**Education International, 4th World Congress**

Porto Alegre, Brazil, 22-26 July 2004

**Address by Guy Ryder, General Secretary**

**International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)**

President, Delegates,

Fraternal greetings from the 150 million strong world trade union family of the ICFTU. It is a pleasure to be with you. It is a particular pleasure to be in Porto Alegre a city which has won a world-wide reputation among those working for progressive change in the world, and of course in Brazil with a Government committed to social justice not just here, but on the international stage. It is a Government, led by President Luis Ignacio Da Silva which should not be left alone in that international fight and which must and does have the support of our global labour movement.

We join in wishing all success to this 4th World Congress of Education International.

Indeed, trade unionists everywhere and from all sectors have a very real and direct interest in its success, an interest which goes beyond the natural solidarity, we in the ICFTU feel for Education International as a Global Union partner and valued friend.

And that is simply because universal access to quality education is a fundamental pre-condition for the realisation of decent work for all which we need to make the world-wide policy goal for fair globalisation.

Everyone of us knows from our everyday experience, once as students, then as workers, as parents, and as citizens, that our educational experience goes a long way to determining the quality of our lives, our work, our family interaction, and the realisation of our potential as human beings. So, global progress does depend on education.

Provision of quality education is about as good a single indicator of the health of our societies as one could probably get – and, by the way of their economic success. And exclusion from educational opportunity, is by the same taken as one of the most flagrant and cruellest sources of social injustice and of exclusion - all the more cruel for being visited particular on the young.

So Education International's fight, this Congress contribution to stopping the commercialization of education is one we all stand behind. The push for privatization and choice in education do need to be exposed for what they are. None of us would turn our backs on reform and on change as such – but where we are confronted with no more than a marketing pitch for the reduction of the allocation of public resources to education and the deepening of structural inequality in our societies – then we are moving away from education for all towards education for those who can pay for it. And that should be stopped.

And what Education International is doing on this fits centrally in the wider Global Unions Campaign for the defense of public provision of essential services from the threats that are present in the Gats negotiations in trade in services, on which we are working together, with the PSI and with others.

And it is precisely because we do face global challenges which are bringing national and international trade union agenda into convergence and which cut across sectoral interests too that our international movement has to learn to work together better and to work differently.
I am conscious that many Education International affiliates are not members of national centers which are affiliated to the ICFTU. There are reasons for that, and they are to be respected.

That said, our movement does need greater cohesion, new working methods and greater unity. In fact we have been moving in this direction. The ICFTU and the 10 Global Union Federations - including Education International have been cooperating increasingly closely in the Global Unions Group.

That has been important in many areas - in our work with the World Bank for example and in the task of building free trade unions in Iraq - where the need for a united multilateral effort has been particularly vital - for reasons which will be obvious to you all.

And the ICFTU goes to its own World Congress in Japan in December with an agenda for change for our movement. Yesterday's trade union internationalism is not going to be up to the job of meeting the challenges ahead.

That conviction means that we intend to take a leaf from Education International's book (You are here to promote education - so you should not mind us learning from you I guess).

We know that Education International was the creation of a historic process of unification. We have followed closely too the process in which Education International has engaged with you colleagues in the World Confederation of Teachers, and welcome it warmly and encourage you in the important decisions before this Congress.

These processes are never easy. Any numbers of good reasons can be cited as to why they should not proceed. So to make them happen requires leadership, a vision of the greater challenges we face and objectives we must achieve and commitment to them.

Education International has shown all these, and you have also done a service to the wider world movement. In a sense you opened the way to the process between the ICFTU and the World Confederation of Labour over the last 18 months which I believe can now lead to the unification of the democratic and independent forces of the International Trade Union movement in a new world international.

I will be putting proposals to that effect to our World Congress in December. I hope they will be adopted. I hope that the WCL Congress the following year - meeting in this very city will take a similar decision and that together with them and other centers we will be able to have that new international in place by 2006.

That would be a historic step forward. The realisation of a 50 year old ambition. An end to division which unnecessarily weakens our movement and an opportunity for us to do better in representing the people we represent in the global economy.

It would be a tool - no more- but a tremendously powerful one, if we learn to use it well.

That means engaging national organizations more effectively (in internationalism, refashioning the way we work, and working more closely together as a single cohesive and determined movement.

Another trade union internationalism is possible - but we have to create it. And having created it we need to put it at the service of that other better world which we also know to be possible - one with quality education for all.

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