after an unfair trial. Please clip out and send this postcard now!
Bridging the gap

Human rights and gender equality in education

By Rebeca Sevilla

“Financing gender equality is often preached, but scarcely ever practised,” Jan Eastman, EI Deputy General Secretary, told delegates at the last UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Although recent indicators show general progress in expanding women’s capabilities, women’s opportunities in employment and decision-making bodies still lag behind. Unions promoting the empowerment of women are confronted with global challenges: inequity and lack of state funding for education; glaring concerns related to lack of access to food, clean water, sanitation, and health care; as well as the climate change crisis.

Unfortunately achievement of an equality agenda is deeply threatened by the global financial crisis. 2008 has revealed the weakness of the current model of globalization. Hundreds of billions of dollars were diverted to bail out banks and financial institutions while at the same time the United Nations Summit on the MDGs only generated $16 billion in commitments to ending poverty. The UN food agency collected only $8 billion for the food crisis, where $15 billion is needed. The same goes for agricultural investment to help small farmers.

In the current crisis, governments are even less likely to set aside additional resources to achieve the vital Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) dealing with education for all and empowerment of women. According to the World Bank, the achievement of the MDG3 devoted to gender equality and the empowerment of women requires $13 billion per year and MDG2 to achieve primary education for all requires at least $16 billion.

Rich western countries promised, 30 years ago, to devote at least 0.7% of their GDP to foreign aid, but only the Nordic countries and the Netherlands are meeting this commitment. If all developed countries kept their promises, available resources would be doubled and the MDGs could be financed. The financial crisis combined with soaring food prices, and subsequent hunger particu-
larly in female-headed households, has highlighted the injustice of global poverty and inequality more than ever. The promises need to be followed by all the necessary actions and measures.

**Does the current scenario bring opportunities for hope?**

Against this stark reality, teacher organisations continue to adopt policies to promote women’s participation in equal conditions in leadership and advocate relentlessly for integrated policies to empower girls and women through quality education and decent work. EI considers quality education – that is universally accessible, free, and compulsory until the age of employment– and quality public services including water, sanitation, housing, and health care, essential to alleviate poverty and achieve gender equality.

Quality education for all girls and women is the first key to breaking the negative cycle of increasing feminisation of poverty, with all its connected human rights abuses. Unless women are educated, they cannot find their voices or be empowered to participate fully in society.

The shortage of 18 million teachers to meet the Education For All goal by 2015 is disturbing. Comprehensive state policies for gender equality should include integrated provisions for quality education delivered by trained teachers and decent work.

Indeed, the shortage of decent work leads to a downward spiral impacting the weakest, who are most often women. Unemployment, underemployment, unproductive and low-quality jobs, unpredictable earnings, absence of union rights, lack of collective bargaining, exploitation of children and of migrants and refugees, dangerous work: all these factors lead to the erosion of the fundamental social contract that ties together democratic societies. A recent example is Zimbabwe, where the general collapse of the country has also had a devastating impact on the education sector.

**Teacher organisations work for equality**

EI and other trade union federations are making sure that women’s rights are protected, respected and fulfilled, and that women are heard within their national unions, regional bodies and international institutions such as International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Many teacher organisations took initiatives to increase the presence of women in their decision making bodies. For example, this year, the Indonesian teacher union PGRI amended its constitution to impose a minimum quota of 30% of women in the top leadership and all decision making bodies of the union. PGRI was inspired by the good practice shared at the EI Women’s Caucus in 2007.

Teacher unions also empower women by improving their union skills through the EI regional women networks (see box).

In national and international fora, unions urge governments to expand and seek to attract investment through the right policies: spending on education and vocational training, decent work opportunities, good health care, anti-corruption measures, and support for good public services. The opposition strategy of entering a race for capital through reducing labour standards will be at the detriment of the populations and particularly the weakest and poorest.

Unions also argue that transparency and accountability of equality policies are critical. This means that all policies include clear gender targets to be set in agreement with women leaders and organisations, inclusive decision making processes, gender-tracking of budgets and implementation practice, as well as gender-just evaluations.

There is a need for transformed leadership of men and women, who are fully committed to gender justice. Only then can the negative cycle of feminisation of poverty and exploitation within both education systems and workplaces be reversed.

Rebeca Sevilla is EI Coordinator for Human and Trade Union Rights.

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“Union education motivates women to play a pivotal role in their union, and not merely to perform minor tasks and tacitly accept unequal division of roles.”

– A participant from TOPPS, Philippines

Since 2000, EI has set up regional and sub-regional women’s networks on all continents. Now representatives of 217 member organisations are involved in the networks, which aim to:

- increase women’s participation in union activities and in decision-making positions;
- empower women through improving their skills regarding union finance, collective bargaining and negotiation, and communications;
- strengthen solidarity among women teachers;
- strengthen gender awareness, equality plans, policies and programs.
The world workers live in

Mexico
1.7 million school-aged children do not receive any education and school attendance rates remain low among indigenous and migrant children. The government is combating the worst forms of child labour through legislative reforms to criminalize trafficking and prostitution of children under 18, as well as children begging. Mexico is also engaged in an ILO-PEC project to withdraw children from exploitation and return them to school. In 2007, the government allocated scholarships to 5.2 million child day workers from very poor households. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the problem remains a matter of serious concern.

