

## FINAL

Ninth World Congress Opening  
Remarks of Susan Hopgood  
*President, Education International*  
Brussels, Belgium

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening delegates, observers, and colleagues from around the world to this Ninth World Congress of Education International, the first-ever World Congress held online.

As you learned from your briefings, the Tenth World Congress will be held in person in Buenos Aires next year. The decision to have two World Congresses one year apart was made by the Executive Board in 2021, at a time when Covid issues made it unlikely that delegates could convene in person on the original dates.

Business in these next three days will be limited to only what the EI Constitution requires an ordinary World Congress to decide, which means elections and debates on resolutions will be postponed until we meet in Buenos Aires.

It is hard to believe that when I last addressed World Congress, it was to close our very productive global gathering in person in Bangkok. None of us had ever heard of Covid or had ever imagined a global pandemic outside the realm of science fiction.

And so, we set for ourselves a very ambitious and focused set of goals. We saw the world as it was and we saw the world that we wanted for ourselves and our students, families, communities and nations, and we announced that we were taking the lead:

To promote democracy, human and trade union rights, equity, and social justice; putting ourselves and our unions at the forefront of movements that fight for democratic values and defend human and trade union rights on behalf of our students, our members, and the communities we serve.

To advance the profession and reassert the vital role of teachers and education support personnel in education and society; using our collective voice to change

the global narrative to improve the status and image of our profession as educators.

To ensure the right to free quality public education for all; standing and demanding accountability of our governments to support safe, inclusive quality education for all.

And to assert that quality inclusive education is the best way to build both awareness of the causes and consequences of climate change, and the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to seek solutions.

Then, Covid.

I won't attempt here to detail the pandemic experience. It is all too familiar, and it was different depending on who you were and where you lived and often your race, ethnicity, gender, and national identity. An unprecedented global health catastrophe that saw compassion, dedication, bravery, and selflessness. But much of the response, as we know, was strained through a template of predictable and persistent inequality, corruption, nationalism, and greed.

You can be very proud of the work of Education International over this period. No organisation on the planet convened more remote communications to its members, participated so forcefully at the highest levels of the United Nations or the World Health Organisation or developed more timely and relevant interventions in collaboration with member and partner organisations to overcome the effects of this pandemic than did our profession through EI.

Colleagues, you were persistent, so we were persistent. Here in the 30th year of our federation, we are reminded of our co-founding presidents Al Shanker and Mary Hatwood Futrell who put aside organisational differences to set us on a common course.

Mary wrote once that "as the need for equity persists: the push for progress will be equally persistent."

The worst of Covid may be over, but the need for our persistence remains as a different and more chronic sort of emergency lingers. That is, the crisis of the

public sector; the ability of governments to maintain and advance the common good and the capacity of the people to hold their governments accountable.

Today, the resources necessary for the public sector to meet the fundamental needs of the people are declining.

The numbers are especially discouraging when it comes to education. Education system resources have fallen in 65 percent of low- and middle-income countries and 33 percent of upper-middle and high-income countries since the start of the pandemic.

In low-income countries, on average, only 32 percent of primary, 43 percent of lower secondary and 52 percent of upper secondary schools have access to electricity. This affects access to the internet, which is just 37 percent in upper secondary schools in low-income countries, as compared to 59 percent in middle-income countries and 93 percent in high-income countries. Access to basic water, sanitation and hygiene is also far from universal. Among upper secondary schools, only 53 percent in low-income countries and 84 percent in middle-income countries have access to basic drinking water. Access to water and sanitation is universal in high-income countries.

Hundreds of millions of the most vulnerable children, young people, and adults remain excluded from education. Millions more don't have learning opportunities because of inadequate environments, untrained teachers, and a lack of educational resources.

Girls are disproportionately affected – they have historically been the last in their families to be allowed access to schools, the first to be forced to leave schools in times of crisis, and the hardest to get back to school when that option is again available.

We also know there is a teacher emergency, a shortfall of nearly 70 million teachers worldwide.

So where is the money?

In all the old familiar places, starting with debt.

Too often as a condition of borrowing from global development authorities or national lenders, states are required to starve the public sector, including defunding education, health, and other public services. By deliberately constraining what is called the “teacher wage bill” global financing agencies block teacher recruitment and salaries, further depleting the corps of professional educators.

Billions of dollars in uncollected taxes prevent responsible investments in the public good and in economies that provide sustainable and broad-based growth. On a global scale, Action Aid tells us the estimated annual revenue losses due to multinational corporate tax manipulation is about US 600 billion dollars.

