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Beyond Burma: Lessons in hope for refugee children

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Invest in education to fight economic crisis

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"Downturn is deeper than expected."

"Jobs crisis cascades across the globe."

Recent headlines tell a frightening story of escalating crisis that threatens the livelihood and future of billions of people. As disturbing as the current situation is, we mustn't lose sight of the opportunities for fundamental change that come at times of crisis.

Business and governments created the economic crisis, but they will not be able to solve it unless they work with trade unions to reverse the disastrous consequences of decades of deregulation and corporate greed.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos in February, I and other trade union leaders emphasized that coordinated action is needed to tackle increasing unemployment, economic disparity, social injustice and instability. We urged massive investments in education, health and other public services as key elements of all national stimulus packages.

Interestingly, a report by the International Monetary Fund reaches the same conclusion. In fact, increased government spending on public education will have a more powerful impact on the economic crisis than tax cuts, the IMF said in a recent note to the G20 countries.

Clearly, with \$100 billion for education included in his historic \$789 billion stimulus package, US President Barack Obama intends to make investment in public education a cornerstone of the American recovery plan. Other governments should follow his lead.

Fred van Leeuwen, EI General Secretary

Good news

A friend of public education in the White House

Millions of people around the world had their eyes turned upon the Capitol in Washington, DC, on 20 January as Barack Obama, the former Illinois Senator from Kenyan-Kansas heritage, took the oath and officially became the 44th President of the United States. To celebrate the event, instructional guides were developed jointly by a team of curriculum experts from EI's member organisations, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The guides provide information and materials for teachers to use in the classroom to help students learn about traditional protocols used on Inauguration Day and other historic implications of the election of the first African-American president.

"It is crucial that our students understand that we are not only living history and making history with this inauguration, but also carrying forward the historical contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his influence on our incoming 44th president," NEA President Dennis Van Roekel said. "These important lesson plans will help students understand President-elect Obama's message of a 'sense of unity and shared purpose' into the next four years and beyond."

"The American presidential inauguration is a transformational moment that brings together our collective past and present and our hopes for the future," said AFT President Randi Weingarten. "It reminds us more clearly than mere words could ever say that power in this country truly rests with the

American people. These lesson plans are intended as tools to help teachers and their students live our rich history and build our brighter future.”

The NEA and the AFT, representing more than 4.5 million teachers and education workers across the United States, endorsed Obama and worked hard to help elect him. The scope of their commitment? Considerable. A few telling figures: NEA and its affiliates distributed more than 21 million pieces of mail, made more than 2 million phone calls, and sent more than 1 million emails to members in tightly-contested states and 5 million pieces of mail before the autumn. NEA actively engaged in targeted races throughout the country, including in 15 presidential battleground states, 11 Senate races, 54 congressional races, four gubernatorial races, and 20 ballot initiatives. The AFT deployed nearly 600 full-time campaign coordinators and 5,000 volunteers to assist affiliates and the AFL-CIO in member education and get-out-the-vote efforts. The AFT made more than 4 million contacts with its members, including phone calls, mail, leaflets and – the means of communication proven to be most effective – direct member-to-member contact at home and at school.

Both union leaders noted that Obama faces significant challenges: wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the deepening economic crisis, and a broken healthcare system. However, they expressed confidence in his ability and determination to confront these challenges, and are looking forward to working with the new Administration. Both unions are pleased with Obama’s nomination of Arne Duncan, the former chief executive officer of the Chicago Public Schools, as Education Secretary.

“Arne Duncan has exhibited his commitment to public education and his willingness to listen as well as to lead,” said Weingarten. “We hope Secretary Duncan’s team includes individuals who share these qualities, and who, like him, are committed to working with all stakeholders to strengthen and improve public education.”



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Teachers across the United States worked hard to help elect President Barack Obama.

Van Roekel said: “This could be the beginning of a promising new period for public education in this country.” He noted that “Duncan told Congress that funding for No Child Left Behind [the federal education programme initiated by the previous Bush Administration] should be doubled within five years.”

According to The New York Times, the economic stimulus plan presented by the new executive to Congress “would shower the nation’s school districts, child care centres and university campuses with \$150 billion in new federal spending, a vast two-year investment that would more than double the Department of Education’s current budget,” and represents “the largest increase in federal

aid since Washington began to spend significantly on education after World War II.” (The final deal reached between House and Senate leaders cut \$16 billion from the original proposal.)

In February, Van Roekel was among several labour leaders invited to the White House to witness President Obama sign executive orders aimed at protecting access to federal contracts for companies with labor unions and informing workers of their rights to organise.

Obama told the unionists: “I do not view the labour movement as part of the problem. To me, and to my administration, labour unions are a big part of the solution.” III

INFO

The lesson plans are available at:
www.nea.org/inaugurationlessons.html and
www.aft.org/tools4teachers/americaelects/index.htm.

Beyond Burma

Lessons in hope for refugee children

Story and pictures by David Browne

Mae Sot, THAILAND – He has the quiet, professional demeanour of a man who prefers the educational sanctuary of the classroom to the dangers of revolutionary politics.

Yet Burmese teacher Htay Hlaing spent nine-years incarcerated in a notorious torture prison in his military-ruled homeland for the so-called “crime” of helping his students draft a letter asking for peace and reconciliation.

“I felt as if I was in hell. My life was taken away. Sometimes we were watched all day and all night. If they said sit, you had to sit. If they said stand, you had to stand. There were five of us crammed into a tiny cell,” recalled the 51-year-old Physics and Chemistry teacher.

