

EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL NORTH AMERICA/CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE  
CASCADIA HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTRE,  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
25 FEBRUARY 2010

“Educators working together for quality education in time of economic challenge”

Key note address by Fred van Leeuwen,  
General Secretary of Education International

Port of Spain, 25 February 2010

1. I am sure all of you are as delighted as I am about the presence here in Port of Spain of Jean Lavaud and René Jolibois, leaders of CNEH (Confédération Nationale des Educateurs d’Haïti), our member organization in Haiti. We have been very worried about the situation of all of our friends in Haiti since the devastating earth quake struck on 12 January. And it took a couple of days to trace them.
2. Our relief over the survival of most national CNEH leaders is overshadowed by our sorrow and grief about the more than 200,000 Haitians who lost their lives in the disaster, including many teachers, probably over 1,500. Almost immediately, we were able to start providing humanitarian assistance to teacher victims and their families. For that purpose, we have established a special fund which – thanks to solidarity support from EI member organizations around the world – now holds some US \$230, 000, of which US \$70,000 has already been used on site. Let me thank all the organizations present here for their generous support so far.
3. But besides delivering humanitarian aid, we also need to support CNEH in making its contribution to the rebuilding of the Haitian education sector. In the most affected areas, 90% of the schools have been seriously damaged or destroyed; in other areas 30 – 45%. We know that it is of utmost importance that children return to school as soon as possible. The construction of safe schools, the recruitment of teachers and trauma counseling programs are on the top of the priority list. But our colleagues in CNEH might also want to look at the future profile of the Haitian school system and the role of the state.
4. It is no secret that the quality and accessibility of the education in Haiti have been problematic. Education has been more a patchwork of scattered private initiatives. The role of the government has been limited, partly because of political choices and instability, partly because of the impoverished state of the economy. The determination of the international community to help Haiti to get back on its feet may provide the opportunity

for the development of an effective public education system able to give all Haitians equal and fair chance to beat poverty.

5. Natural disasters of the scale that struck Haiti are exceptional. However, as we all know, the Caribbean – as a notorious passageway for hurricanes – gets a disproportionate share of natural catastrophes. It is not always easy for people like ourselves – part of a movement that believes that we can change the world through reason and the power of the human mind – to accept the unpredictability of the natural disasters and the randomness of human suffering. We understand more easily, if you will, man-made catastrophes and crises that we must often deal with.
6. Yes, these are dramatic times. The global financial and economic Crisis, a clear example of a man-made catastrophe, is still upon us. The impact of this crisis is being felt in countries across the globe. We face an unprecedented threat to education and our members everywhere. The stakes are high. For this crisis comes on top of the other man-made crises – the food crisis in many developing countries, mass movements of refugees, migrants, cohesion and democratic change are real. But it is also in times of crisis – even multiple crises like these – that new opportunities are created, that history is made. I believe that together we can help shape a new global economy – and yes, a new and stronger economy, here in the Caribbean and on the education, the skills and capacities of citizens, based on equity and justice.
7. I have been asked to address the main theme of this conference, educators working together for quality education in a time of economic challenge. In doing that we should first look back to the origins of those economic challenges.

Economic crisis - origins

8. For nearly three decades [from the time of Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the US] there had been a global consensus in favor of the de-regulation of the private sector and downgrading of the public sector. The rise of this policy – or should I say this ideology – often described as “neo-liberal” coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union and centrally planned economies across Eastern Europe.
9. As we moved into the new century, the globalized economy reached into every corner of the earth, and there was an unprecedented global boom – for some!  
But, as we warned so often, there was also an unprecedented rise in inequality. I can show you statement after statement in which the international trade union movement –

including EI – warned that social cohesion was being stretched to the limit, and that the boom was unsustainable because of dangerous imbalances.

