RESOLUTION ON GENDER AND HIV/AIDS

“If it can be said, as it can, that by the year 2020 the number of deaths [caused by HIV/AIDS] in Africa will approximate the number of deaths, military and civilians combined, in both World Wars of the 20th Century, then it should also be said that a pronounced majority of those deaths will be women and girls. The toll on women and girls is beyond human imagining; it presents Africa and the World with a practical and moral challenge which places Gender at the centre of the human condition […]”

STEPHEN LEWIS, UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa, July 2002

The Fourth World Congress of Education International, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil from 22 to 26 July, 2004

1. Noting that the world will mark the 23rd anniversary of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in June 2004 and that according to recent UNAIDS estimations that 40 million people are living with the virus, and that the global epidemic killed more than 3 million people in 2003.

2. Concerned by the alarming growth in the gender dimension of the pandemic, that women and girls are increasingly represented among the vulnerable, infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, in Sub-Saharan Africa (the region worst affected), that women and girls are twice as likely to be infected with HIV than men, and that among people aged 15-24, this ratio is highest.

3. Noting that it is not simply because they are women, but because of the inequalities and discrimination that distorts and impairs almost every aspect of their lives, that violence of all kinds and the fear of violence may intimidate women from trying to negotiate safer emotional relationships, to discuss safer practices with partners and to leave risky relationships, that vulnerability is extremely high where women and girls have little power to decide on fundamental aspects of their lives, that trafficking of people, prostitution, including child prostitution, armed conflicts and poverty that devastates economies and impoverishes families introduce further gender-based violence and increase the opportunities to be affected by the pandemic.

4. Concerned by the extremely difficult situations that particularly women teachers and women education personnel affected by HIV/AIDS could face at school, in the union, and in society at large. Also concerned by the situation of girls and young women students, and;

5. Convinced that women teachers and women education personnel affected by HIV/AIDS should not be considered only as victims because they could also be part of the measures aimed at effectively combating the discrimination and stigma that they could face, and that they have the right to participate in the development of such measures.

6. Considering that the fundamental role that education must play in the prevention and elimination of all forms of discrimination that could face women and girls affected with HIV/AIDS, and that several studies conducted at national and international level have shown that the lack of education in general, and particularly on reproductive health and HIV prevention, increases the vulnerability of women and girls and have also highlighted the protective role that schools could play.

7. Considering also the quantity of data and expertise gained by EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL during the past nine years through the programme undertaken in conjunction with WHO and UNAIDS.
The Fourth World Congress of Education International

A. Calls on governments to take effective measures to:
   • Ensure equal and free access of girls and women to public, quality education, which includes scientific, informed programmes on human sexuality, in close consultation with teacher’s unions;
   • Prevent HIV infection of women and girls ensuring access to appropriate sexual education and to reproductive health care;
   • Promote research for the development of effective microbicides;
   • Facilitate access to condoms in order to reduce significantly risks of HIV transmission and slow down the pandemic;
   • Ensure equal access of women and girls living with HIV or affected by AIDS to proper care and treatment;
   • Ensure access to generic medication in less developed countries and fully implement the commitments of Doha;
   • Reduce violence against women and girls at home, in schools, at the work place and in society at large, reducing their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS;
   • Conduct national estimates of HIV prevalence based on gender-sensitive and disaggregated data;
   • Protect the economic rights of women and girls, ensuring property ownership and inheritance rights in the context of HIV/AIDS;
   • Firmly combat trafficking on women and girls, child labour, forced marriage, sexual and economic exploitation and all forms of discrimination against women and girls that increase their vulnerability and could facilitate their exposure to HIV/AIDS.

B. Invites EI member organisations to:
   • Spare no effort and to urge their governments to implement a prevention and education policy integrating sex education, with a gender perspective as well as teacher training programmes including the use of appropriate methods for education about health, life skills and HIV/AIDS;
   • Include in collective bargaining negotiations issues related to the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS and to train negotiation teams in this;
   • Develop activities to deal specifically with the situations that face women teachers affected by HIV/AIDS;
   • Firmly implement the EI Declaration on Professional Ethics and act to make school a safe and healthy place that guarantees to everybody protection from all forms of discrimination, harassment and violence and a friendly place in which to learn, work and live together.

C. Role of Education International
   EI should:
   • Strengthen its collaboration with international organisations like ILO, WHO, UNAIDS, among others that deal with the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS;
   • Participate at international and regional level in events related to gender and HIV/AIDS;
   • Include the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS in developing cooperation programmes;
   • Develop training activities and materials specifically for women to assist member organisations on the gender-related aspects of the pandemic.