

Colleagues, almost everything about this Ninth World Congress is different than anything we've ever experienced and this Progress Report is no exception.

In little more than a year, at the in-person Tenth World Congress in Buenos Aires, I will present a comprehensive review of the 2019 to 2024 period. There is much important detail about our work together that you won't hear in this interim report. But I can't let this opportunity pass without acknowledging these past several devastating and also inspiring years.

When I last stood before you to mark our progress together in 2019, it would have been impossible to even imagine the world of today. Our profession has changed, the world has changed. The pandemic that infected the globe and killed up to 20 million also infected every aspect of our work.

I want to begin by acknowledging the friends and colleagues we all have lost at this point. Tens of thousands lost their lives because they joined the millions of their colleagues who kept some form of education alive for hundreds of millions of students in the time of pandemic.

Please, a moment of silence.

For all of them we pledge a renewed sense of commitment and a sharpened mission. It was in Bangkok at World Congress where we pledged our organizations would take the lead on advancing the profession, ensuring free quality education for all, and promoting democracy, and human and trade union rights.

Then, Covid. One point six billion students out of school. As EI, from the beginning we were determined to be present for our members in every sense of the word. Just in time research and analysis; continuous online seminars, meetings and organizing sessions; high-energy campaigns and communication platforms delivering our core demands and messages and pressuring governments to act.

On nearly 200 occasions over these past four years, we gathered virtually online from one-on-ones, to small groups and global conferences, keeping each other close in mission and purpose and raising all of our spirits.

No global organization outside of the primary health sector was more fully engaged in the global response to Covid than our federation. From the early months, EI was called upon to formally advise the World Health Organization.

In 2020 after nearly two years of Covid, two years of isolation in front of our screens, we decided that EI and our member organizations needed to shake things up; to bring as many of us as possible together virtually for a sort of EI snapshot. And so, a 24-hour around the world celebration of solidarity on World Teacher Day.

Starting in Asia and the Pacific Islands and ending in North America and the Caribbean, it was a worldwide whirlwind of who we are, our friends and allies, our students and a daylong reminder of the importance of our work. Of course, when you do a day around the world, I forgot it would mean 48 hrs in the studio.

Let's take a quick look.

We had a wonderfully exhausting time on that daylong journey and it helped to reaffirm one of our core values as unionists. That is, that in the face of crisis, we are never paralyzed – we mobilize. In desperation, we find inspiration among our colleagues and with our allies.

We made a special effort to keep advancing the connections between EI and the various professional levels and constituencies of our member organizations.

In 2022, 700 education unionists came together online for the EI World Women's Conference, focusing on mobilizing and using women's power for change. EI is also a lead participant in the UN's annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. President Susan Hopgood addressed the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, highlighting the critical role of social dialogue and climate education for a just transition to a green economy.

We preceded the World Higher Education Conference with a virtual consultation highlighting the need to address issues related to the casualization of academic labor and support personnel, staff wellbeing, social dialogue, inclusion, sustainable funding and commercialization, as well as academic freedom.

We marked World Education Support Personnel Day, recognizing the contributions ESP make to quality education and worked with our members to demand that these professional workers have quality working conditions.

Migration and refugees were a special focus for us during this period, from the United States border to Türkiye, Lebanon, Sudan and Ukraine. I visited our member organizations in Lebanon to express solidarity with educators and students facing extreme conditions for teaching and learning.

And thanks to our efforts we were able to get teachers paid after months of impasse.

We also visited refugee camps and schools where our members are educating Syrian refugees in double shift settings.

As in Lebanon, some teachers and education support staff working in crisis contexts don't receive their salaries for months. While working to close the funding gap, our Education Cannot Wait delegation led by President Hopgood, succeeded in ensuring that ECW's strategic plan includes a priority on teachers.

At the UN Child Labor Conference in South Africa, representatives of governments, employers' organizations and workers' organizations renewed our commitment to prevent and eliminate child labor and forced labor.

While our unions came together to advance rights and opportunities, other forces continued to gather to fight not only the advance of trade unions and the cause of quality education, but to wage war against democracy itself.

Ukraine. I was just there a few weeks ago. You know the fundamentals. The shooting war continues, waged by a desperate dictator in unrelenting assaults on civilian populations, including children.

The EI delegation arrived and bared witness to the atrocities firsthand. Playgrounds and schools destroyed by missile attacks, classes being held in bomb shelters. I also saw firsthand where the solidarity funds you raised were going to support our member organization and the teachers who had lost loved ones. We saw incredible valor and union values on full display as a people fight against their own eradication and for democracy.

I can tell you with great confidence that no global union federation has done more in terms of supporting members on the ground in Ukraine. In May 2022, to support member organizations in countries facing a large influx of refugees as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, EI and the OECD brought together a wide range of stakeholders to strategize effective ways to meet the educational needs of Ukrainian students.

Ukraine of course is not the only place where authoritarianism is on the march.

In the Asia Pacific region, EI joined the Myanmar Teachers Federation, to demand the formal diplomatic recognition of the National Unity Government and the release of all political prisoners. Unfortunately, the anti-democratic agenda is advancing in much of the Asia-Pacific region, including Afghanistan and the Philippines and EI maintained international pressure on anti-worker, anti-democratic governments in affected countries. In Hong Kong, Chinese pressure against teachers forced the HKPTU, one of EI's oldest members, to disband.