10. First: Global imbalances. To simplify, the national debt of the United States, which grew dramatically during the Bush years because of tax cuts and the Iraq war, has been financed by China, with its massive trade surplus. This cannot be sustained in the long-term.
11. Secondly: The imbalance between the financial sector and the real economy. In the US, Wall Street became separated from Main Street. Bankers, Private Equity and hedge Fund managers could make huge bonuses out of deals that often stripped real companies and threw employees out of work. Workers pension funds were actually used to finance many of these deals! Some countries of this region were also caught up in these schemes created by these financial acrobats, sometimes without even knowing it!
12. Thirdly, the imbalance between the bargaining power and incomes of employers and employees. Wherever collective bargaining was weakened, purchasing power dropped. But people kept on consuming, and their consumption was no longer financed by their wages, but rather by the debt they took on through the schemes cooked up by financial wizards.
13. So in the autumn of 2008, the boom bust! And since then, the great majority is paying the price for the greed and folly of a few.
14. Sustainable global recovery will only be possible if these three imbalances are addressed. At this point, the prospects are not so good. The financial sector, having been rescued by taxpayers' money, is now getting back to business as usual. Share markets are up. Many banks have failed – there have been 87 bank failures in the US alone. But the mega-banks are back in the business of paying mega-bonuses to their traders and CEOs. Meanwhile, the real economy needs a lot more time to clean up the mess left by the storm.
15. The ILO, The IMF and the OECD all agree that unemployment will continue to rise – ILO estimates 50 million people thrown out of work by the crisis worldwide and a rapid rise in precarious employment, especially among women. The World Bank says up to 200 million more people will fall before the poverty line. Social justice in the world is going backwards, not forwards.
16. Millions upon millions of hard working families are paying the price – losing jobs and homes. Millions upon millions more in the emerging economies are being thrown back into poverty. And the most vulnerable of all, people in the low-income countries, will be worse off than ever as the North concentrates on finding a way out of the crisis.

17. And yet, and this is my message today, it is these very people, the most affected by the global crisis in the South and in the North, who also hold the key to global recovery.

#### Education: Key to Recovery

18. And that is where we come in. education for all, quality education for all children and young people, is really one of the keys to recovery in all nations. This is the message we need to get across to political leaders everywhere. We need to make them understand that this is not the time to cut back on education, but, on the contrary, to maximize investments.

19. However, in spite of this irrefutable truth, in the short to medium-term many of our schools are threatened with budget cuts; and many of our members are threatened with loss of their jobs. On top of that: developing countries in 2009 will be only one quarter of the 2007 level. One quarter!

20. So we are in for a rough time in the public sector. We expect 2010, 2011 and 2012 to be hardship years for the public sector, as governments will be trying hard to reduce the deficits caused by the bailing out of banks.

21. In Education International we share a vision for education and society. We believe that education is a human right, that it is a public good, not commodity. We make strong and passionate pleas for investments in our public school systems on moral grounds.

22. We should not overlook another powerful argument and stress that there is no better strategy to boost economic development, than investing education. In fact, we have no choice. To keep pace with global economic developments, where success increasingly depends on knowledge and skills, on a well educated population, education is to be placed at the center of government policy. Well-known economists have calculated that every dollar we invest in education will return between 8 and 12 percent in revenue! Schools and other educational institutions exist in communities across every nation. Maintaining and even increasing employment in them will benefit each community in this time of crisis. The inclusion of resources for education staffing in national economic recovery plans will have an immediate and positive fiscal impact.

23. We are totally committed to defending resources for education. Everyone in this room shares that commitment. But we also have to be realistic. The pressures on public budgets are going to grow. So defending resources for education will not be enough, we must go on the offensive, be pro-active.

