Speech
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Madame President, Distinguished Delegates,

Let me say what a great honor it is to participate in this 4th Congress and let me thank you EI for this invitation. It is the first time the Bank has been invited to speak and we are grateful for this opportunity.

Let me tell you also how intimidated I am to speak to so many teachers in one room.

It is fitting that you are holding your Congress here in Brazil, a country that is undergoing a significant transformation as we heard President Lula tell us this morning. A country that is striving to balance democracy, reform, and inclusion. A country that is committed to build a more balanced and more equitable world. And we in the World Bank are pleased to give Brazil our full support.

In too many parts of the world still today geography is destiny and where you are born determines what your opportunities are. And like President Lula said this morning, we believe that education is a key investment to break the cycle of poverty and provide people with opportunities.

The World Bank believes in public education, and together with UNICEF we are campaigning for free primary education and the abolition of school fees. But this must be done in a way that recognizes the capacity of various countries and does not sacrifice quality.

We believe it is the responsibility of governments to allocate resources to education and we use our leverage not only to increase the volume of resources going to the sector, but also to ensure that the composition of expenditures and their quality contribute to the objective of a quality education for all.

And we believe in the importance of life long learning, from early childhood development to primary, secondary and university education and for people to continue to learn in a world where knowledge has become a key ingredient for countries to grow and compete.

The World Bank is investing heavily in education: over 2 billion on average per year over the past 3 years, a tripling of previous amounts. We provide countries with policy advice, and we use debt relief provided to poor countries in the context of the HIPC (highly indebted poor countries initiatives) to increase expenditures in education and health.

We have participated in launching the fast track initiative and we are today the largest financier of the fight against HIV and AIDS, a disease that is decimating the teaching profession and depriving AIDS orphans of an education.

And here in Brazil we are proud of our contribution of more than US$500 million to the Bolsa Familia program that President Lula described so movingly this morning.

In all this, the role of teachers is essential. And partnership with teachers' unions and their members is vital: no other organization has the same potential for the deep understanding of a country's education system, down to the last school, down to the last teacher, down to the last student.

The World Bank is carrying out studies looking at how to give greater support to teachers on issues of key concern: providing services to children with disability, measuring student learning outcomes, reducing gender-based disparities in access to learning, improving access for rural children, and improving instructional time. These will be done in collaboration with teacher unions and other civil society groups.
To give an education to the 115 million children currently out of school, a number of tough challenges need to be met. The strategic choices they imply are often cast as either/or choices-teachers or textbooks, access or quality, preservice or in-service education, and so on. But this dichotomization is not how education systems work, nor is it how meaningful reform occurs. The real choice is in determining a balance that achieves the objectives in a resource constrained environment and to be flexible in managing this balance as conditions improve.

An entire package of inputs is required-when there are no textbooks, when reading books and other teaching and learning materials are in short supply, teachers are severely hampered in their ability to work professionally. Even where resources are scarce, funds will need to be found to provide teachers with opportunities to upgrade their skills. Secondary education and higher education, lifelong learning, require much more support from the international community than they are currently getting. We are working with countries to help them identify and support programs to achieve the appropriate balance.

Our collaboration with EI is essential. The World Bank, like EI, must seek consensus among a wide range of different constituencies and stakeholders. Broad policy must be approved by our board which comprises representatives nominated by governments from many countries. And they do not always wish for the same thing.

And while partnership at the global level is important, we do most of our work at the country level because we recognize that support for education must be a country-by-country process. This means that the participation of civil society representatives, including notably the teacher unions, is critical to success. This is an area where we are improving but we must do better. Participation of civil society must be meaningful and sustainable; it does not mean simple consultation and after-the-fact dialogue, but a process of dialogue that is part of the very fabric of decision-making. Many of the governments we work with are not there yet; the World Bank itself is not there yet, but we are serious about getting this right, and helping the countries we work with get it right.

And we are beginning to see some progress when the top officials from Education International met with Mr. Wolfensohn in December, we had an open, frank dialogue about how best to support teachers. We promised to improve collaboration and communication between Education International and the World Bank. We have put in place an 'early warning’ system for quick contacts at the highest levels whenever problems emerge. This has already been used, most recently to resolve issues over teacher hiring in Zambia.

As another example, the World Bank, Education International, and ADEA are jointly planning a conference for this November in West Africa to deal with the various issues raised by contract teachers-everything from salaries and pensions to the need for professional development opportunities and employment security.

Education is key for global progress and teachers, not soldiers, are essential to the key to creating global citizens and to building understanding among people and across cultures. That's why, As Kofi Annan's message reminded us this morning, 2 of the 8 Millennium development Goals are about education. In making an explicit promise to the children of the world that they will get a good education, the international community is also making an implicit promise to the teachers of the world that they will get the working conditions they need to deliver that education.

Working together, we are determined to ensure that all of these promises are kept.

I thank you.