One year after the Taliban seized Kabul, EI reported progress in acting on our Executive Board resolution requesting a Teachers' Rights Observatory to collect testimonies from teachers in Afghanistan and monitor the education situation on the ground.

EI also condemned attacks on free trade unions by the Lukashenko regime in Belarus as part of its long campaign to destroy democratic infrastructure, including the dissolution of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions.

I also led a delegation to Turkiye to bring solidarity to our members who are providing hope, housing and services for the victims of that terrible earthquake that has taken more than 50,000 lives.

In Africa, I led an EI delegation to Eswatini to meet with the country's leaders to condemn the targeting of union leaders, including the president of our member organization, SNAT who has now been reinstated.

EI condemned the intimidation of teachers in Uganda and drew attention to the precarious situation of education for both learners and teachers in Sahel countries. More than 1,800 schools in Mali have closed following attacks or direct threats from armed groups. Just two weeks ago in Uganda militants attacked a secondary school there and killed more than 85 children.

In the middle east, EI launched an urgent action appeal calling on the Israeli Government to immediately halt school demolitions, provide protection for Palestinian children against violence and ensure their right to education with safety.

As you also know the crisis has hit this region especially hard, with frequent violations of trade union rights, including in Bahrain, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. In the context of the protests that followed the killing of Mahsa Amini, EI requested Iranian authorities release all trade unionists detained in connection with their union activities and to guarantee and protect the right to freedom of association and assembly for all citizens and especially for women and girls.

In Haiti, working with DC partners we established a Solidarity Fund and rallied member organizations globally to help our Haitian member organizations.

Sometimes, progress is the simple absence of war as in the hard-won ceasefire in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, obtained with the help of constant campaigning of teachers there. Sometimes it is simply a victory for the rule of law as in the defeat of the fascist insurrectionists in Brazil in January or in the victory of a coalition government in Fiji, where unionists were routinely jailed and assaulted by government forces.

In December, after eight months of campaigning, our member organizations in Nepal secured agreement with local governments to discuss all matters related to teachers, education and education funding. That same reliance on fundamental social dialogue and persistence was on display in Morocco, where our member organizations and the government came to substantial agreements.

In Latin America, I led a regional delegation to Argentina and Uruguay where we advocated for the rights of our members and took a stand against the privatization and commercialization of education.

We know education does not exist in a vacuum as a sectoral issue. It's the foundation of human enterprise, woven into the ambitious narratives of every priority of the future. At the last World Congress, delegates directed us to prioritize sustainability in everything we advocate.

We launched our Teach for the Planet campaign and presented world leaders with our Climate Manifesto and have since made climate change education a key piece of the movement for a sustainable future. We presented research and tools which every single one of you can use to advocate at the national level.

We are persistently integrating ourselves into the broader sustainability movement in the world. This fervor, this commitment, this momentum on the ground among our member organizations is undeniable. So are the realities we face, starting with resources.

In 2014 and 2015, we led the successful campaign to include education in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, alongside such issues as ending poverty and hunger, fighting gender inequality and climate change and others. For each of the goals, education is the catalyst.

Today, education systems in many countries have fewer resources than at any time in history.

To realize the SDGs, we are elevating our notion of the sustainable world we want to create. Under the banner of EI's Go Public! – Fund Education campaign launched earlier this year we are putting a spotlight on education financing, on corporate irresponsibility and on government accountability.

Our global campaign to fund public education and the teaching profession is a fight for investment in the public sector, a new social contract focused on the value of collecting and deploying the people's money for the public good.

We are fighting international finance agency restraints on the public sector that block teacher recruitment and limit teacher salaries. Tens of millions of new teachers are needed globally. This is no time to divest from the public good, it's a time to invest.

Large corporations and wealthy individuals can no longer be allowed to leverage the financial system for short-term profitmaking including the extraction and use of toxic energy sources like coal, while raising prices, hiding assets, and avoiding taxation.

How do we make governments responsive? By now you can probably say it along with me. We organize. We mobilize. The path to a sustainable future, to our rights as citizens of the world, is the same as our path to union rights. That path is democracy.

The link between strong and mobilized teacher unions and democracy is real and it is recognized. Nowhere is that sense of valuation stronger than at the highest levels of the United Nations. Last fall, EI played a central role in the Transforming Education Summit called by the Secretary General.

At our urging, the UN announced creation of a High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession to examine the role of teachers and the supports we need to do our work, including addressing the global teacher shortage, elevating teacher professionalism and funding public education systems. For the first time, there is high-level agreement that education is an investment and the key component of this investment is in teachers.

The High-Level Panel will have a special focus on technology and we know from past practice this will require us to be very deliberate about equity, which is continually threatened by privatization and commercialization. And we know that one of the key favorable conditions for privatization is chronic underfunding of public education systems.

We must reverse this trend globally. A strong public education system is not inevitable. It must be fought for and defended.

Here in our 30th year, together, we have built the knowledge, the reputation the power and the alliances at the highest level to be a force not only for education and sustainable development, but for democracy itself. Thanks to you, we continue to make our influence felt and our leadership stronger.

So, I am reporting to you today, the Ninth World Congress of Education International, that we are building upon this progress. We continue to make a difference worldwide. We will not stop.