24. Our message is that: education is part of the solution. Investing in people, in education is the smartest strategy for recovery.
25. Nations that want to build a sustainable recovery must invest in primary and secondary education for our future generations in vocational education and training. In a down turn, it's time to upskill in Early Childhood Education, for an equal start for all children and equity for families including single parent families in Higher Education and Research, maintaining standards of excellence and capacity for innovation. And last but not least, in Teacher Education.
26. EI is advocating these positions with force at all the key global institutions meetings – the IMF and World Bank, the ILO, the OECD, and UNESCO. The G8 leaders meeting in Italy eight months ago, reiterated EI's two main messages: "Investing in education and skills development is crucial for sustainable recovery" and "We affirm the right to education for all". That did not happen but accident. It happened because of strong work together with our coalition partners, the Global Unions, and the Global campaign for Education.
27. But we all know there is a big gap between words and action. Back in January 2009, the Heads of the World Bank and IMF both called for global stimulus. The IMF Head, in particular, has called often for investment in public services, including education. "Great!", we said, "The IMF seems to be changing".
28. But as we have pointed out repeatedly, there is a big contradiction between the calls of the IMF leadership for stimulus through the public sector, and the budget ceilings, including public sector wage ceilings, imposed on countries through IMF conditions. Several Caribbean countries, I mention Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean, are currently experiencing that IMF pressure. The World Bank too sometimes does not practice what is preaching. While we have reached an understanding with the Bank's leadership in Washington about the vital importance of investing in quality education by putting emphasis on quality teacher education, it continues supporting the influx of unqualified teachers into our school systems. We must challenge these contradictions and take our political leaders to task.
29. This year, Canada will host both the G8 and the G20. While we had succeeded in getting the G8 to make at least the right statements about education, the G20 summits – Wasington, London, Pittsburgh – were all focused on the response to the financial crisis. They gave little attention to education. The challenge for us right now is to make sure that education is high on the agenda of the G20 from now on. We'll be working closely through our two

major coalitions – Global Unions and the Global Campaign for Education – to make education a top priority at the G20.

### Investing in Teachers

30. Let me at this point stress that of all of our demands for investment in education, the training, recruitment and retention of qualified teachers is undoubtedly the most urgent one. There is today a growing world-wide shortage of teachers. The latest forecast from UNESCO show some improvement. However, the world still needs 10.3 million primary teachers to be recruited by the year 2015 – allowing for retirements and normal attrition, and the teachers needed to achieve Universal Primary Education for All. The countries of North America and the Caribbean are less affected than Sub-Sahara Africa and South Asia, but in an age of mobility, this shortage is already being felt in this region as well. In addition to these primary school teachers, the world needs millions more secondary, vocational and higher education teachers.
31. In too many cases, the response of government to these needs has been to take short cuts, ranging from reducing the school year to recruiting unqualified people, placing them in front of students in classrooms with totally inadequate preparation and virtually non-existent prospects for professional development. Short-cuts like these are short-changing future generations. The great risk for much of low income countries today is to perpetuate the yawning gap of inequity in education into the future. They must be given the chance to recruit and prepare quality teachers for quality education. That is one of the key issues we are addressing with the World Bank and other agencies.
32. One of the critical factors is to retain the teachers we have, and especially to improve retention rates among young teachers. This is a major issue in many countries. Effective teacher development programme are crucial in helping these young people to get a good start, and to see a future for themselves in the profession.
33. For let us not have any illusions. Teaching, to quote UNESCO's Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is the noblest profession. But it is also a tough one, especially at the beginning. The challenges and the realities of teaching in today's world can be daunting. Too many of our young people fall by the wayside. We have to help them rise to the challenges, and go on to be successful teachers providing quality learning for their students, the next generation.

34. There is a related challenge facing the Caribbean – the recruitment of teachers from here to countries like United States, Canada, Britain, to overcome their own teacher shortages. Global mobility can be a good thing. But it must be equitable. When brain drain is not balanced by gain, low income countries are penalized, and so are the students.
35. That is also why we support the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol. Countries that see their qualified teachers move to Europe, the United States and Canada are to be compensated, while we need to ensure that teachers moving to these countries are protected against exploitation. I can give you horrific examples of colleagues who thought they would be moving to greener pastures in the North but who found themselves in low paid positions stacked away in gloomy dormitories. I know that our colleagues from AFT are actively engaged in improving the situation of teachers from the Philippines and challenging the highly improper recruitment practices that are often used.
36. I am afraid that when we fail to retain our teachers, when not enough priority is given to the development of high quality teacher education programs, initial as well as in service programs, we will not achieve Quality Education for all, not by 2015, not by 2025. We will simply not be able to keep our promise to future generations.
37. We have asked UNESCO and the World Bank to start assessing existing capacities in teacher education institutions and the likely supply of qualified teachers to 2015 and beyond, and that they involve education unions in such analyzes, so that a shared understanding of issues can become the basis for a shared search for solutions.
38. We should look at recruitment beyond the boundaries of states in federal countries, or among countries in the same sub-region. Teacher education facilities developed on a sub-regional basis such as here in the Caribbean may provide a helpful model to be introduced in other parts of the world.
39. In this respect let me stress that education unions have an important role to play in the setting and monitoring of professional standards. Yes, we are trade unions, concerned about the terms and employment conditions of our members, but we are also the guardians of the profession. And the risk of de-professionalization – as a result of inadequate responses to existing and looming teachers’ shortages – is very real and should not be underestimated.

