My dear Mary Futrell, President of EI
My dear fellow delegates
My dear friends

I would like to offer you a warm welcome on behalf of the World Confederation of Teachers, WCT, affiliated to the World Confederation of Labour.

Firstly, I would like to thank our “Gaucho” friends for the great hospitality that they have shown us here in Porto Alegre, which is undoubtedly the centre of those of us, men and women alike, who oppose this inhumane, unjust, inadmissible and debilitating capitalist globalisation. I would like to congratulate you for choosing Latin America as the venue of this congress. Your visit here could help each one of you to understand how international capitalism works in displacing wealth, breeding injustice and subjecting millions of human beings to poverty and dependence.

However Latin America is also the continent of hope. Its people have had enough, and a new day is dawning.

Thanks also to our colleagues of the CNTE for the excellent organisation and the welcoming atmosphere that we have found here.

We are now entering the so-called “new world order”. This new world order allows the powerful minorities to become more and more powerful and the impoverished masses to become poorer and poorer. The powerful and rich few have complete control of the most important decisions affecting people’s lives, creating a massive global imbalance of power: so simple, so cruel, so unjust. A few individuals accumulate power and money, millions live with hunger and oppression.

On the whole, developing countries saw their foreign debt increase from 580 billion dollars in 1980 to two trillion 385 billion dollars in 2002, according to the figures of the World Bank. However, in this same period those nations made payments of four trillion 600 billion dollars, that is, they re-paid eight times what they owed, only to end up four times more indebted. In little more than 20 years, between 1980 and 2002, the populations of the peripheral countries have given the equivalent of 50 Marshall Plans to their creditors of the North.

And this has consequences with which we are all familiar: the main problem being the misery which takes on the appearance of illiteracy, HIV/AIDS, discrimination, malnutrition, child labour, and so many other evils that are born of injustice.

But we, as educators, possess a wonderful field of work. For we hold the key to opening up thought and knowledge.

As reflected in the central theme of this congress, education is undoubtedly the key to progress. Not the progress shown by manipulative statistics, but rather real progress, which is justice. This is the progress that each and every one of us desires!

I said earlier that this is a world in which the powerful accumulate power, and in this context, it is one in which we, the educators, also want to accumulate it.

As Education International and the World Confederation of Teachers we are creating a new type of relationship between the organisations of the teaching profession. The integrated structures which the Congress passed today represent a vital step towards the creation of total unification of the teaching community before the common problems which we face as educators and teaching organisations: how to be more efficient in fighting for quality public
We cannot deny the fact that we have a past of confrontation and competition at an international, regional and national level. We cannot build the future without acknowledging this past. History teaches us lessons and does not allow them to be lost in the struggle. We are constructing a new and promising step between the organisations of the global teaching community.

We find ourselves faced with a considerable challenge: to show that it is possible to have unity in diversity, that it is possible to create organisations which are united and strong, and in which no one individual has pre-eminence over another, where respect for others is guaranteed within the framework of the trade union freedom and with respect for the autonomy of educational organisations at every level.

This unity runs the risk of being controlled by only the upper echelons if we do not have concrete action at all levels.

Experience is different in every continent and much work, effort, patience and dialogue will be needed. The experience of our European colleagues has been beneficial in finding a path to unity, which has in turn undoubtedly been beneficial to the organisations and to European education. At this congress, for the first time, our European organisations will integrate themselves organically into the EI and this will constitute the first experience of integrated structure. The challenge for our European colleagues is to show us that structural integration is possible whilst respecting identities, within the framework of the agreements reached and passed by the political bodies.

The organisations of other continents should find in this example a key for dialogue. It is not a matter of imitating plans but rather of aiming to find the spirit of unity needed to forge the common path which reflects the union between our organisations, and which is based on realities and individual characteristics. The agreement passed by the Confederate Committee of the WCT and by the institutions of the EI, will be adopted by the regional structures of the EI and the WCT in a positive and constructive way. The ACT, the FEPASE and the FLATEC – regional branches of the WCT in Asia, Africa and Latin America – are embarking upon a process of unification and we are open to this positive dialogue. We know that the regional structures of the EI are also open to it and this is the first necessary and essential step. Here in Porto Alegre, we are opening the dialogue between the regional organisations for this construction.

We must develop a new historic phase of organic relationship built on the basis of the common declaration of principles, on the agreement of integrated structures and by the means of the pathway of dialogue and negotiation, but above all by the pathway of united action in taking on the challenges faced by education and educators. We need to place the emphasis on faith in concrete actions.

Yesterday, we, the negotiators of the EI and the WCT, proposed that via the integrated structures, we create a political and structural framework of unified structures acting at a global level, whilst respecting the identity of the WCT and its members. In December 2005, it will be submitted to the Extraordinary Congress of the WCT, to enter into full effect from 2006. As we said earlier, the national and regional organisations of the WCT and the EI must be aware that they have a great responsibility in the development of the integrated structures so that they produce the positive results that we are hoping for, from the basis of respect of identity at a national and regional level.

It is in this context that the organisations of the EI and the WCT will demonstrate their desire to come to an agreement, so that this structural unit can flourish.

This is vital so that we can fight against this inhumane and unjust globalisation.

This process begins today, right here in Porto Alegre, where we have been received with such warmth and commitment. Those responsible nationally and regionally for the EI and the WCT have here the opportunity to establish contacts so that the accord reached can progress from paperwork to a reality.

Today we must transform the conflicting relationships that still exist between the members of the WCT and the EI in some countries and regions into a relationship of mutual respect and unity of action.

We believe that we can build tomorrow today.
We hope that our first meetings will work towards this goal, in order to be better organisations.

Ladies and Gentlemen: the WCT warmly welcomes this Congress of Education International, wishes you a productive visit, thanks you for your solidarity, urges you to continue in and deepen your fight for education and for the educators of the world.

For life over death.
For hope over despair.
For idealism over sterile pragmatism.
For education over degradation of the human being.

Long live education, long live the unity of educators.