Guatemala
In response to the urging of ILo’s affiliate, STEG, the government has made efforts to normalize the professional status of many teachers who were working under irregular contracts. For many years, STEG General Secretary Jordi Cordero and other activists have been dealing with the hostile climate against trade unionism. STEG has also reported a wave of murders of women, including teachers, in the past several years. At least 350 women were killed in 2007 and more than 3,600 since 2001. Most of these crimes remain unpunished.

Ukraine
In 2006 the Parliament adopted a law ensuring equality of women and men in all spheres of society, including employment, through enforcement of equal rights, the elimination of discrimination (including against Roma and Tatars), and positive action to address the existing inequalities between men and women. However, implementation of the law needs proper assessment regarding provision of employment free from gender-bias and discrimination and examples of collective agreements that promote and ensure gender equality, as well as measures for men and women workers with family responsibilities.
The map shows whether countries have ratified the ILO Convention 97 on Freedom of Association and/or Convention 98 on Collective Bargaining. The triangles indicate countries where violations of trade union rights (yellow) or children’s rights (red) have been reported by the ILO.

**Ethiopia**

ET’s affiliate ETA, founded in 1949, was officially dissolved in June 2008 by a court decision which benefited a parallel ETA officially in 1993 with government support. The registration procedure of ET’s affiliate as a new, independent association of workers is currently facing administrative setbacks. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government is about to pass a bill which would considerably hinder the rights of civil society groups. An ILO contact mission visited Ethiopia in October 2008 to defend teachers’ rights to have access to an independent and representative trade union.

**Middle East**

Following the oil price boom in 1973, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain all had enormous wealth, but a shortage of workers to implement their development plans. Increasingly workers were recruited from abroad, principally from Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan and Southeast Asia. Asian governments actively pursued overseas employment policies, both to alleviate unemployment and to generate foreign income. Many foreign workers in the Middle East live under conditions that are close to slavery. Only 23 countries in the world have ratified the ILO Convention on migrant workers, none of the Gulf States have done so.

**Philippines**

Extra-judicial executions and abductions of trade unionists is tragically common in the Philippines. More than 1,000 trade unionists and human rights activists have been killed or reported missing since 2001, among whom 17 were teachers. Unfortunately, those responsible commit their crimes with impunity, a fact which severely limits the free exercise of trade union rights. Nonetheless, ET affiliates have reported a decrease in violence against their members in 2008.
Global financial crisis

The time has come

Brussels, 30 September 2008 (ITUC OnLine): The political wrangling in the US Congress over a $700 billion bail-out plan may well reflect the disgust and anger of working people everywhere at their taxes being used to bail out those whose greed, irresponsibility and abuses have brought the world’s financial markets to the brink of collapse and raised the spectre of global recession.

But it has also deepened a crisis which threatens the jobs, homes and futures of billions of human beings – those who never drew profit from the years of excess, whose work has been underpaid and degraded and who bear no responsibility for what is now happening.

Having looked into the abyss they have helped create, policy-makers are waking up to the need for regulation of the world economy and for governments to finally take up the duties they have long abdicated—to set rules for markets, to protect and provide for their citizens, and to intervene to ensure socially equitable and sustainable outcomes.

This awakening comes late, but if it goes deeper than a passing concern to extinguish the fires raging in the financial markets which are threatening to engulf the real economy, then it is to be welcomed. Because only by breaking the habit of hanging on the coat tails of financial interests, abandoning their complicity in the generation of massive and growing inequality, and ending their underwriting of corporate greed and excess, can governments reconnect with the realities of the lives of working families, and begin to provide the leadership and the answers they demand.

The immediate task is to respond decisively and effectively to the financial crisis with assistance for its victims but without reward for its authors. But the scale of the challenge ahead goes far beyond even this massive task.

When the ITUC was founded in 2006, it highlighted the need for fundamental change in globalization and committed itself to bring it about.

The time for that change has come.

Resolving the financial crisis must go hand in hand with concerted international action to stimulate jobs and growth so that the imminent danger of world recession is averted, and economies are launched on paths of just and sustainable development.

The essential task of regulating financial markets, so as to shut down the option of a return to business as usual and a repetition of today’s debacle, must be one component of a wider agenda to reshape the management of the global economy.

The imbalances which have seen real wages fall and stagnate, at the same time as capital has reaped record profits, need to be re-dressed. Organising and bargaining rights, recognized internationally, must be enforced universally so workers can have real influence over their lives and their futures. The trade agenda, mired in the impasse of the Doha Round, can only move forward once it is based on the imperatives of decent work, development, rights and equity. The international community faces too the unavoidable obligation to agree quickly on an effective plan to combat climate change, where failure would have consequences far beyond anything that financial meltdown might bring.

The bottom line is that the model of globalization which has reigned supreme for over two decades stands discredited. But in its failure are the seeds of opportunity for fundamental change.

