Press Release
July 23, 2004

**Education International, 4th World Congress**
Porto Alegre, Brazil, 22-26 July 2004

**Opening of the 4th World Congress of Education International**

The President of Education International, Dr Mary Hatwood Futrell, declared the Congress open and welcomed the more than 1500 participants and guests.

The Congress was first addressed by Juçara Maria Dutra Vieira, President of CNTE - EI’s Brazilian affiliate and host organisation of the World Congress, which represents over 2 million educators in the country. She highlighted the symbolic importance of holding EI’s Congress in the city of Porto Alegre, and at this particular moment in the history of Brazil after the election of labour leader Lula. “Globalisation can mean exclusion, poverty and illiteracy,” she said. In the face of globalisation, the right to education becomes all the more important. It is hence necessary to recognise that “rights have social costs”, unions such as CNTE have a responsibility in making sure that the Brazilian government sets aside resources for to protect the right to education. It is an honour as well as a great responsibility for CNTE to host the event, for the presence of more than a thousand teachers committed to the same goal will impress President Lula.

The second speaker was Luis Marinho, President of CUT, the largest trade union confederation in Brazil. Luis Marinho voiced the strong desire of the workers’ community to change Brazil and the whole Latin American region, which is ignited by the election of President Lula, a former metalworker, to the Presidency of the country. Luis Marinho also highlighted the commitment of all workers in the world to defend peace and to support governments that defend peace in the world.

In her address, the President of Education International, Dr Mary Hatwood Futrell, presented the challenges faced by education personnel as citizens in a global society: Education For All, quality of education, the rights of women and girls, fight against child labour, the continuing struggle for democracy, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the defense of human and trade union rights of educators and support personnel. “Education is a basic human right and a critical component of global progress,” said the EI President. “When a country educates its people, it is building a nation.” In her speech, Mary Hatwood Futrell talked about the past, the present and the future of EI. Since its foundation in 1993, EI has made a tremendous impact on education and has become a powerful advocate for children and education worldwide. While it is faced with many challenges in the present, EI does not shy away from its responsibility to fight for and protect the rights of educators worldwide. For the future, she stressed that EI will focus on what she termed the “Weapons of Mass Construction”. These include the guarantee of quality learning and decent working conditions and the protection of the human and trade union rights of teachers and students. EI also needs to focus on professional issues such as teacher recruitment, training and retention, freedom of association and academic freedom. “We need to remind the world that educating children cannot be achieved at bargain basement prices,” she said.

She concluded her introduction by wishing that EI and teachers unions be creative and bold in their advocacy, and in doing so, drawing inspiration from the host country, Brazil.

A message from UN General Secretary Kofi Annan was read by the General Secretary of EI. In his message, the UN General Secretary reminded that two of the eight UN Millennium Goals pertain to the access to education. He lamented that “more than half a century ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established that everyone has the right to education. The fact that millions are still deprived of it should fill us all with shame.”

Education International is the largest global teacher organisation representing over 29 million teachers through over 300 member organisations in over 150 countries and territories.
Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) brought solidarity greetings from the 150-million-strong trade union family. He also praised the government of Brazil for advocating for international change and global progress. “The ICFTU makes sure that Brazil is getting the workers’ support its projects merit,” he said. The importance of education raises no doubt, he insisted, because universal access to free quality education is a precondition for a successful working life. Hence he condemns the privatisation of education. “Education cannot be a commodity any more than labour cannot be a commodity.”

Reflecting on the future of the international trade union movement, Guy Ryder insisted on the merits of unity, cohesion and efficiency. Guy Ryder welcomed the present discussions between EI and the World Confederation of Teachers (WCT) which is paving way for the process of unification between the ICFTU itself and the World Confederation of Labour. Unnecessary divisions should be ended so as to realise the vision of greater unity and teamwork among all workers. “Another international trade union movement is possible. We just have to create it,” he concluded.

The audience was next addressed by Brazilian President, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, also known affectionately as “Lula”. First of all, President Lula congratulated both EI and CNTE to have chosen Porto Alegre as the venue of EI’s World Congress. This choice reflects the significant efforts that his government is making to reform the education system. For example, the “Family Grant” programme put in place to ensure each poor family can provide its children with the opportunity to attend school marks a milestone in the provision of Education For All in the country. President Lula also announced an electronic tracking system which will soon be implemented so as to enable him to monitor the daily school attendance rate of children in Brazil. Another part of his education reform is to provide adequate training for teachers. “Brazil does not only want to be the exporter of primary products,” he declared. “we also want to be the exporter of knowledge. All investment in education is investment in the future. No human being is stupid and all human beings can develop given the opportunity.”

President Lula’s speech was warmly welcomed by EI as well as by the Mayor of Porto Alegre, João Verle. Participants were next addressed by Tarso Genro, the Minister for Education. “It is an honour to participate in an event of this magnitude,” he said. “This government wants to eliminate illiteracy and get funding for basic education and guarantee equal access to public universities.”

Before the departure of President Lula, EI President Dr Mary Hatwood Futrell congratulated him on the implementation of the Family Grant programme, to the applause of all present.