Although Htay – pronounced “Tay” – wasn’t personally tortured, he told how other political prisoners in infamous Insein jail on the north-western outskirts of the Burmese capital, Yangon, were beaten to near death and locked in leg irons by prison guards at the merest hint of defiance.



Htay Hlaing was imprisoned for nine years in Burma.

“The Burmese government is like the devil. The whole world should know how they treat the people,” said Htay, who fled to neighbouring Thailand with his wife and four of their five children last year soon after his release.

Still reeling from last May’s devastating Cyclone Nargis, Burma has been at civil war for 60 years and oppressed, since the mid 1960’s, by a succession of military regimes.

An estimated three million Burmese citizens are now in exile, the vast majority slaving as undocumented migrant workers in Thailand and throughout South East Asia.

Around 350,000 Burmese have fled to the Mae Sot border city area, where most live in sprawling refugee camps and struggle to feed, clothe and educate their children.

Today Htay – although without legal papers – has found employment and relative freedom at a remarkable school for the children of Burmese refugees in Mae Sot, some 400 miles north west of the Thai capital, Bangkok.

Founded in 1999 by head teacher U Khaing Oo Maung, the Boarding High School for Orphans and Helpless Youths has 300 pupils and 20 staff. Sixty of the children are orphans and live at the school, sleeping in classrooms that double as dormitories, playing in a dirt courtyard shared with a flotilla of ducks.

Although facilities are ramshackle and rudimentary, the school has found an educational pathway that leads away from war and repression. The spirit and enthusiasm



Head teacher U Khaing Oo Maung founded the Boarding



School for Orphaned and Helpless Youths.



1. Teacher Si Si Htwe surrounded by students.
2. Student Ne Aung Moe.
3. Student Sang-Sang Lwin.

for learning and teaching amongst the children and staff are truly inspirational. And a number of the school's graduates go on to universities in Australia, Canada, Germany and Thailand, through United Nations scholarships and education programmes.

For the orphans what little the school can give means a lot.

"When I arrived I was very happy and grateful. They gave me everything. I didn't have any clothes so they gave me clothes. They gave me soap, toothbrush and slippers, everything I needed," said 15-year-old Ne Aung Moe, who is rarely seen without a smile.

The school's oldest student, 20-year-old Kyain Ye Shet, who was disabled by botched medical treatment back home, said: "We got pressure from both sides, pressure from the military and pressure from the opposition, so we had to run away. But here I am safe. When I finish my education, I'm going to return to my Burmese Lahu tribe and work for them."

It's a declaration of service and sacrifice echoed by many students. U Khaing's adoptive daughter Yatanar, aged 9, wants to be a doctor and "would like to treat poor people free of charge," while 13-year-old May Thet Aye aims to be a teacher "to teach what I learned here to other children."

From a nation divided by ethnic and political strife, the school is a microcosm of Burma with pupils coming from all the country's religions and ethnic groups.

"Here there is no ethnic or religious discrimination. This is very important for the

future democracy of Burma," stressed principal U Khaing. "We should have human rights without discrimination among the ethnic and religious groups. In future, some students will be medical doctors, engineers, university teachers. They will be leaders. They will lead us in our country."

Proudly wearing a yellow T-shirt emblazoned with the face of imprisoned Burmese pro-Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, 70-year-old U Khaing has all the wit and charisma of a born teacher. For six years, he too was jailed and tortured by military intelligence agents, before escaping to the border region after Burma's failed 1988 uprising. He then taught at a school hidden in the jungle.

Another teacher and former pupil at the orphanage school, 25-year-old Si Si Htwe, also witnessed atrocities committed in her home village by soldiers of the State Peace and Development Council, the official name of the ruling military junta in Burma. She told EI:

"When I was in my village of Khaung Chi, SPDC soldiers were attacking and burning other villages in the area. One man tried to return to his village but he was caught by the soldiers. They cut off his head. They cut off his hands and legs and spread the body parts all over."

Despite its great successes, life remains tough at the orphanage school.

"All of us, the teachers, the principal and all the students are illegal. So we are concerned about our security all the time," explained deputy head teacher Chang One.



Students at the Boarding High School for Orphans and Helpless Youths taking a test.

"If I go into Mae Sot centre and meet a policeman and he asks for money, I have to give it to him. If I don't I will be arrested and sent back to Burma."

A grant from an Italian NGO feeds the children twice a day, but the school remains desperate for funding. And its status is uncertain as Thai authorities only recognise it as a "learning centre" and not as a legal school. Moreover, because of their precarious status, the teachers can't form or join a union.

The school can only afford to pay its teachers around US\$100 a month. Even principal U Khaing is paid only US\$30 a week.

"We need many things: clothing, computers, school transportation," stressed U Khaing. "We have no government, no country under the military leadership, so I deeply request international donors to please come to our school and check up what we really need." III

Remarkable school featured in new EI video

The teachers and students of the Boarding High School for Orphaned and Helpless Youths are also featured in a new documentary video entitled *Beyond Burma: Lessons in hope for refugee children*.

The teachers and students alike have had to flee their homeland and seek refuge from the military dictatorship. Some of the teachers are former political prisoners and some of the students are orphans. All of them live in poverty.

The video gives a glimpse into the lives of these dedicated teachers who, with few resources but plenty of skill and determination, strive to provide quality education. Despite many

obstacles, they are giving their students the skills and knowledge they will need in the future — especially if their dream of a free, democratic Burma finally comes true.