The ITUC calls on all governments to seize that opportunity and to act with courage, vision and principle to reinstate commitment to social justice, decent work and sustainability at the heart of policy making and as the central objectives and rationale of economic activity. III

INFO

For more information: www.ituc-csi.org
HIV and AIDS

Positive about rights

By Julie Kavanagh

EI’s programme linking Education for All and HIV/AIDS education, called EFAIDS, now is active in 50 countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Protecting the rights of teachers and students living with HIV is as much a part of the programme as education to prevent HIV infection. Certainly teachers living with HIV face challenges above and beyond those confronting their colleagues. “The situation is worse for our colleagues living with HIV and AIDS, owing to prohibitive medical costs versus the teachers’ meagre salaries,” says Tendai Chikwore, President of the Zimbabwe Teachers’ Association. Making treatment affordable is one of many issues to be tackled to ensure that teachers get the support they need to work successfully and live positively.

The EFAIDS Programme promotes not only their right to have access to HIV prevention, treatment and care, but equally their right to work free from discrimination. Teachers have a right to continue to work and to share their knowledge and experience, regardless of their HIV status. Developing a comprehensive response for HIV-positive teachers is crucial not simply for the well-being of those particular teachers, but for the good of the education sector as a whole. The goals of Education for All (EFA) will continue to elude us as long as the impact of HIV and AIDS on the education sector is not adequately addressed.

Networks of HIV-positive teachers are a powerful ally in responding to HIV and AIDS. The Kenya Association of Positive Teachers (KENEPOTE) was started by two HIV-positive teachers more than five years ago. Now it is a flourishing organisation with more than 3,000 members. The Kenyan teachers’ successful outreach from humble beginnings provides inspiration to other expanding networks, such as the Ugandan Teacher Anti-AIDS Action Group (TAAG) and the Tanzania Positive Teachers’ Initiative (TAPOTI+), as well as to newer initiatives in Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Working with and through these networks can be an effective way for unions to enhance their support to HIV-positive teachers. In the same way, networks that are integrated within the union structure can mobilise union members and resources for their activities.

Unions involved in the EFAIDS Programme in Uganda, Kenya and Zambia coordinate with Networks of HIV-positive teachers to lobby for treatment access, to carry out workshops, and to implement workplace policies. The development of workplace policies on HIV and AIDS has been an important step in working for the rights of teachers living with HIV. Translating that policy into practice, and making sure the positive impact is felt by teachers in their classrooms, is an ongoing challenge, but one that must be met.

Greater involvement of people with HIV and AIDS makes the EFAIDS Programme stronger and more relevant. As Margaret Wambete of KENEPOTE says: “HIV-positive teachers are part of the solution to fight HIV/AIDS in the education sectors, not a problem.”

Julie Kavanagh is EI professional assistant for Solidarity and Development Programs.

Have you taught One Hour on AIDS?

World AIDS Day on 1 December is an opportunity to emphasise education for HIV prevention, combat AIDS-related stigma, promote the rights of people living with HIV and express solidarity with them.

By giving the One Hour on AIDS lesson in their classrooms and union meetings, teachers can communicate HIV and AIDS issues to a large number of colleagues and students, both on World AIDS Day and throughout the year.

Sharing accurate knowledge is a crucial part of the HIV response and is fundamental to prevention strategies. In many countries, surveys indicate that only 40% of young people have the knowledge needed to protect themselves. The EI EFAIDS Programme is working so that young people have comprehensive information on HIV and AIDS. To download the One Hour on AIDS lesson plan and toolkit, go to: www.ei-ie.org/efaids
Italians resist dismantling of public education

Teachers, parents and students across Italy are rallying in defense of quality public education and to protest a devastating package of reforms proposed the government of Silvio Berlusconi. Union leaders say it would turn back the clock thirty years in schools.

Education International and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), strongly support the call by their Italian member organisations - the Federazione Lavoratori della Connoscenza (FLC-CGIL), the CISL-Scuola and the UIL-Scuola for action against the plans by the government to dramatically downsize the education sector.

As part of the measures to increase the coffers of government by cutting down public spending and increasing income taxes, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi plans to get rid of teachers in most specialised subjects and pare down primary school classes to one teacher each, starting in 2009. The reform would also cut the school week by almost half, inconveniencing working parents of Italy's 2.8 million children aged 6 to 10.

Reverting back to an outdated schooling model

If turned into law, the reform is essentially reverting Italy's education sector to a schooling model cast aside 30 years ago. It will perhaps help save 8 billion Euros a year for Europe's most-indebted country, according to Education Minister Mariastella Gelmini. But, according to the teachers, it will ultimately ruin the future of the next generation. FLC-CGIL General Secretary Joëlle Casa says at least 140,000 jobs, including 80,000 teaching positions, will be cut. This means that assistance to children with disabilities will disappear, class sizes will increase significantly and some schools will have to close down, making travelling distances for some children much longer. The reform will not only affect primary and secondary schools. It also aims to reduce one-third of the current resources allocated to public universities, and will reduce at least 10% of their research staff.

Teachers rise in protest

To show their discontent towards the plans, which are currently under debate in parliament, teachers greeted returning pupils wearing black when the school year started on 15 September. An all-night protest was held on 2 October in 25 primary schools in Rome. Despite these protests, the government is showing neither signs of backing down nor any willingness to enter into discussion with the teachers.

Difficult times ahead for teachers, pupils and parents

"It is insane to presume teachers can take twice the workload with half the resources," stated FLC-CGIL's Casa. "Especially when class sizes are already on the rise and teachers across the country are facing difficulties coping with the workload, such as the increased scope of the lessons, or giving special attention to children speaking Italian as a second language."

