Speech
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**Speech by EI President, Mary Hatwood Futrell**

Good Morning! On behalf of the Executive Board of Education International, it is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to the Fourth Education International World Congress.

As all of you know, the theme of this year’s meeting is “Education for Global Progress.” This is -- to put it mildly -- an enormous topic, with vast implications for our profession, for the children of the world, and for the future. And, yet, it is a theme predicated upon a simple, singular belief: that education is a basic, human right and a critical component of global progress. As such, this theme presents us with a challenge: how do we ensure that such a basic human right is bequeathed to all children in all communities across the globe? How can we provide quality education for all?

This is a daunting question. To answer it, I’m going to speak today about our past, our present, and our future.

I will begin with our past.

EI’s history has been unprecedented. Our past has built for us a marvelous foundation upon which we have become powerful advocates for children and education worldwide.

It is difficult to believe that just 11 years ago, we were two organizations vying with each other for members and competing to be the preeminent, international voice for education. On January 26, 1993, approximately 1000 delegates from the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) and the International Federation of Free Teachers Unions (IFFTU) gathered in Stockholm, Sweden to consummate the merger of these two rival teachers’ organisations. How many of you were in Stockholm for that historic moment?

I am sure you remember how cold and snowy it was that day. But, most of all, I remember how anxious all of us were as we debated the merger, and then voted whether to accept it.

When the votes were tallied, WCOTP and IFFTU delegates voted overwhelmingly to merge. The next day we met for the first time as Education International.

Since then, we have been growing stronger every year. And as a result, we have had an enormous impact on education globally. Just think,

- 11 years ago we were divided; today we are united.
- 11 years ago we started with about 18 million members, today we have approximately 27 million members in 315 affiliates in 159 countries and territories.
- 11 years ago we projected that we would become the largest democratic teachers’ organization in the world; today, we are one of the largest democratic organizations, including unions, in the world.
- 11 years ago we were trying to establish an identity for ourselves; today Education International is renowned as ‘the’ leader on issues such as education for all children, the rights of women and girls, union rights of educators and...
support personnel, the fight against child labor, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the struggle for democracy.

Today, we have already surpassed the dreams and aspirations of the leaders of this great organization upon whose shoulders we stand: William Carr, Heinrich Rodenstein, Norman Goble, Albert Shanker, Sheena Hanley, Bob Harris, Tom Bediako and Shoju Oba to name just a few. We are who we are today, thanks to you and the work you have done: the members, leaders and staff in this room and those in our regional and national organizations. Men and women who have provided courageous and inspirational leadership that laid the foundation for who we are today.

Yet, as we calculate the algebra of our past successes and reflect upon our accomplishments, we must also look forward. While there is much in our past for which we should be proud, there are plenty of present-day challenges that require our attention.

And so, allow me to now to address our present.

It has often been said, “the course of civilization is a race between catastrophe and education.” This has arguably never been truer than now. As educators – and as educators with a global awareness – every person in this room knows that the economic, spiritual, social, and very literal physical health of the world depends upon having a well-educated population.

We know that the minds of children are every nation's greatest natural resource. Neglecting this intellectual capital is at our peril. An educated population is the best possible inoculation against poverty, communicable diseases, injustice, war or tyranny.

An educated population is also economically mandatory. Nowadays, we live in a society that is increasingly based on information and knowledge, which demands more literate and more educated citizens than ever before. More and more of our nations’ Gross National Product are based on the national GIP--Gross Intellectual Products--the brain power and creative genius needed to drive media, biotechnology, electronics, communications, and other industries yet to be dreamed.

When a nation educates its people, it is doing more than simply teaching reading or mathematics: it is nation building. When a nation educates its people, it is fortifying itself economically. When a nation educates its people, it is laying the groundwork for sustained democracy, for increased health and prosperity, and for the preservation and promotion of culture and human rights.

Where does all of this nation building start? It starts, of course, with our children. Over 2000 years ago, Socrates asked the Greeks, “Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth and, yet, take so little care of your children, to whom one day you must relinquish it all?”

Although more than two millennia have passed since then, little seems to have changed. Socrates' indictment could just as easily be applied to us.

Although we live in a world that is increasingly intercultural and interdependent -- a world that is made smaller everyday, a world changing so fast that a person who is saying, "it can't be done" is usually interrupted by someone who has already done it -- we still have not managed to take better care of our children and to invest in their potential.

