Speech
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Introduction to the Congress Theme, “Education for Global Progress”

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Colleagues, friends

Everyone has the right to education.
Toute personne a droit à l'éducation.
Toda persona tiene derecho a la educación.
Toda pessoa tem direito à Educação.
Subete hito wa kyo-i-ku (w)o ukeru kenri (w)o u-suru.
Jeder hat das Recht auf Bildung.

So begins Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights! Kofi Annan highlighted these words in his message. Mary said our theme is enormous, but the key is that education is a basic human right. These words underpin our theme.

When they were adopted in 1948 the world was already globalising. The special significance of the Declaration was that these rights were held to be Universal, they were inherent in being human. “Everyone has the right to education”.

The Declaration was the clearest, most unequivocal rejection up to that time of ideas of superiority and inferiority, ideas that had been taken for granted in the time of colonial empires, ideas that had reached their apotheosis under the Nazis and the Holocaust. Those ideas were rejected. At the United Nations, the political leaders of the day said that everyone had rights. And everyone had the right to education. But then, as now, there remained a giant gap between rhetoric and reality.

Twenty years later, in 1968, Philip Coombs at UNESCO wrote The World Educational Crisis, a book that became the basis for the early involvement in education of the international development community, including the World Bank.

But 1968 was also the year of protest and challenge. A friend passed me a copy of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire of Brazil. As a young teacher I was inspired by that book.

The two works took radically different approaches. Coombs wrote much about the efficient use of resources, but also about qualitative questions. Freire portrayed education and learning as revolutionary and liberating.

But they also shared common ground. Notably, they started from the premise that everyone had the right to education. Conceptually, educational thinking had taken a giant step forward. Practically, however, the long march towards Education for All had barely begun.

Freire went into exile, then returned to Brazil in time to be the keynote speaker at the 1980 WCOTP Assembly in Brasilia. I recall the human warmth of this man, and his sheer delight at being able to discuss education once again in his homeland.

Later he became Minister of Education in Sao Paulo.

That these works by Freire and Coombs in the sixties had global impact was a sign of the times. For the globalisation of ideas has been one of the major agents for change in our global village.

But we know that the world educational crisis has not gone away. Far from it!

One of the reasons is quite simply lack of resources. Yet the resources required to provide elementary education for all are feasible. Cost calculations by the UNDP indicate up to 75 billion USD per annum would achieve all eight Millennium Development Goals including
Education for All. Compare that with the allocation by one country – the United States – for reconstruction in one other country – Iraq. That cost is 90 billion USD per annum. Compare worldwide expenditure on the military and on education, as UNICEF has done in earlier editions of *The State of the World’s Children*. (I would also draw your attention to this year’s edition which is dedicated to the education of girls, and contains a wealth of information and statistics that you would find tremendously helpful in your campaigns.)

The point is that education has always been the key to progress. The world’s strongest economies were built on quality education in public schools. So it is logical to assert today that education is the key to global progress.

Let us look back briefly at over 100 years of the history of education. Those nations that introduced compulsory elementary education for all in the late 19th and early 20th centuries created an enormously productive use of their human potential. They became the industrialized countries.

Yet progress in these countries was not regular. It was not a steady linear progression. On the contrary, there were major setbacks along the way: depression, war, social upheaval. Education both influenced and was influenced by these events. Education was at the centre of the struggle for equal rights for women, for civil rights, for an end to discrimination. In the countries emerging from colonialism, teachers often took the lead in struggles for independence. And education was at the heart of the development of democracies. Controversies over education were right at the centre of the great social and political upheavals of the 19th and 20th centuries – the separation of church and state, the rise of nationalism. Education was vital to the values that each society sought to establish as the underpinning for its cohesion.

Those values were not the same in all countries. There was a world of difference between the values of nazi Germany or militarist Japan, or the Stalinist Soviet Union, all of which stifled dissent, and those of the liberal democracies founded upon values of freedom of expression.

Education’s role in economic progress is well established. But even more important is education’s role in social progress. Education for citizenship developed at the same time as the industrial revolution.

Those same questions are before us today, with even greater force. For globalisation carries both opportunity and risk. Those who regard globalisation as a good thing per se give little attention to the risks. How often have you heard political and economic leaders argue that the imperatives of globalisation require that we accept closing of industries and cuts in public expenditure?

There is an assumption out there that economic progress will continue, indefinitely, without setbacks. But that is not the lesson of history.

There are three great risks we can identify. The first is the risk of breakdowns in social cohesion resulting from gross inequities and exclusion. This is not speculation. This is real. It is already happening. Look at the prisons in most countries, stretched far beyond their capacity. Look at the problem of illegal immigration. Look at the ghettos spreading in and around our cities. The fact of the matter is that we cannot indefinitely prevent major social upheaval solely by repression. You have to address the root causes, and those are inequity, exclusion and injustice. And you have to start with equity in education.