Working parents will find it hard to cope with making a living and taking care of their children. Apart from having to look for childcare facilities, which are few and expensive in Italy, working mothers will not be able to choose to work part-time by law as is currently the case, but will be subject to the decision of their employers. Other measures, such as stricter conditions for medical leave and parental care, will add to the burden of working parents.

Italy is last in education spending

According to the "Education at a Glance 2008" published recently by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Italy ranks last, behind the Czech Republic, in public spending on public education: less than 10 percent of its total public spending in 2006. It also ranks 23rd behind Slovenia in teacher pay: a primary school teacher earns on average 21,257 euros a year.
Finns work for safe schools

“When I first heard the terrible news from Kauhajoki I was shocked: Not again!” said Erkki Kangasniemi, President of the Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ).

He was recalling 23 September 2008: the most brutal day in the history of public education in Finland. A 22-year-old student shot and set fire to 10 victims, including one teacher, at a vocational college in the western town of Kauhajoki.

The tragedy was compounded by the fact that it was the second school shooting in less than a year. In November 2007, an 18-year-old student killed eight people and himself at a high school in southern Finland. It was deeply shocking that the two school massacres took place in Finland, a peaceful progressive nation known for the excellence of its education system.

Even more disturbing, the second appeared to be a “copycat attack.” In both cases the gunmen posted threatening video clips on YouTube before the shootings. Both used .22-caliber handguns bought from the same store and, in the end, both shot themselves in the head.

Kangasniemi was most worried about the students and teachers who had been attacked, but he knew that schools not only in Kauhajoki, but throughout the whole country, also needed support.

The OAJ immediately put a message of solidarity and condolence on its website, along with information for schools on coping with crises. The union also organised expert contact people to give advice and advocacy to the members in Kauhajoki.

After the first shooting tragedy, the OAJ focused on workplace safety through its local associations and shop stewards. They also worked with the Ministry of Education on a school violence committee which promoted cooperation between authorities and updated the systems. They organised and implemented a training programme on school violence.

"We already have a report on violence in the work of teachers, but it does not include murders," Kangasniemi said in an email. "Further work will have to be done in this field."

He said in future the OAJ will strengthen its demands for smaller class sizes so that teachers at all levels, including vocational education, have the time and ability to advise students and show them that they care. "Teachers need to have time to contact every student as an individual person and to guide his or her learning," said Kangasniemi.

Asked to reflect on the fact that both of the school shooters in Finland posted videos on YouTube, Kangasniemi said that the internet does seem to play a role in these violent events because it allows dysfunctional youth to lead a double life, and to link up with “the internet’s hostile community.”

In the wake of the attack, unfortunate rumours and threats of more violence spread through cyberspace. Not surprisingly, some students were afraid to go to school.

"Specialists say that fear is normal, but you must not be overcome by fear," Kangasniemi said. He spoke out about the need for schools to regain a feeling of normality so that students, parents and teachers could begin to heal from the trauma.

He also warned that "these acts of violence indicated in their extreme way the deteriorating well-being of children and young people."

Society needs to focus on measures to avoid such tragedies in the future, he said, without losing sight of the fact that Finland is still a safe and peaceful country, where schools don’t need high fences or security staff.

Many Finns have urged more vigilance of internet sites and tighter gun laws, especially since Finland ranks among the top five nations in the world in civilian gun ownership, and people as young as 15 can legally own firearms. Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen has said the government will take measures to restrict access.
World Teachers' Day 2008

Teachers matter everywhere

Every day, in millions of classrooms around the world, the universal endeavour of teaching and learning takes place. Every day, teachers pass on skills and knowledge from one generation to the next. World Teachers' Day 2008 was an opportunity to celebrate the work of teachers and the contribution they make to education and development. A myriad of events and calls on public authorities to develop and provide adequate training programmes because, as this year’s slogan said, “Teachers matter!”

EI contributed to the visibility of the global campaign by producing posters in 13 languages and a collection of e-cards in 9 languages, both available from the official World Teachers’ Day website. The poster travelled a long way; it was widely displayed in schools in a town as remote as Fitzroy Crossing, 2,686 km north of Perth, Australia.

Many countries are still celebrating teachers beyond 5 October. For instance, the Australians usually do so on the last Friday of October, to coincide with the new academic year. In Montserrat, teachers will have their Commemoration Day on 4 November. In Pakistan, the Central Organization of Teachers held a seminar attended by more than 300 people. But one teacher at Shahjee Collegiate chose a different way to celebrate the day. He conducted 22 classes from 7:30 am to 12:00 am on 5 October, addressing more than 2,000 students!

The German affiliate VBE issued a press statement to highlight that in Germany there is not only a shortage of teachers, but also a shortage of school headmasters. In the United States, the American Federation of Teachers ran a full story on their national paper, Teacher Today. Official statements were also sent to the media by affiliates in Barbados, Cameroon, Canada, Morocco, Spain, and Taiwan.

In Spain, FECCOO’s General Secretary and member of the EI Executive Board, José Campos, appeared on television calling for a new teachers’ statute. In Benin, radio and TV stations ran shows on quality education and teachers’ working conditions as well as privatization of education. The Teachers’ Awards Project held a ceremony to honour teachers for their life commitment and contributions.