Beyond Burma is the second production completed through a new EI initiative called Video for Union Educators (VUE). The VUE Project, with assistance from the NEA Foundation, produces short documentaries on themes relevant to the achievement of Education For All and EI's principal aims. The documentaries are shared with affiliates, partner organisations, global unions and others, both on DVD and over the internet. To view *Beyond Burma*, please go to: www.youtube.com/user/EduInternational.

To find out how you can help, write to editor@ei-ie.org or directly to the school: bhsoho7@yahoo.com.

Guest speakers

Eve Ensler and Stephen Lewis

Eve Ensler is a writer and activist, and the founder of V-Day, the global movement to end violence against women and girls.



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Stephen Lewis is the Co-Founder of AIDS-Free World and the former UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa.



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The never-ending war: Femicide in the Democratic Republic of Congo

There is a modest rush to bring humanitarian aid to the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). After weeks of escalating conflict, during which hundreds of thousands have been displaced, hundreds more women raped, and many civilians slaughtered, there is now the possibility that 3,000 additional peacekeepers will be sent to DRC. (...) There is a new element of care and concern.

But why does the world behave as if there is suddenly a new war in the DRC? For thousands upon thousands of women, the war that began 12 years ago has never ended. Each day, women have been threatened with rape, torture, abuse and violation.

Many of us have been calling for intervention on their behalf for years, especially the last two years. We have spoken at the UN Security Council, we have met with European governments, we have pushed the US administration, we have made countless speeches. We have launched a worldwide campaign called "Stop Raping our Greatest Resource: Power to the Women and Girls of the DRC."

We have begged, cajoled and pleaded for triple the number of peacekeepers to protect the women, for an end to impunity, for shining a light on the connection between the sexual violence and the plundering of Congo's vast resources by militias and

multi-national companies. We have worked with brave and resilient women and men in the DRC who are building movements from the ground up to break the silence, demanding an end to war.

It is acknowledged across the board that the sexual atrocities perpetrated on women in the DRC are without a doubt the worst atrocities in the world today. It may seem extreme to call what is happening a Femicide – the violence may not fit the exact legal definition of the Genocide Convention – but for the women facing such systematic destruction, targeted precisely and only because they are women, Femicide is a word whose time has come.

The numbers are appalling. More than a quarter of a million women have been raped in the last decade. The crimes are shocking: gang rapes; the raping of three-month-old infants and eighty-year-old women; the dispatching of militias who have AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases to rape entire villages; women being held as sex slaves for weeks, months and years; and women being forced to eat murdered babies.

At Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, more than ten women who have been raped and tortured arrive every day. Their vaginas are ripped apart; for some that means that their reproductive organs are permanently destroyed.

Many have fistula – a hole in the wall of tissue between the vagina and the rectum or the vagina and the bladder. These wounds are most often inflicted by militias who attack using sticks, knives or guns, or through the merciless vaginal penetration of mass rape.

What makes it all so appalling is that everyone in power knows what is happening. On December 10, the founder of Panzi Hospital, Dr. Denis Mukwege, was awarded the United Nations Prize in the field of Human Rights, an award which Nelson Mandela and other esteemed leaders have received. There are Security Council resolutions, dramatic visits by western Foreign Ministers, increasing news coverage, coalitions of UN agencies, statements by humanitarian NGOs, 17,000 peacekeepers on the ground, and yet the sexual violence never ceases.

The missing piece of the analysis is that peace and war have always been measured in gun blasts. When men take up arms, and other men fight back, war is declared; when men agree to a ceasefire, the war is said to have stopped. Now we've come to the point when the world has recognized that in conflict after conflict, a gruesome, sadistic dimension has been added to modern-day-war, a widespread strategy employed by men to achieve their military and political ends: the rape of civilian women and girls.

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Women demonstrate in Brussels to call attention to the atrocious sexual abuse taking place in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

All the parties to the war in the DRC may agree in theory that rape is being used as a 'weapon of war,' but when they sit around the negotiating table and work out the terms that will end the fighting, they consistently forget to include for discussion just one weapon in the arsenal: rape. And so sexual violence has continued unabated, never letting up during the periods of so-called 'peace.'

And it will continue, because although we claim that rape is a weapon, committing a rape has never constituted a breach of any peace accord.

Enough of the lip service. If rape is a weapon of the Congo's war – and we know that the threat of rape is a terrorist tactic, causing communities to flee their homes and farms, causing millions of deaths by starvation, making rape the single most deadly of all the militias' weapons – then treat it with the gravity afforded every other weapon. Insist that the militias lay down their weapons AND stop their raping. Until the sexual violence ends, the world has no right to speak of peace. III

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INFO

For more information on how you can contribute to the joint campaign by V-Day and UNICEF to end violence against the women and girls of DRC, go to: www.stoprapeindrc.org.

Neuroscience and education

Implications for classroom practice

By Margaret Pillay

Did you know that the concept of individuals being left-brained or right-brained is an example of neuroscientific research data being interpreted incorrectly (Willis, 2008)? Or that the practice of identifying learners as auditory, visual or kinesthetic has never been supported by brain research (Ansari, 2008)? These commonly held beliefs have found their way into urban myth and into some educational conversations.

It may be challenging for beginning teachers to identify valid information and put it to use in the classroom but, with the growing body of work in neuroscience and the connections between brain-based research and learning, it is important that we all have a good understanding of the recent research and its implications for classroom practice.