Large corporations and wealthy individuals are leveraging the financial system for speculation and short-term profitmaking while raising prices and hiding assets.

At the same time, technology companies overwhelmed governments and school systems with pitches and promotions while chalking up underwhelming results and racking up costs to education systems into the billions of dollars. This even though education technology at scale remains largely untested, unregulated, and unproven.

Governments and global financial institutions are very quick to use the word ‘cost’, but we don’t often hear the word ‘value’.

There is no lack of resources to fund public education, but a lack of political will to make education the priority the world needs. We need to ensure that public financing is directed to where it is needed most – ensuring that every student has a professionally-trained, qualified, and well-supported teacher, in a quality learning environment.

Investment in the common good is fundamental to democracy and there is no better investment than quality public education with well-trained and well-compensated teachers.

Last September, the United Nations faced these facts. And the UN elevated education to the highest priority globally, focusing on critical shortages of qualified teachers and funding for education systems.

For the first time ever, a UN High-Level Panel will examine the role of teachers and the supports we need to do our work, including addressing the global teacher shortage, elevating teacher professionalism and the importance of funding.

Colleagues, this is a breakthrough. Your message, our message, about teachers is leading the global education dialogue. That they must be supported, valued, and paid their worth; with workloads and working conditions that support mental and physical wellbeing; negotiated salaries competitive with those in comparable professions and an end to the hiring of contract or unqualified teachers.

Funding public education systems improves pay and working conditions and empowers teachers and education support personnel to stay and thrive in the profession they love. It also inspires a new generation to join the professions the world desperately needs.

Quality education requires quality teaching, for all students, in all circumstances, which means employing qualified teachers with the right standards and competences. It's more than just having enough teachers.

Many thousands of teachers have been recruited in many countries, but they do not always meet minimum qualifications and training standards.

Qualified teachers and education support personnel are at the heart of successful education systems. They must be recognized as key partners for transforming education systems and be involved in policy planning through collaboration between governments and education unions. This means social dialogue mechanisms that ensure the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining must be strengthened.

Now is the right time for teachers to raise our voices once again for a new social contract; to

to exercise our ability to come together and unite behind a common goal; to educate our colleagues and mobilise our communities to connect the crisis in funding to the sustainable world we want to create.

Every EI member organisation can have a significant impact right now by completing the EI Status of Teachers Survey and returning it by July 31st. Not only does the survey provide vital evidence on the issues facing teachers in each Region, the results are critical data on our profession for the UN panel meeting in a matter of weeks.

The survey also provides important advocacy material for the *Go Public! – Fund Education* campaign launched earlier this year by EI and our member organisations. This campaign is our opportunity to take the lead, to place our profession at the vanguard of real change in our nations and our communities.

To make equity and inclusion in access to education a top priority.

To guarantee student and teacher safety and wellbeing.

To adequately and equitably finance quality, free public education for every student.

To bring opportunity and technology together in an equitable way in public education,  
and to ensure quality climate change education for all.

Our campaign demands accountability.

Governments must invest in public education by both increasing the size of national budgets and increasing the share of finance going to education.

We must strengthen the narrative for well-resourced inclusive and equitable quality public education systems and their indispensable role in advancing human rights, equity and equality, peace, democracy, and climate justice.

We must join with our communities to expose the negative impact of austerity and privatisation, to define and develop education systems of quality and equity, and to advocate for the rights and conditions of education workers.

The very name of our campaign – to *Go Public!* – reminds us that we cannot be silent. To be public is to be loud. To be public about something is to be unmistakable. To be public about something that you feel passionately means organizing and mobilising. We are not just talking amongst ourselves now; we are going public – invest in teachers and students for a better future.

We are asserting what we know to be true – that quality education is at the heart of a well-functioning democracy; and that the conditions to make this possible include a well-trained and compensated teaching profession and strong trade unions engaged as partners in democratic decision-making.

By growing our unions and elevating our professions, we are building and defending democracy. Our values and our principles, represented in more than 400 unions with more than 32 million members in 178 countries, have become essential to maintaining and growing sustainable democratic systems.

How do we continue to establish inclusive quality education a universal human right and priority? How does the public gain control of its own resources for the public good? How do we move forward to build a sustainable world?

We understand our power.

Our power to mobilise our unions and our communities to engage our governments and hold them accountable to fund the future through quality education.

Colleagues, that is leadership. That is our challenge. But that is also our strength.

Thank you.