The Syndicat des Enseignants du Congo rallied the streets of the capital during a strike which had been going on since 1 September.

Finally, a tradition among the Cyprus affiliates on this day has been to celebrate a friendly football match between the Board members of the Turkish-speaking and the Greek-speaking organizations. A Flickr photostream is still available for participants all over the world to post pictures of their activities online.

For details and pictures, visit www.5oct.org
Teachers speak out

“Education, schools and children will ultimately pay the highest price as the global financial crisis hits communities everywhere,” warned EI Vice-President Patrick Gonthier to the participants in a Round Table held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 3 October to commemorate World Teachers’ Day 2008. Facing such a grave economic threat, it is even more important that unions use their legitimacy in policy development to guarantee quality education as a public service, Gonthier said. He was speaking on a panel with representatives of the ILO, UNESCO and UNICEF on their involvement in policies for teacher development.

The World Teachers’ Day event gave teachers from different regions of the world a welcome opportunity to speak out about the realities in their schools. Teachers from Togo, Malaysia, France, Morocco and Haiti spoke of their key challenges in the attraction, recruitment and retaining of qualified staff, from dealing with classrooms of up to 130 pupils to juggling several jobs to support their families.

Kokou Mawunyo Ayedze, National Coordinator of UNESCO Associated Schools in Togo, explained that trained teachers are in the minority in public schools. By comparison, there is a high percentage of auxiliary teachers who work in precarious conditions with no professional development or potential for salary increases. “Some auxiliary teachers work up to 18 years at the same salary level and no national insurance coverage,” he said. The current financial crisis has worsened the already difficult living conditions of teachers in Togo. Meagre salaries averaging 43 euros per month force teachers to take night jobs to meet basic needs. Overcrowded classrooms only add to the distress of teachers and students who are striving to achieve Education for All.

Asha B. Dass, a teacher of English with 20 years experience in Malaysia, explained the government’s policy on professional development. In 1994 the Malaysian government created the “Master Teacher” position as a way to improve the status of the teaching profession. Until then, there were no prospects for promotion or improvement for classroom teachers. In order to get better salaries and employment conditions they had to abandon teaching for a position in the Department of Education or as a headmaster, which resulted in schools losing qualified staff.

Jean-Pierre Loubet, a teacher educator from France, spoke of his teaching in rural schools, which are often referred to as “a teacher’s punishment.” His extensive experience with immigrant children led him to develop an intercultural pedagogy. He was critical of French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s current education agenda, which is having a severe impact on teacher training. The massive number of jobs cut increases the workload for remaining teachers, who become reluctant to undertake further training to meet ever-increasing demands.

Najia Abdelkarim, a teacher and representative of the Syndicat National de l’Enseignement in Morocco, said because teacher training and education is standardised, many teachers lack the expertise in specialised subject areas. The Moroccan government’s mass enrolment policy is a step in the right direction. However, the resulting overcrowded classrooms pose daily challenges.

Gilbert Buteau, Assistant Coordinator of UNESCO Associated Schools in Haiti, said it was difficult to make education a priority in a country where 60% of the population live on less than one dollar a day. There is no formal teacher education policy, and 92 per cent of schools are private and not subsidised by the state. Haitian schools face great difficulties in recruiting teachers because of low wages. The recent hurricane disasters have added significantly to the misery of teachers, with schools destroyed, classes disrupted and students traumatised.

All teachers concluded that the image of the teaching profession needs a serious lift which can be achieved by open dialogue and sustainable development policies to improve the status of teachers.
France

Public education under threat


The investigation sheds a new light on the declaration by Education Minister Xavier Darcos, who provoked a great outcry amongst the ranks of early childhood educators by asking publicly whether “it is really logical, while we are so aware of careful spending of public funds, that we should ask people to take Masters level exams when their main function will be to make children take a nap or to change their diapers?”

With this comment he demonstrated his deep misunderstanding of and disdain for the work of the educators for whom he is responsible. It should not come as a surprise, since the book reveals that the minister was linked to a think tank called “Creators of schools.” This group, composed of high-ranked officials in the education ministry, was “determined to take over the citadel of Education with their ideas.”

The book also shows the agenda pursued by a coalition between advocates of privatisation of education and religious interests, mostly Roman Catholic. On their agenda: More public funding of private schools through school vouchers; promotion of freedom of choice in schooling, especially in terms of Catholic boarding schools; questioning co-educational schooling; raising doubts about the long-standing policy of secularism in schools; review of teacher training institutions; curriculum reform at primary level, among others.

And all this with the full support of the educational establishment and the government! The authors conclude that “the government’s hidden agenda is to undermine education as a public service and, over the long term, to privatise it. The book’s goal is to add to a debate that is fundamental to French society and its future, to call upon all citizens to be involved—especially parents of students, teachers, and educators— in order to preserve and enhance community wellbeing, and the essence of secular public education that is truly open to all.”