The second great risk is intolerance. After the emergence from colonialism, the civil rights struggles in North America, the end of apartheid in South Africa, we might have imagined a new era of understanding and tolerance between people. But in every one of the industrialised countries there are strong, albeit minority, political movements based on intolerance, with strong racist overtones. We also see the resurgence of old demons of intolerance based on religions – demons that afflicted many of our societies in centuries past, that played a major role in the setbacks of the past. September 11, 2001, brought home the devastating consequences of intolerance derived from religious extremism.

Extremism is not the province of any one of the world’s great religions. All of them have strands of extremism providing the rationale for terror or for repression. These extremisms feed off each other. Their political impact can be enormous. The risks for civilisation as we know it are horrendous.

The third risk is environmental. If economic progress means destruction of our eco-systems, no one wins. From the destruction of the forests of the Amazon or south-east Asia, to the over-use of fossil fuels, the impact on the earth’s capacity to support life is known. Unregulated
globalisation means little is done to reverse the trend. El Nino occurs more frequently, causing drought in Asia and Australia, and devastating storms in the Northern Hemisphere. Here in Porto Alegre, the thinning of the ozone layer over the Southern Hemisphere can be felt every summer, as it is in my hometown of Adelaide. One very practical question highlights this risk – the growing worldwide shortage of access to clean water.

All three risks are inter-related. Inequity and intolerance all too often go hand in hand. And the growing difficulties of the environment have enormous implications for equity.

Here we return to our three sub-themes:

First: The rationale for education as a public service rather than a commodity. That rationale is based on the case for equity. It is also based on the case for citizenship, for learning to live together. Those two principles, equity and living together, form the foundation for education as a public service, not a commodity.

Second: The right to education means more, much more, than access to a place called school. It means the right to learn. Maybe we thought that was self-evident. But we cannot escape questions of the objectives of education, of what is to be learned, of the values that underlie that learning.

That again reinforces the rationale for public responsibility for education. Within the parameters set by a democratic society, in order that teachers can exercise their professional responsibilities as facilitators of learning, their right to teach must be protected and promoted.

Third: Those teachers must be qualified. Qualified by the preparation and study they undertake to undertake this most complex and subtle, this most interactive and potentially this most rewarding of professions. As UNICEF writes this year: Teachers spark hope! Qualified also by their motivation, their desire to provide something special, to draw out the potential, “the treasure within” each child, each young person, or each adult.

We have to stop the loss of good teachers, and attract capable people, young people, or people who wish to change from another job. Let’s face it. Many of us in this room are of the generations of the sixties or the seventies. Where is the new generation that will take education forward? There are no short cuts. If we want quality education, we must retain and recruit quality teachers and we must give existing personnel the chance to upgrade and to develop their professional capacities through in-service training. Teachers, too, need access to life-long learning.

On each of these sub-themes, the EI Executive Board invites you to consider the issues synthesised in the paper, and in the draft resolutions.

As has always been the case in education, there are real dilemmas to be addressed. How to reconcile equity with efficiency? How to defend the right to dissent while respecting democratic principles? How to attract enough able teacher educators to inspire and prepare an unprecedented number of new teachers? How to reconcile the short-term and the medium-term (which includes giving a chance to today’s children while preparing the teachers of tomorrow)? How to facilitate beneficial mobility while avoiding the traps of poaching and the brain drain? The questions for discussion are there to help open the debate in each of the three breakout sessions.

This is a defining moment. The policy choices are clear: commercialization and the market, or reaffirmation of education as a right. Overall, there are two inescapable issues that political decision-makers must address: Resources and Participation.

The financial resources are a question of political will. The will to make war always mobilizes resources. So must the will to provide quality public education for all.

Human resources will be found too, once we restore the idea of a pedagogy of hope. (As Freire wrote in 1995.)

50 years ago Europe was able to emerge from the ravages of war, because of the vision that was the Marshal Plan. That same vision is needed today, to achieve the resources required for the Millennium Development Goals.

By mid-2005, the countries of the G8 – the seven leading economies plus Russia, indeed all 30 members of the OECD, must decide collectively to fund a new “Marshal Plan” this time not for Europe but for the world. The plan exists. National leaders all endorsed the eight MDGs at
the UN four years ago. By mid-2005 they must decide if they will implement the plan, and if they will fund it. We have to help them take the right decisions, by mobilising public opinion.

And we all know that money alone is not enough. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition. People must be part of the solution. Education unions have a key role to play in making that participation possible.

Firstly the participation of our own members. But also the participation of fellow employees through the trade union movement. And the participation of millions of people working through organisations of civil society committed to social justice.

I cannot stress too much the importance of the next 12 months – to June 2005. We must mobilise public opinion. We must share our vision. It responds to the dreams of many – of working people, the poor, women and girls.

Education unions have an established capacity to organize and to build coalitions, as we have done in the Global Campaign for Education. The theme of this congress is much more than an aspiration. It confronts us all with a set of imperatives. And those imperatives begin with the words from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Everyone has the right to education”