#### Ensuring the MDG's: Education for All

40. Colleagues, we are only five years away from 2015. Will there be a school and a qualified teacher for every single child born today when it will reach the age of five in 2015. I doubt

it. We are not all on track. Sure, some progress has been made since Dakar in 2000. But the enrollment statistics, no matter how impressive, are not giving the full story. Education, as our political leaders sometimes seem to overlook, is more than just bringing as many children as possible into a room and calling it a classroom.

41. Having said this, I believe that it is necessary to say that when we take a look at the EFA Development Index (EDI) many Caribbean countries are performing reasonably well. Aruba scores the highest in the index – number 29 - , ahead of Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. It is followed by our host country, Trinidad and Tobago (57) and Saint Lucia (60). Among the medium level EDI countries there are Barbados (64) and Bahamas (73) as well as Belize (80) and Saint Vincent (82). There are no Caribbean countries in the Low EDI group, although GMR does not have data from Haiti.
42. These indexes are interesting, but, again, they do not give the full story. For example, according to our information, there are to date no legal guarantees of free (primary) education in (2007) Bahamas, Dominica, Haiti, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St Vincent. And in many countries the pressure to privatize or commercialize education services are a real threat. They do not weigh quality issues such as the sorry state of school buildings and the lack of teaching materials.
43. It is no secret that both in the developed and in the developing countries we are confronted with education quality deficits. When talking about education quality we are not always talking the same language. I understand that our colleagues from Belize are currently protesting against the government's plan to ban corporal punishment...
44. In the industrialized countries, we know there are major skills gaps. On the one hand we have serious problems of school drop-outs and youth unemployment, especially among minorities and immigrant communities. On the other hand, employers complain they can't find young people with the necessary skills. In the United States, NEA is working with many of these companies through their Partnerships for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills – the P21 project. EI has engaged in discussions with major corporations through the World Economic Forum, most recently in Davos last month. In April, President Obama is convening a meeting of G20 labour Ministers in Washington to address this issue – and the role of skills and training in achieving sustainable recovery. EI is working closely with our Global Union partners and the ILO under the heading “Upskilling out of the downturn”.
45. Not to be overlooked – and we keep stressing this – are the conditions of work of our colleagues in Vocational Education and Training. The new and welcome emphasis on skills and training will not amount to real change unless governments and the private sector

agree to negotiate good conditions for the people working in VET. EI's VET Taskforce will work on that with the International Labour Organization this year. VET is also a critical sector in the emerging and developing economies. Together with Education for All, VET is one of the keys to closing the gap between the North and the South. If we can get the right policy coherence through the G20, the ILO, the OECD and the World Bank, VET ought to become a major growth sector in all countries – North and South. And it will be a major challenge and responsibility for EI affiliates to organize members in this growth sector.

#### A new global architecture

46. A main factor, of course, is education funding. Many countries have ongoing difficulties of inadequate tax bases and revenues which are imperative for taking a longer term approach to education financing. IMF Head Dominique Straus Kahn has reiterated recently the need for government spending on health and education, in the context of measures required for recovery from the economic crisis. But mere exhortation is not enough. The Least Developed countries – the LDCs – simply cannot do it alone in the foreseeable future, and other developing countries do need ongoing support through mechanisms put in place with the support of the international community. That support must be engaged overtime. Short-termism is not enough.
47. There is a strong case for new global architecture to help structure and mobilize international support for education, to innovate in the mobilization of resources, to scale up that mobilization, and at the same time foster creative approaches to delivering resources more effectively. There must be a major rethink of what is required to get the job done. That job is in the first place the achievement of the MDG of basic Education for All by the year 2015.
48. But even if that important goal were to be achieved, much more would remain to be done to develop secondary education, vocational education and training, and higher education, so that the citizens of all countries could have reasonable prospects and opportunities for participation in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
49. Such a new global architecture must be given by principles of inclusion rather than the politics of exclusion. The proposal for a Global Fund for education, made by the US Administration, holds the promise for such a renewed approach. Both President Obama and secretary of State Clinton have made encouraging statements about this. But we have the strong impression that other countries are waiting for follow-up on the campaign promise of 2 billion US dollars to get such a fund going.