Clearly the authors share the same worries as delegates to EI’s 5th World Congress, who passed a resolution stating that “attacks on the quality of public education are used by those who promote privatisation ... in order to undermine the public’s confidence in public education and to justify cutbacks in public investments.” As well, they voted to “support affiliated trade unions in their struggle against the growing influence of the role of religions in school.”
Reduction discrimination and preventing exclusion of Roma people has been on the agenda of many European countries in recent years. Despite numerous programmes on integration of Roma, the European Union lacks the ability to influence national governments in crucial areas: the labour market, social institutions, health structures and education, where discrimination and structural exclusion continue to keep Roma in poverty. The European Roma Summit, which took place in Brussels in September, raised considerable criticism of certain member states.

Despite the European Court of Human Rights ruling last year that segregation of Roma students into "special" schools for children with learning disabilities is a form of unlawful discrimination, governments and school systems have been slow to undo practices of segregation of Roma children. Patterns of discrimination are still reflected in the main-stream school systems in Central and Eastern Europe, and school attendance of Roma children remains low.

Segregation does not only take place at the school level. While Roma children often do attend all-Roma schools or are enrolled in special schools, segregation also exists in regular schools: between classes, and also within them. Roma children may be placed at the back of classrooms and ignored by their teachers, who may feel at a loss as to how to go about teaching Roma students. Teachers may not be aware of the needs of the children in their class because they have not been trained in intercultural perspectives. Due to a lack of representation in school textbooks or class discussions, many Roma children are unable to find themselves and their realities reflected in the school experience.

Discrimination in education, or any other social sphere, cannot be solved by 'quick fix' programmes. Arguably any effort is better than none, but one short-term project or crash course after another is not likely to meet with enthusiasm from teachers or students. If real change is to be achieved, it must be through structural transformation of entire education systems to accommodate diversity. Teacher unions, teacher education programmes, the curriculum, local government and education ministries, and, of course, Roma communities themselves must all be involved.

Obviously teachers have a key role to play as implementers of inclusive education practices and encouragers of reciprocal relationships of tolerance and respect between children in the classroom and the community. It is important that their voices be heard, and that they be given the support and inter-cultural training they need to meet the challenge of diversity in their classrooms.

Introducing Roma school mediators can help to encourage Roma parents to send their children to school, and also help keep teachers up to date about the home situations of Roma students.

However, teachers cannot end discrimination and disadvantage alone. Roma continue to face multifaceted deprivation and inequality in terms of unemployment, poor housing, lack of access to social services and minimal political influence. These problems can only be confronted through joint policies that address closely interlinked spheres: social, political, economic and cultural.

Mireille de Koning is EI Professional Assistant for Research. III
Not surprisingly, most reactions – both by experts and the general public – were rather sceptical.

Many schools in developing countries would be grateful to have functioning laboratories, let alone computers. Under such conditions access to the internet seems fairly Utopian. That is not to say that many teachers, headmasters and teacher unions do not see computer training as a priority, quite on the contrary; it’s just that if you have a leaking roof and no textbooks to give out to your pupils, these issues might seem altogether more pressing than a little laptop for the kids to play with.

But we should not forget that during the last few years, literally a revolution has been going on in the areas of Information and Communications Technology. In little more than two decades, life in the industrialised world has become unimaginable without computers, mobile phones and all sorts of other electronic helpers.

However, this process has also opened up a huge gap between industrialised and developing countries in terms of access to these kinds of technologies: the so-called "Digital Divide." This gap has enormous social and economic consequences, both for the developed and for less developed countries of the world.

A study by the University of California’s Centre for Research on Information Technology and Organizations has found that in Asia only about four out of every 1,000 people have a PC, compared to 585 per 1,000 in the United States of America. Likewise, 88% of internet users come from industrialised countries.

The impossibility of gaining access to the wealth of information on the internet is a real hindrance where education is concerned. Of course, technology on its own cannot solve the problems of poverty and exclusion but, as a tool, there’s no doubt it can make a real difference.

Again, bridging the gap in digital technology between poor and rich countries may seem of secondary importance when compared to the necessity to give access to clean water and healthcare. But even low-income countries are prepared to spend billions for the latest military hardware, when that kind of money could be far better invested in educational projects.

The OLPC Initiative’s “100$-laptop” (as it is colloquially known) ultimately turned out to cost about $180 US. But the XO-1 (its official name) actually set a completely new trend among notebook manufacturers: the emergence of “netbooks.”

Netbooks – low-cost, small, lightweight, offering only fundamental functionalities such as word processing and web-browsing – have only been emerging since the XO-1 made front-page news. And they have been a great success: The XO-1 has been distributed to more than 700,000 children in countries such as Rwanda, Uruguay, Afghanistan and Mongolia.

The government of Venezuela announced a few weeks back that it intended to buy 1 million “Magalhães” laptops, a computer manufactured in Portugal based on Intel’s competing low-cost platform, the ClassmatePC. When the Asus Eee PC hit the stores earlier this year, it was sold out so quickly that the company was struggling to meet the demand.

What would it be like to be working with a netbook?

We asked ourselves: What would it be like to be working with a netbook? The Fedora operating system with the Sugar Graphical User Interface that is used on the One Laptop Per Child Initiative’s netbook is available for download on a Live-CD, which
means you can boot your own PC into the same environment XO-1 users experience.

But in order to get an impression working on a real netbook, we wrote to a number of manufacturers and requested test models of their products. Asus, Acer, and Dell never responded, but Hewlett Packard sent us the Mini Note PC for a two-week test period.