Although nations around the world are being brought together through “globalization,” the rift between those nations who “have” and those who “have not”
is at the same time growing exponentially. Although the fate of the entire world depends upon education, enormous inequalities exist. It is a sad commentary that people still have to fight for the right to be educated in the 21st century. Universal access to formal schooling should be a given, but in too many countries it still is not.

As of 2000, 84% of the world’s children were enrolled in school, except in Africa, where enrollments were at the 60% level. Many of the students listed as being enrolled only occasionally attend school. 77% of all children enrolled in primary education only reached Grade 5.

Today, there are 900 million illiterates in the world; two-thirds of these are women and girls.

Amazingly, when I speak to different groups, they often do not immediately make the link between crises such as warfare and disease with education. Yet, I trust that everyone in this room intimately understands that while it is difficult to teach without basic supplies such as books and pencils, it is nearly impossible to teach in war-zones, refugee camps, or in communities decimated by AIDS. When members of EI speak of an “environment conducive to learning,” we don’t just mean a clean, quiet schoolroom with electricity, a blackboard, and enough desks for everyone. We mean a clean, quiet school room in each country where children are not being housed in refugee tents, recruited to fight in rebel armies, or orphaned and infected by AIDS.

This is not idealism, my friends, but a necessity.

According to a recent survey of 113 countries conducted by the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, more than 27 million children currently living in war-torn nations don’t receive any education – and those who do attend school often have to contend with “overcrowded classrooms that are targets of violence.” Only 6 percent of all child refugees are enrolled in secondary school, and in countries such as Angola, where civil war raged for 30 years, the commission has found that many children receive no formal education at all for the duration of the conflict. In other places, such as Afghanistan, war had openly been declared on learning itself.

But, we will not be intimidated. Education International’s leaders, staff, and members have risked their lives to work with educators in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sierra Leone and in other countries to re-establish the education system so that children in those war torn countries can go to school. We will continue to fight for the right of everyone, but especially children, to have access to education.

Compounding the ravages of warfare is the international crises of HIV and AIDS. I don’t think I need to explain to anybody in this room just how devastating this epidemic has been. Earlier this month, United Nations health officials announced that the epidemic is spreading at an alarming rate, with a record 4.8 million new infections in 2003 alone. In terms of education, both resources and the teaching force itself are being decimated. Children are not only being orphaned by AIDS (and infected and dying themselves), but also left without teachers and, thus, without the opportunity for formal schooling.

According to the Population Reference Bureau, “some 860,000 school children in Sub-Saharan Africa had teachers who died of AIDS. Across the ocean in Guatemala, it has been found that at least one-third of AIDS orphans have dropped out of school.

So whenever people approach me – or you – and ask, “Why is EI so concerned with HIV/AIDS? Is it really an education issue?” – the answer is and must be an unequivocal “Yes. Oui. Sí, and Jà.” We must not and cannot be afraid to stand up
and fight for justice. Not only is this not unprofessional, it is our moral obligation as educators to speak out on these issues and how they impact the education of children everywhere.

We are educators in difficult times. The present is full of challenges and inequities reflecting the complications of the times in which we live. And yet, I believe that the future can hold enormous promise if EI holds fast to its commitment and advocates for those policies that we know to be right and necessary.

Thus, now, I come to the third part of my speech today: the future. It is simply too easy to rest on the laurels of our past or lament the seemingly insurmountable problems of the present. But by fixing our gaze squarely on the goal of “Education for All,” and doing the tough work that it requires of us, I believe we can pave the way for a better, more promising future of global progress for all of us. We have to. We have no other choice.

I instead of focusing on the calamities of the world and its current brutalities, we need to focus on, what I like to term, “The Weapons of Mass Construction.” These are not so much weapons as tools—tools that will make it possible for nations to engage in nation-building by providing individuals with the intellectual capacity to address the challenges of the future:

As I see it, Weapons of Mass Construction entail -

1. guaranteeing every child, woman and man in the world a quality education;
2. overcoming the teacher shortage while enhancing teaching as a profession;
3. improving the working conditions within our schools and, thus, improving the quality of education provided to our children;
4. advocating human and civil rights for all people, including
5. more effectively advocating for and protecting the trade union rights of our members and the civil and human rights of all people; and
6. helping communities overcome the vicissitudes of HIV/AIDS and other diseases that are ravaging societies.

Since this is what we, in the United States, call a “tall order,” let me break it down and focus on a few key issues.

First, let me focus on the issue of teachers—teacher recruitment, training, and retention—and the right to teach. If quality education is to become a reality, a sufficient number of well-qualified teachers is necessary.