The last 20 years have been revolutionary in the field of brain research due to rapid technological advances which allow scientists to look inside the brain, watch it processing information, and identify which areas of the brain are active during specific tasks. For example, we now know that several areas of the brain show activity during the act of reading, and that adults and children with dyslexia show atypical brain activity profiles. Scientists suggest that in the future, children will be able to enter school with learning disabilities already identified by medical technology, and with learning plans already developed for use by teachers.

The implications of brain research for the future look very promising, but teachers can also make use of current research in their classrooms; for example, did you know that daily school experiences actually change the physiology of the brain? Considerable attention has been paid to the fact that the

use of technology can change the physical structure of the brain, a fact that has been discussed in educational circles in respect to a perceived shorter attention span seen in students who use technology. However, this is only part of the picture as all activity changes the physical structure of the brain, including learning.

Research has shown that learning can stimulate the development of new neurons and neural pathways. This new growth can occur throughout life, not only when the brain is still growing in childhood and adolescence. Pruning of these neurons and neural pathways is also continuous, as pathways that are not used regularly are deleted to make the brain more efficient, while those used regularly are strengthened. This quality, referred to as brain plasticity, has implications for teaching and learning. Jensen (2008) suggests that schools can use this fact to advantage by using strategies that encourage students' metacognition.

Connected to brain plasticity are new understandings about IQ. Research has shown that an individual's IQ is not fixed at birth, but rather can continue to grow through life, given optimal conditions. In the past, IQ was believed to be a function of nature (genetics) or nurture (environ-

ment). Now a third factor is also recognized: that of "gene expression." Gene expression is described by Jensen (2008) as "the capacity of our genes to respond to chronic or acute environmental output." Jensen states that "gene expression can be regulated by what we do at schools" so that, as teachers, we can provide opportunities for growth that will enhance the lives of all students.

Several other promising practices that reinforce the connection between education and brain research are currently being investigated. One of these supports the multiple intelligence theories of Howard Gardner, and confirms that children learn in a variety of ways and have different ways of expressing what they have learned and understand. If we present information to students in a variety of ways and allow for the expression of learning in a variety of ways, more students will be successful.

Further, research has shown that if new information is presented in a multi-sensory manner, this new learning can then be stored in a variety of areas in the brain. If distributed in several places, information can also be retrieved from a number of areas, thus increasing the likelihood of it being retained, and creating strong neural pathways.

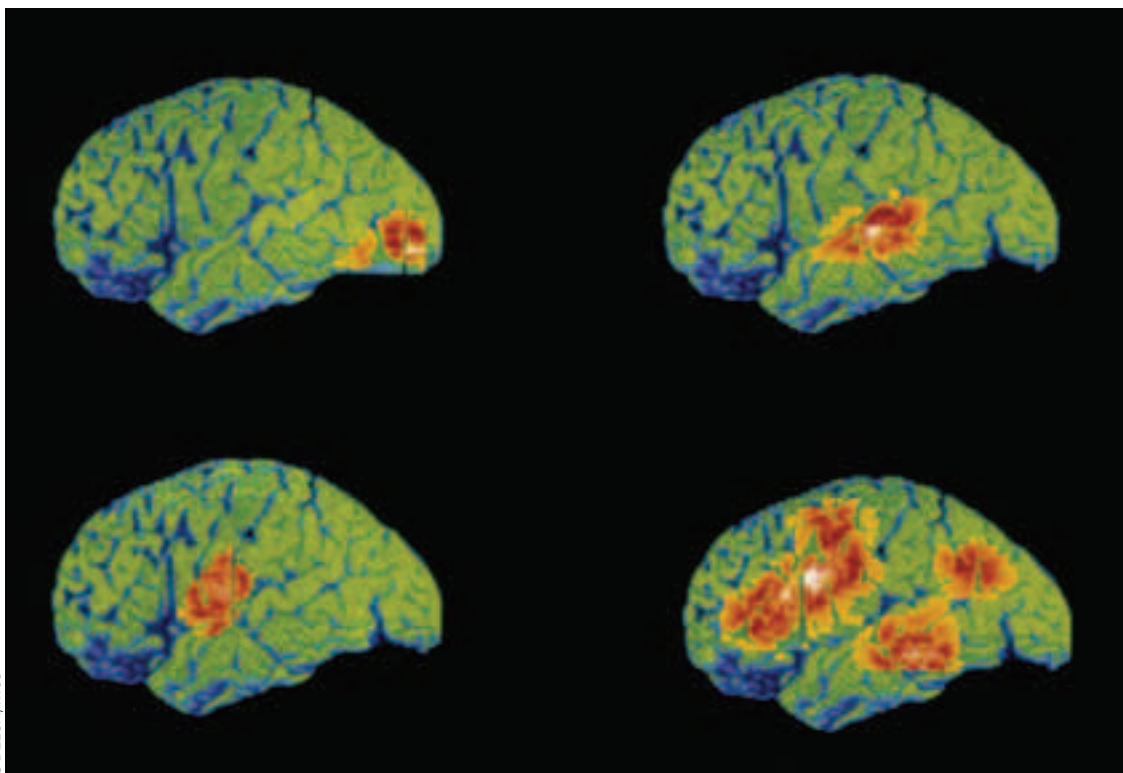
Another good teaching practice confirmed by brain research is the connection between emotion and learning. Willis (2007) states that “superior learning takes place when learning activities are enjoyable and relevant to students’ lives, interests and experiences.” This speaks to the importance of our knowing about the interests and lives of the students so that we can connect new learning to their past experiences. Yet another teaching practice reinforced in current literature is the belief that students are active learners who construct meaning when immersed in a meaningful performance in a social environment.