The Mini Note is one of latest additions to the netbook universe, and, as Michael Donck of HP Belgium told us, it is “specifically developed for the education market.”

The Mini Note has a brushed metal finish that easily survived the “scratch test” in my daughter’s schoolbag. The remarkably large keyboard and the impressive, very crisp and bright screen make on-screen reading and word processing a rather pleasant experience for the little actual space available – in fact, the letter keys have the same size as a standard keyboard. Apart from an adequate array of standard input and output ports, the Mini Note comes with a built-in webcam and stereo microphone. Stereo speakers are built-in, too, and their sound quality is quite good.

The Mini Note we tested was installed with Linux as operating system, and was equipped with a VIA 1.2 Gigahertz processor plus 512 Megabytes of memory, which results in performance fair enough for basic needs. For classroom use, though, it would need heavy customization. Out of the box, we could picture it as the perfect gadget for a student to take notes with in a lecture theatre, or for a pupil in secondary school to get the basic hang of Linux.

**Technological tools can serve students’ needs**

Clearly developing nations face pressing infrastructure needs in schools, but this fact should not serve as an excuse for governments not to offer their pupils ways to familiarize themselves with information technology.

As always, technology in itself is only a tool, a means to an end. It can help provide access to information to economically disadvantaged children by making them more active in their own learning through collaborative and creative activities, according to Nicholas Negroponte, the founder of the One Laptop Per Child Initiative.

Education is a fundamental human right, and in the 21st century, much of education has to be based on information technology. The One Laptop Per Child Initiative was the forerunner in developing affordable hardware and learning-centred software specifically for the classroom, and other manufacturers have jumped on that bandwagon. This is a new development to be welcomed, but not only because it has given millions of children in the developing world the chance to work with computers. The general decline in prices triggered by the introduction of these small and less expensive subnotebooks also makes it more affordable for children from low-income families in the industrialized world to own – and learn with the help of – computers, and so to integrate better into the knowledge societies in which they live.

Timo Linsenmaier is EI Professional Assistant for Web Communications.
New Deputy General Secretary and Executive Board members appointed

At its meeting in Brussels held from 22-25 September, members of the Executive Board of Education International appointed a third Deputy General Secretary to help lead the growing global federation. In addition, two new members of the Executive Board were appointed as a result of two resignations.

Yuzuru Nakamura, President of the Japan Teachers’ Union and chair of EI’s Asia-Pacific regional committee, will replace the outgoing Yasuo Morikoshi.

Emily Noble, President of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, will replace the outgoing Marilies Rettig, who played a key role on the EI Status of Women Committee and offered leadership in the area of equality.

EI expresses its gratitude to Yasuo Morikoshi and Marilies Rettig for their distinguished service to the organisation and to the international trade union movement.

The Executive Board also appointed Monique Fouilhoux as EI’s third Deputy General Secretary. Monique Fouilhoux, currently senior coordinator for Education and Employment, has been involved with EI since its foundation in 1993. Her work with affiliates, intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organisations has focused on higher education and research issues, and the impact of GATS and trade agreements on education.

Her appointment comes in the wake of the retirement of former DGS Elie Jouen, and she now joins Jan Eastman and Charlie Lennon as fellow deputy general secretaries on the EI management team.

At the same time, eight new organizations were accepted as new members of Education International: CONADU/Argentina, DAU-SEN/Cyprus, SNESUp-FSU/France, CNEC/Ivory Coast, GUWT/Jordan, KNUPST/Kenya, KUPPET/Kenya and PTUZ/Zimbabwe.

In order to better support member organisations in the Islamic countries in addressing trade union and professional challenges, the Executive Board mandated the General Secretary to work towards the establishment of a special group for member unions in those countries. The group would assemble under the EI banner, make recommendations to the Executive Board on relevant policies and programs, and represent EI member unions at the international Islamic institutions.

The Executive Board decided that EI should examine possible implications of the international financial crisis on teachers and the education sector. It also approved some new initiatives including the convening of an international conference on privatization of education services to be held in London in the first half of 2009.
In Memoriam

Jackie Kirk: Courage and compassion in dangerous times
Dr. Jackie Kirk died 13 August 2008 in Logar Province, Afghanistan, gunned down along with two other female humanitarian aid workers and their Afghan driver. They were travelling in a clearly-marked International Rescue Committee vehicle when they came under heavy fire. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the deadly attack.

Dr. Kirk, 40, was an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University in Montreal, where she worked on several research projects focused on gender, education, conflict and peace. She was a teacher-consultant in global education, a technical specialist in education in emergency and post-conflict and fragile states including Haiti, Lebanon, Rwanda, Angola, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Afghanistan.

She worked with UNESCO, UNICEF and a number of aid organizations in countries where education has been devastated by conflicts, and where girls’ enrolment and retention in schools has suffered because of family displacement, poverty, lack of accessible schools, and other conflict-related issues.

“Jackie was courageous and she put her principles in action,” said EI General Secretary Jan Eastman. “I admired her deep understanding of the issues and her determination to take action despite the dangers and difficulties. I’ll always remember Jackie’s passion for her work, and her caring for people, especially the women and children.”

Jackie was convinced that education and teachers have a critical role to play in peace-building and reconstruction, and this process should be informed by a concern for gender equality in its broadest sense. “For these reasons we need to encourage women to be teachers now, and support them as important agents of change,” she wrote.