50. Today a substantial part of EFA funding is, as you know, coordinated by the Fast Track Initiative. At the present time the World Bank is the default agency for delivering FTI finances – but its systems are cumbersome and complicated. We should consider alternative channels, including non government and civil society organizations, other bilateral donors, UN agencies and partnerships with the private sector in situations where this makes more sense than going through the Bank.
51. National and local governments should be able to choose whatever agency is best placed to deliver needed finances effectively. One of the critical objectives in delivery of finance must be getting the right balance of overall coherence (for example, ensuring that all countries are treated equitably) and on the ground flexibility. That is where a Global Fund for Education could play an important role – over and above the necessary scaling up for resources.
52. The time is also ripe for a realignment of responsibilities among the intergovernmental agencies, with the reassertion of UNESCO's lead role as the United Nations organization for education, provided that UNESCO has the necessary capacity and engages with civil society in accordance with its own existing procedures. There should be sharing of tasks with funding agencies, including the World Bank, and mutual reinforcement rather than duplication of effort.

### Mobilization

53. Today 75 million children still denied the right to education. The key to achieving the right to education of every child is of course mobilization – joining our global advocacy with national and local action focusing on two goals:

Investment in quality public education, and Achievement of the MDGs, especially Education for All.

54. We must act in every nation, to mobilize public opinion in support of these two key issues. Last year EI launched a simple Global Action Plan, let me sum it up quickly. EI recommends that education unions:

#### 1 State the needs

Compile details of staffing needs in education – for teaching and other positions in schools, vocational and other educational institutions.

## 2 Call for national plans

Present these plans to the authorities, to allied and friendly organizations, including parents, students and other trade unions, and the media.

## 3 Campaign to hire, not fire

Call on the authorities to work with education unions to maintain existing levels for teachers and support staff, and on plans to train and recruit the qualified personnel needed to provide quality education in safe schools.

## 4 Keep up the pressure to achieve the MDGs

Remind governments and public opinion that keeping on target to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including Education for All, is vital to global recovery.

## Special role of education unions

55. Education International has a vision. That vision encompasses principles of democracy, equity and equality of opportunity, non-discrimination and social justice. They are the antithesis of ideologies built upon authoritarianism on the one hand, or on greed and unrestrained pursuit of self interest on the other. They include concepts of solidarity and collective responsibility as well as individual liberty. Their values taken together form the basis for EI's defense of public education – quality public education for all.
56. They provide the common ground upon which can be constructed a discourse with governments, with international agencies – and ultimately with public opinion via the media. They provide the basis for mobilization beyond the ranks of educators, to include other key actors, including parents and fellow trade unionists, and activist in civil society organizations. They also form a basis for dialogue within the economic actors of society, particularly the organizations of business and industry.
57. Colleagues, now more than ever is the time for us to affirm the potential of our countries to build a new future for their citizens through the power of education.
58. I started by saying that these are dramatic times. Let me conclude by saying that these times will also clearly show the important difference the trade union movement will be able to make, both nationally and internationally. Given the global character of the challenges facing us, International trade union action is more important than ever. Our member organizations in Canada, and the United States, and throughout the Caribbean

have very well understood this. I commend your organizations, your leadership for your active involvement, and for the role you are playing international teachers movement.

59. Education unions today have a special role as we bring together unionists committed to social justice, and educators committed to giving hope to new generations of children and young people. It is hard to imagine a more demanding set of challenges than those. But by linking our global advocacy with national mobilization, we can show that we can rise together to the occasion.

60. That conviction – that we can make a difference – must drive us forward. Quality public education and solidarity between trade unions, solidarity between people. And quality education for everybody. That is the challenge before EI globally, and each member union nationally. That is the challenge before our North/Caribbean region today. There is no time to lose.

---