None of these strategies are new to teachers, but what is new is that these sound educational practices are now confirmed by brain research.

Jensen (2008) suggests that educators should be “professional enough to say ‘here’s why I do what I do’ in the classroom.” This means looking to the research to identify good teaching practices.

Think about an area of your curriculum that is necessary but not exciting. How might you make that learning that topic enjoyable and relevant? How might you connect this topic to students’ prior experiences, and in what ways might you engage students in studying this material via an authentic performance task? What are some ways in which you can introduce learning to students in a multi-sensory manner? How might you introduce metacognitive strategies to your students? What other teaching practices could you use in your classrooms that are founded on research?

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Sight, hearing, speaking, thinking. Coloured Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans of areas of the human brain activated by different tasks. The left-side of the brain is seen. At upper left, sight activates the visual area in the occipital cortex at the back of the brain. At upper right, hearing activates the auditory area in the superior temporal cortex of the brain. At lower left, speaking activates the speech centres in the insula and motor cortex. At lower right, thinking about verbs and speaking them generates high activity, including in hearing, speaking, temporal and parietal areas. PET scans detect blood flow.

A former teacher, school principal and curriculum consultant, Margaret Pillay now is Associate Director with the Professional Development Unit of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation in Canada. Her article is reprinted with permission from the union’s paper, Saskatchewan Bulletin. III

INFO

Your students may enjoy this entertaining and fact-filled site on Neuroscience for Kids:
www.faculty.washington.edu/chudler/neurok.html.

PISA

Is testing dangerous?

By Laura Figazzolo

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally standardized test undertaken by random samples of 15-year-old students in 57 countries around the world. It is the best known international comparative study undertaken regularly in education today, and its results have a significant impact on education policy in participating countries and beyond. As such, PISA is increasingly important for education policy development, but it is just the tip of the iceberg of a bigger process: the trend towards evidence-based policymaking as a force in politics on an international scale.

In the PISA process, students are randomly selected to perform pencil-and-paper tests in 45 minutes. This makes it similar to many tests that are a key part of schooling methods nowadays. However, PISA's influence goes far beyond merely taking a snapshot of how well students have acquired certain knowledge or skills. Tests are becoming powerful policy tools, both nationally and internationally.

“When tests purport to evaluate the overall quality of education systems, they inevitably tend to become instruments of injustice.”

In 2008, EI undertook a survey analyzing the impact of PISA 2006 on the education policy debate, with a specific focus on how the mass media reported on PISA, how governments drew from its conclusions and how unions reacted to them. In other words, how education is affected by the most important international comparative survey.

The findings show that PISA has a tremendous impact on the way in which educators,

parents and governments understand education. The analysis of press materials demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of articles on PISA make a simple reference to PISA as a “measurement” of the quality of education. Making comparisons to distant places such as Poland and Singapore governments use the testing to justify their reforms. “As shown by PISA, our education system is performing well behind our neighbors, and that is why we need to act,” is a common refrain.

These actions usually lead to the introduction of more measurements, of national testing systems based on the PISA model and methodology, of more scrutinized teaching procedures, and ultimately, to linking teachers' performance and pay to students' test scores. This trend is very dangerous and unions are increasingly concerned about it because it fundamentally changes teaching and learning and, indeed, the overall meaning of education.

International comparisons can produce fascinating data, but it should not be forgotten that the basis for this data is rather simple, and it does not convey the complexity nor the breadth of education. The same limitations apply to any other mass standardized test.

PISA 2006 reveals interesting data on correlations between the performance of 15 year-old students in science as well as reading and mathematics, their socioeconomic backgrounds, and the organization of schools. However, it does not transmit anything close to the total picture of education quality. It can help to stimulate debate about education, but any attempt to use the PISA results to support already-developed political agen-

das would be a misuse of the report and the data it contains.

In this, PISA is similar to many national tests. As far as they help understand students' progress, strengths and weaknesses in learning, they can be very helpful tools, but when they purport to evaluate the overall quality of education systems, they inevitably tend to become instruments of injustice.

In fact, what makes PISA different, and more dangerous than the other international comparative surveys in education, is its clear policy orientation led by the principle of increasing school efficiency. This renders it a powerful tool for political influence, as the OECD is able to exert a sort of peer pressure and “soft governance” on national governments, by virtue of its status as an authoritative impartial source of evidence.

Given the OECD's capacity to develop international comparisons based on sound data gathering mechanisms that are globally recognized, staying out of international comparative research and education indicators is not an option for teacher unions.

This said, we should not deny the possibility of using PISA reports in an integral, yet creatively positive way. The wealth of data and the variety of conclusions of PISA allow space for sound interpretation from a unionist point of view, as well. A better understanding of the real role and scale of PISA's potential impact, which EI has developed over recent years, leaves no doubt that the use of PISA for informing policymaking is not only unavoidable, but can be beneficial for the teacher unions' cause. ■■■

Standardised testing

South Korean teachers fired over giving parents a choice

Seven primary and middle school teachers in the South Korean capital Seoul have been fired for giving students and parents a choice about whether to take a national standardised test.

The teachers are all members of *Jeon Gyo Jo*, which is the Korean Teachers' and Education Workers' Union (KTU), an affiliate of Education International. EI joins the KTU in strongly condemning the firings, and calls on the education authorities to re-instate the teachers to their previous jobs.