Her working life was a vivid example of the growing role of women, both as the deliverers and the beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance.

Jackie was a friend to education and a much valued colleague and resource person. Education International honours the memory of Jackie and her colleagues who died promoting the role of women teachers and gender equality education in the most adverse conditions: the conflict-affected areas that are home to 40 million of the 72 million children not in school.

Concha Espinosa: A loud and proud socialist
Concha Espinosa Jiménez, of the Spanish Federación de Trabajadores de la Enseñanza de la UGT, died 24 September in Madrid, Spain after a battle against cancer. She was 54 years old.

Concha was the Federal Secretary of University Education for many years and often represented FETE-UGT at international events. She was a member of the EI Higher Education and Research Standing Committee. She was well known as an efficient, outspoken and challenging trade unionist who was at the top in defending teachers’ rights in education policy negotiations. She participated intensively in all discussions towards the reform of the Ley Orgánica de Universidades, the national university-level policy, reflecting her conviction that the future of a country lies in the hands of those who teach their children. She was highly esteemed for her frankness and loyalty to her colleagues and friends.

She dedicated her life to the promotion of a progressive, quality education based on equal rights and opportunities. Her determination and commitment to the work of her union and of EI is an example for us all.

Faustin Kanamugire: Resolute champion of teachers’ cause
Faustin Kanamugire, General Secretary of the former Equipes Enseignantes du Rwanda (EER), now known as the Syndicat des Personnels de l’Enseignement du Rwanda (SYPERWA), died 30 September in Kigali, and his funeral took place on 5 October 2009, World Teachers’ Day.

All those who knew Faustin will remember him as a reserved man who rarely raised his voice and was very respectful of others. He was unerringly resolute in his fight for the cause of teachers. He was dedicated to promoting the Education for All goals, and to the fight against HIV and AIDS through the EFAIDS programme. Faustin was very honest, devoted, and well-liked, and always sought consensus in the face of problems.

It was just a few weeks ago that Faustin was re-elected General Secretary of the former EER. He also served as a member of the EI African Regional Committee.

The death of Faustin is the second tragedy to hit his union in the space of four months. President Nazaire Sébiraza passed away just before him. It is also a terrible blow to the African teachers’ trade union movement, which has lost an experienced and passionate unionist. III
Haiti

Hurricanes devastate homes and schools

In Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, nearly 45 per cent of the country’s population is under the age of 18. Only 51 per cent of Haitian girls and 48 per cent of boys of primary school age attend school, according to UNICEF.

EI regional coordinator Virginia Albert-Poyotte travelled to Haiti in October to meet with teachers and leaders of the Confédération Nationale des Educateurs d’Haïti (CNEH), and to distribute solidarity funds from EI and Canadian and Caribbean affiliates.

EI and Haitian union leaders met with teachers in the hard-hit town of Gonaïves to distribute international solidarity funds.

Haiti’s struggling education system suffered another severe blow as tropical storms and hurricanes hit the island four times in August and September, bringing floods that killed more than 800 people and inflicting almost $1 billion in damage.

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Albert-Poyotte and other unionists visited the hard-hit city of Gonaïves, where flood waters three metres deep swept away homes and schools. They also tried to visit Nippes, where 40 schools were damaged, leaving more than 8,000 pupils without access to education, but access roads were closed due to flooding.

In Gonaïves, no classes were taking place because the remaining schools were still occupied by townspeople whose homes had been destroyed. “The teachers were very thankful for the support given to them,” said Albert-Poyotte.

Besides homes and schools, the hurricanes also destroyed crops and killed significant numbers of livestock, making already-hungry people all the more vulnerable.

Médecins Sans Frontières reported an increase in the number of malnourished children admitted to its relief hospital in Gonaïves.

In a country faced with such immense challenges, education represents a key source of hope for the future, says UNICEF’s representative in Haiti, Annamaria Laurini. “Too many Haitian families are being faced, this year, with a decision no family should ever have to make: to feed their children, or to send them to school.”
Letters to the editor

Australian outback schools mark WTD

To the Editor:

The tyranny of distance does not stop tiny schools in outback Australia from celebrating World Teachers’ Day, though they do it on 31 October. That’s because most students and teachers in Australia and New Zealand are enjoying school holidays on 5 October.

Our country’s biggest state, Western Australia, is a whopping 2.5 million square kilometres – twice the size of Western Europe – but has a population of just over 2 million people, 1.5 million of whom live in the capital Perth, one of the world’s most isolated cities.

To help bridge the distances, the Western Australia College of Teaching, which registers all 45,000 teachers in the state, posted several World Teachers’ Day initiatives on its website (www.wacot.wa.edu.au). Its Celebrate teachers page offered ideas about how students, parents and communities could acknowledge the vital contribution of teachers. A special version of Education International’s “Teachers matter” poster, carrying the 31 October date of WTD in Australia, was made available for download. It was posted in outback schools as far away as Fitzroy Crossing District High School, 2,686 km north of Perth!

Robyn Cash
Perth, Western Australia

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Robyn Cash
Perth, Western Australia
Manila, Philippines: Young people who were forced to quit school due to poverty stage a demonstration outside the ministry of education to protest rising food and fuel prices.

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