Not long ago, I attended a Children’s Parliament in India—a parliament where the children were the representatives. One 11-year-old girl spoke about the educational rights of children, especially child laborers. This girl asked the adults present a very simple question: “Don’t poor children have the right to receive a quality education? Don’t poor children, like rich children, have the right to be taught by well-qualified teachers?”

No one answered her questions, but the answer is “yes.” Yes, poor children have the right to receive a quality education and, yes, poor children have the right to be taught by well-qualified teachers. In fact, the former is simply impossible without the latter. There is no quality education without quality teachers, and achieving universal education requires a significant increase in the number of trained, qualified teachers. In other words, the single most important factor in determining student performance is the quality of the teacher.

Ironically, although there is so much inequity that currently divides the world, there is one educational reality that many rich and poor nations alike increasingly seem to share: a mounting shortage of teachers. It is estimated that at the primary level
alone, at least an additional 35 million teachers will need to be hired within the next ten years.

I have picked up newspapers in England and Switzerland decrying the teacher shortage problem. I have witnessed it in Togo, South Africa, India, and Honduras. And I have certainly confronted it at home in the United States. While the severity varies, the problem is the same: too many students, but not enough willing, available, quality instructors. While we actually train enough teachers, we chronically lose them. And no, replacing teachers who leave the system with voluntary teachers is not the solution – Retaining them is.

On a hopeful note—an adequate supply of teachers is one of the top educational priorities of the UNESCO High-Level Group on Education For All. Issues such as teacher recruitment, training, and retention relate to achieving the goal of educating every child. Some want to address the problem by doubling class size. Others suggest that teachers teach two shifts—one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Last year, I talked with teachers in Ethiopia and Nigeria who shared with me their frustration trying to manage, much less teach, classes that range in size anywhere from 80 to 125 students. Such an expectation is not only unreasonable for teachers but also for students. When you have 125 or even 50 students in a class, there will not be much teaching and learning occurring. By the way, the Children's Parliament issued a declaration calling for no more than 30 students in any class and that all teachers should be professionally trained to teach. Maybe we should ask children rather than adults to develop strategies for achieving Education For All; at least they have more realistic experiences of what is happening in their schools!

I am happy to inform you that the report from last year UNESCO High Level Group meeting calls for more teachers, all teachers to be professionally trained, and concerted efforts by governments to reduce class size.

How else might we help alleviate this situation?

To put it quite bluntly, we need to uplift the status of teachers so that they are revered and respected. That teaching becomes a more attractive profession in communities, especially where teachers have previously felt overwhelmed, disrespected, or undervalued.

At the same time, teachers need to have support infrastructures. In one “school” I read about in Kenya recently, a teacher was teaching 150 fifth grade students about “Romeo and Juliet” using a megaphone – under a tree! And, yes, students do want to learn. I remember being in Togo not long ago and seeing boys and girls sitting under street lamps at night trying to study for their exams because they did not have electricity in their homes or schools to allow them to study there.

Concurrently, governments must also recognize that just as students have the right to learn, teachers must also have the right to teach with dignity and security. The teaching profession requires freedom of thought and action. It also requires us to work together collegially without fear of reprisal, to share ideas and experiences that enhance our knowledge base.

The right to teach also includes freedom of association, which is still problematic in some countries. Governments need to understand that teachers and other educational employees, according to the ILO Conventions on Freedom of Association, Collective Bargaining, and Equal Pay, have the right to belong to unions, to negotiate salaries and working conditions reflective of their professional work, to work together collegially and, most of all, have the right to be respected.
A report from this year’s Pan-African Conference shows an increasing violation of human and trade union rights of teachers, higher education faculty and other educational employees throughout the continent. In Colombia, on the continent where we’re gathered today, teachers are killed, tortured, harassed or go missing for trying to form unions and advocate for their rights.

Education International will not stand by and be silent while our colleagues are threatened and denied their rights. Through EI and our member organizations, we need to ensure that our members’ rights are protected so they can practice their profession free from physical attacks by parents and students as well as threat of reprisal, firing, or other abuses by government officials. We must stand united, as we did in Ethiopia when the government imprisoned Dr. Taye, President of the Ethiopian Teacher Association, for almost six years simply because he was a union leader and spoke out on behalf of the Associations members. We will stand united wherever the rights of our members—teachers, higher education faculty and support personnel—are infringed upon.

Attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers means that teachers must be paid salaries that reflect the professionals they are and the importance of the work they do. Attracting and retaining teachers will not occur if salaries are barely minimal or delayed. As a teacher, I know once said, ‘I can’t buy groceries with good intentions and promises’.