"Across the OECD countries, teachers are becoming increasingly concerned about the uses and abuses of standardized testing and its vastly increased stress on students and teachers," said EI General Secretary Fred Van Leeuwen. "High-stakes testing has significant negative impacts in terms of narrowing the curriculum in order to teach to the test. Teachers have a professional right and duty to speak out about testing regimes they believe to be harmful." The Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education dismissed the seven teachers, alleging they had not "followed orders" and had "induced" students not to take a national test, thereby "interrupting" the students' "right to learn."

In fact, the fired teachers had sent letters to the parents, suggesting that this kind of standardized testing might "raise unnecessary competition among students" and give children "a heavy, stressful burden." If students did not want to take the test, the teachers suggested that they could participate in an educational field trip instead – provided they had their



KTU members rally in support of their fired colleagues.

parents' permission. If students wanted to take the test, they could.

The South Korean education system is highly competitive, with government policy compelling all elementary and middle school students across the country to sit the standardized tests. High school students endure extremely intense schedules of study seven days a week in advance of critical university entrance exams.

The KTU says the firings are the most recent example of a consistent pattern of attacks on teachers and public education by the administration of President Lee Myung-Bak. The administration has nullified the teachers' collective bargaining agreement and imposed a punitive system of teacher evaluation, introduced by repeated hostile statements in the media.

The KTU is determined to continue supporting the teachers, who they believe were merely exercising their professional judgment and conscience, and will press

its demands for teacher autonomy in the face of arbitrary government moves.

Van Leeuwen noted that parents and other stakeholders across South Korea have also joined in the union's protests.

"Parents and teachers share these concerns because they want a quality education for their children," van Leeuwen said. "They understand that quality education involves much more than high marks on a standardized test. Quality education is focused on academics, to be sure, but it is also about the arts, athletics, citizenship, critical and creative thinking skills, love of learning, and so much more."

EI will continue to monitor the situation in South Korean schools and to support its affiliate in complaints it plans to bring to the International Labour Organisation and the Expert Committee on the Application of the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers (CEART). ■■■

See page 27 for more on testing.

Sri Lanka

Teaching under bombardment

Story and pictures by Samuel Grumiau

Sri Lanka has for decades been torn apart by the conflict between the Sri Lankan army and the Tamil Tigers.

Members of a Tamil education union give personal accounts of life and work in the most dangerous areas of the country. To protect the identity of the teachers who had the courage to talk about the situation despite the risks involved, all of their names have been changed.

Checkpoints and stress on the way to work

"My school is 40 km from Omantai, where there is a major checkpoint between the government-controlled area and the LTTE-controlled area. I live in the Vavuniya region, eight kilometres south of Omantai, in the government-controlled area.

"I go to work by motorbike and the journey can take me between one and three hours, depending on the number of checkpoints I have to cross and the intensity of the checks and searches by the Sri Lankan army at the checkpoint. The main parts of my motorbike are systematically dismantled and then reassembled to check whether I'm carrying any of the items or materials that the Sri Lankan government forbids being taken into the LTTE zone. The soldiers also check that I'm not carrying more than the five litres of petrol needed for my journey to the school." This is a measure taken by the Sri Lankan army to stop fuel being resold to the Tamil Tigers.

To minimise the risks, Maaran lodges near his school during the week and only returns to Vavuniya on weekends.



Lessons continue in this Colombo school thanks to support from unions and NGOs.

"The journey to my school in Omantai is dangerous; the Sri Lankan army sometimes carries out ambushes in the area, and has already set off mines as the vehicles of government employees go by, mistaking them for Tamil Tigers. It's very dangerous throughout the LTTE-controlled area, because of the bombings carried out by the Sri Lankan army. It tries to limit civilian casualties, but contrary to what it tries to make people believe, civilians are often hit by its missiles. Schools have already been hit, and a teacher lost his life at the beginning of August after bombs were dropped from military aircraft. We all rush to the shelters during the bombings, and go back to giving classes as normal when they are over. The pupils and teachers are used to living under such stressful conditions, but it's very difficult, nevertheless, to provide children with a good education in such circumstances."

It is impossible to summarise the civil war in Sri Lanka in just a few lines. In short, it is a conflict between the central government and a Tamil separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Internationally recognised as a terrorist group, the LTTE is demanding self-determination and the creation of a Tamil state in the northeast of the island. Tamils form 18% of the Sri Lankan population and the Sinhalese 74%. The Tamil Tigers long controlled large areas in the north and east of the country, where they established their own parallel administration to that of the central government. Owing to internal divisions and military routs, however, the parallel administration is currently confined to the north of Sri Lanka. In recent weeks, major offensives by the Sri Lankan army have further reduced the area controlled by the LTTE, but barriers to the exercise of free journalism in the conflict zones make it difficult to draw an exact picture of the military situation.

For the Tamil civilian population, over and above any political considerations, one thing is clear: fear is part of their everyday lives. In the government-controlled Tamil areas, not a day goes by without civilians being arrested, tortured and beaten for suspected links with the Tamil Tigers. The plight of civilians in the areas controlled by the Tamil Tigers is no less desperate. In addition to the bombardments of the Sri Lankan army, Tamil families have to cope with a terrorist movement that tolerates no dissent and has long forced Tamil children to join it as soldiers (although it would seem that the LTTE's use of child soldiers has diminished over recent years).

“The artillery fire startles the pupils”

This climate of terror has a huge psychological impact on the children. In Vavuniya, for example, a town in the government-controlled area, the Sri Lankan army fires shells practically every day at the area controlled by the LTTE, just ten kilometres north of the town. Most Tamils from Vavuniya have family or friends in that area and every fire of the cannon sparks fears for their safety.

“My school is just next to a military base,” says Krishnan, a member of the Ceylon Tamil Teachers' Union, an EI affiliate. “The sound of the artillery fire is very loud in my classroom, it startles the pupils. It's really difficult to give classes under such circumstances.”

The teachers also speak of the distress they observe among their pupils following round-up operations. These operations are generally led by the Sri Lankan army (100% Sinhalese) and consist in rounding up all the people from a given district in a public square and lecturing them on their duty to denounce LTTE sympathisers. In some instances, they are forced to file one by one in front of an army informer masked by a balaclava. If the informer nods his head as you stand before him, you are arrested under suspicion of being a Tamil Tiger sympathiser. Those arrested are generally tortured and held without trial for an indefinite period.

The fact that families are constantly having to flee the combat zones is another serious problem affecting schooling.

“When I was appointed to this school there were 500 pupils, but there are only 150 now, as the others have been internally displaced with their families to other parts of the LTTE-controlled area. My school was also displaced recently, when the fighting came too close. At least 55 schools have already been displaced in this area, but the cost of moving is not reimbursed, and we do not receive any kind of danger money despite the ever growing risks. All the government employees working in the LTTE area face the same difficulties,” says Krishnan.

Cautious trade union movement

Out of caution, most Sri Lankan trade unions take care not to get too closely involved in the conflict dividing the country.

A few trade unions have, however, occasionally called on the government to abandon the military solution in favour of negotiations, even though this is very difficult with a terrorist movement such as the Tamil Tigers. One of them is NATURE, which groups 19 Sri Lankan unions, including the Ceylon Tamil Teachers' Union.

“NATURE appealed to the Sri Lankan president, urging him to end the fighting, but the government responded that there could be no peaceful solution while the LTTE continues its campaign of violence,” explains Palitha Atukorale, the president of NATURE. “So NATURE then wrote to Vellupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, to urge him to seek a peaceful solution, but to no avail, unfortunately.”

The unions working near the combat zones have to be much more cautious.

“In the past, we did carry out some initiatives in favour of peace, but when the current government came to power and decided to do away with the LTTE by military



This family lost everything due to a fire in a displaced persons' camp.

means, we had to keep quiet, so as not to place ourselves at risk,” explains Vishwanathan, a member of the Ceylon Tamil Teachers' Union in Vavuniya.

“As unions, our activities are confined to work-related issues: problems concerning promotions, taking leave, the transfer of teachers to villages far away from their homes, etc. Joint action with the rest of the Sri Lankan trade union movement is difficult: the Vavuniya region is cut off from the rest of the country by a major checkpoint in Medawachchiya, and crossing the checkpoint means wasting a lot of time, because of the all the red tape,” he continues.

“The circumstances make it difficult for us to attend trade union meetings in the capital, Colombo, for example. We do, however, want to maintain contact with teachers from all around the country, because workers, be they Tamil, Sinhalese or from other communities, have every interest in remaining united, despite the fighting led by the military,” Vishwanathan says. III

Reprinted with permission from the ITUC's *Union View*.

UK

NUT strike featured in LabourStart's photo of the year



Investing in education is part of solving economic crisis

A photo depicting members of one of EI's UK affiliates, the National Union of Teachers, marching through Birmingham led by banners and drummers has won the 2008 LabourStart contest for best union photography.

The NUT demonstration was part of a one-day national strike held on 24 April 2008 as part of the union's "Fair Pay For Teachers" campaign, launched over government attempts to impose pay cuts. The day was an emotional one for NUT members because Steve Sinnott, NUT General Secretary who would have led the teachers' strike, had died suddenly just weeks earlier.

Robert Day, a branch secretary with the British public sector PCS in Birmingham, took the shot which won the first-ever Labour Photo of the Year competition organized by LabourStart, the news and campaigning website of the international trade union movement.

Almost 3,000 LabourStart readers from around the world voted in the competition. Five finalists were chosen from over 100 entries by a panel of three labour photographers.

Runners up included Brooke Anderson, Organizing Director of the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE) in Oakland, California (USA); Khaled Hasan from Bangladesh; Gerardo Raffa from UNIA, a union in Switzerland; and Hossam el-Hamalawy from Egypt.

For more information, visit www.labourstart.org for news from around the world about trade union issues and campaigns. The site publishes in more than 20 different languages. ■■■

Over the past six months, people around the world have watched in growing alarm as it became evident we now are facing the worst crisis in the real economy since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Unfortunately, working people, who had no hand in creating the crisis, are bearing the brunt of it in terms of massive unemployment, deep cuts in public services, decreased social stability and dashed hopes.

The international labour movement, however, has developed a bold agenda and a clear plan of where we should go and what changes are needed to confront this global crisis.

There's no doubt the news looks grim. The International Labour Organisation recently revised upwards its estimate of job losses predicted for 2009. This year global unemployment could increase over 2007 by a range of 18 million to 30 million workers, and more than 50 million if the situation continues to deteriorate. In the latter scenario, some 200 million workers, mostly in developing economies, could be pushed into extreme poverty.