To this end, we must remind the world that educating children cannot be achieved at bargain basement prices. We need to improve the conditions of schools as well as the conditions in schools. We need to build schools. We need to develop curricula and instructional materials, including textbooks and technologies. We need transportation systems that give all children access to formal schooling. But, most importantly, we need teachers who can enable each child to acquire the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to negotiate the contemporary world in which we all live. We must also, I believe, be daring. We must be creative and bold in our advocacy. We should take inspiration from our host country, Brazil.

I don’t know if many of you know this, but Brazil has recently taken a very creative approach to the education of its poorest children. This country has begun a social program called the “Family Grant” – which I understand is also being implemented in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Mexico. Family Grant pays poor families small, monthly cash allowances for keeping their children in school and taking them for regular medical check-ups. The program not only provides families with an economic incentive to invest in their children’s futures, but drives home an important lesson: namely, that education pays. It is the best-shot families have of lifting their children out of poverty. The program is not a cure-all, but to Brazil's 45 million people mired in poverty, it stands to make a huge difference in their lives.

The program is simple, innovative, and so far, effective. And it represents the kind of thinking and creativity that EI members are wise to draw upon.

We have to be bold and innovative in our activism, and steadfast in our advocacy for equal educational opportunities for boys and girls, men and women alike. We must be willing to tackle the difficult challenges of our times, and rise to them with courage.

I am not naive enough to think that EI’s goals can be achieved through mostly good will and energy, and not massive amounts of money, time, and dedication. This is an historic moment that should call forth an historic effort on our part, but also on behalf of our national leaders and the general public.

Education International needs to impress upon the powers that-be, that nations can no longer educate 20, 50, or even 75 percent of their people and expect to survive.
No child should be denied access to education because schools do not exist or their parents cannot afford to pay the school fees. Universal, quality public education—not privatization of the education system—is the key to global progress. That is the pledge we made to our children more than 100 years ago. It is time to collect, to honor, and to fulfill that pledge.

Now is the time to impress upon governments, NGOs and the general public alike that we either pay now and reap the benefits of educating all of our citizens -- or pay later for the growing abject poverty, illiteracy and genocide that our negligence has bred and will continue to breed.

When we talk about education for global progress, we often ask ourselves “Is education for all children an impossible goal to achieve”? My response is No! Will it be difficult? Yes, but if we join together; IF we work together, this ideal can and WILL become a reality.

I began by speaking of our past – of how, just 11 years ago, we were a fractured body without a coherent voice and with little sense of our own power. But now, look at us. Look at what we have become, and how capable we are! We are 27 million people fiercely, passionately dedicated to a common cause. 27 million members brimming with talent, expertise, commitment. 27 million members dedicated to harnessing our skills - and using them to create a more equitable, just, and educated world!

As I work with teacher organizations all over the world, I see our colleagues tirelessly engaged in increasing access to education and improving the quality of learning. I have been a student in your classrooms. You have taught me lessons about education and the struggles you have endured to assure educational opportunities for all children that I would never have learned from a book or by simply listening to a lecture.

I have seen you – all of you – for you are Education International, proudly and valiantly doing what you do best: teaching the children of the world. Your efforts, dedication and determination are unmatched. Every single educator here is an advocate committed to making education the number one political, economic, and social priority in every community in every nation. We are the public stewards who can and should persuade communities to focus their resources on children and, thus, invest in becoming responsible, caring citizens.

I applaud each of you, members of Education International. I applaud you for reaching out, for teaching our children. I applaud you for reaching out to parents, government officials, other educational leaders, and civil society representatives to expand and improve the quality of education. The message you must continue sending is that by working together we can and we will build a better future for all children—regardless of the language they speak, the color of their skin, their religion, or socio-economic status--and, thus, a better future for all of us. This, I hope, is the first step in guaranteeing that no child’s dreams will be deferred because she or he was denied the right to an education.
The challenge before us is huge, but not insurmountable. It is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity. It is an opportunity to realize a goal each of us has personally - as well as the one for which this great organization, EI, was founded: to guarantee that every child, every boy and every girl is endowed with their basic, human right to be educated. That is how I define global progress. It is also our goal, our hope, that through education we can help ensure that the world in which we all live is more just, more humane, and more peaceful. After all, the future does not belong to us — to you or to me. The future belongs to the children. Let us commit to give it back to them better, stronger, and more secure. Let us educate the children of the world -- and educate them well.

Thank you.