At the same time, the very same Wall Street bankers and financiers who lobbied for billions in public bailouts to rescue the financial system still continued paying themselves billions in corporate bonuses, a fact that US President Barack Obama described as "shameful."

"Indeed it is shameful," said EI General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen. He pointed out that the \$18 billion US that went into the pockets of those who created the crisis could have paid for two years of schooling for the 75 million children around the world who have no access to education.

But, as always in times of crisis, there are opportunities for transformation. Educa-

tion International and other global unions are seizing the moment to speak out about the need for fundamental reform of the economic system, reform based on social justice, human rights, decent work and international cooperation – not competition and greed.

"This is the end of market fundamentalism," Barbara Wettstein, of UNI Finance, writes in the journal International Union Rights. "But reform must be comprehensive and it must be global... The new economic model must put workers and sustainable development before the interests of financiers and speculators." Now that economic policy makers are forced to acknowledge the need for new regulatory structures and financial architecture, unions are demanding to be part of the solution, insisting on their rightful place at the table and their voice in the global dialogue.

To that end, EI is developing an Action Plan for Education and the Economy, a plan to protect education from the economic crisis and to mobilize political support for investment in education as a critical element in economic recovery. EI and its affiliates are pressing their governments to ensure that education is central to any stimulus packages they implement. In particular, affiliates in the G20 countries are driving that message home in advance of that group's meeting in London in April.

Van Leeuwen emphasized that the action plan must maintain EI's basic principles: that education is a public good not a commodity; that education is about much more than economics; that education is central in our societies in many ways, having both social and economic importance; and, especially, that quality education requires quality teachers.

He noted that in nearly 16 years of EI's existence the struggle of education unions to put these principles into practice has been arduous.

"Now it is going to get tougher, much tougher," van Leeuwen warned. "The challenges that will confront education systems around the world as the finan-

"The \$18 billion US that went into the pockets of those who created the crisis could have paid for two years of schooling for the 75 million children around the world who have no access to education."

cial meltdown impacts upon the global economy will be unlike any we have experienced previously in our lifetimes. The crisis began in the North, but already affects the whole world. The South, just emerging from mistakes like structural adjustment will be hit badly as global recession takes hold. The Millennium Development Goals for 2015 are seriously at risk. The financial and economic crisis threatens everything we have worked for."

In some European countries the impact on public education is already being felt in

terms of reduced public spending and increased privatisation. Italy and Ireland, for example, have drastically reduced education funding, sparking enormous protests by unions, teachers, parents and students.

EI insists that instead of cutting spending on education, governments ought to be investing in it to stimulate growth, foster social stability and build for the knowledge economy. Fiscal stimulus through spending on public services and social protection for the most vulnerable provides the best hope for recovery.

At a recent meeting with representatives of the International Financial Institutions, EI's General Secretary called on World Bank President Robert Zoellick to defend the Millennium Development Goals, and especially Education for All, against the ravages of the current crisis.

"I can't think of anything more important," said Zoellick, who described how he was trying to persuade governments to include funds for vital services in developing countries, including education and health, in their fiscal stimulus packages.

"We've got solid evidence that this kind of spending will help global recovery and the more advanced economies as well," Zoellick said.

Indeed, the International Monetary Fund recently reported to the G20 countries that it had calculated multipliers for three policy options: tax cuts, infrastructure investment and "other" government spending. Public education would be included in the latter.

The IMF paper says that public spending in the "other" category has a consider-

ably larger multiplier than tax cuts (1.0 vs 0.6), although infrastructure investment has an even higher multiplier (1.8 vs 0.6). Clearly, tax cuts are the least effective policy option.

As the industrialised economies scramble to find solutions, people in the developing world are worried that they will suffer negative impacts on their economies and a reduction in development assistance.

Most of the G8 governments failed to live up to their commitments in good times, so there are fears they will fail even more miserably now that they are faced with this crisis.

However, a study by the OECD Development Centre reveals that support for development aid remains strong despite the crisis, and now is not the time to take away from people who already have so little. In Policy Insights No. 87, entitled *Fallout from the Financial Crisis* (5), Robert Zimmerman reports that: "The evidence demonstrates that public support for development aid is high, and it has remained high for the past two decades. Politicians looking for an 'easy' cut in their budgets may want to think twice. First, the high support for development aid is reflected in a well organised global civil society that will resist breaches of donor commitments for more and better aid. Indeed, in leaner times, attitudes seem to be more charitable, and redistribution more popular. Second, in times of a global financial crisis, poor people in developing countries need development assistance more than ever. Taxpayers seem to realise this. Their policy makers must realise it, too." ■■■

Island-mainland

Long distance solidarity among teachers

By Claude Carroué

The gate to the school yard is covered with ugly graffiti, but the murals in the courtyard depict lovely flowers, colourful tropical scenes, and a map of the island of Martinique, an overseas department of France in the eastern Caribbean. We are at the secondary school of Le Vauclin, where Arnaud Michel teaches physical education and serves as a representative of his union, SE-UNSA, member of UNSA Education, an EI affiliate.

He describes his school, which has 420 students and 34 teachers, as being “family-sized, off the beaten track and resembling a secondary school in rural France.”

Although they are 7,000 kilometres away, he explains that the concerns of the teachers in Martinique are the same as those of their colleagues on the French mainland. They face the same problems relating to working conditions, especially because of large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms. In the commune of Sainte-Anne, for instance, the union gained support from parents who were also opposed to allowing up to 30 students per classroom.

In Martinique, more teachers face the extra challenge of having their jobs split between two schools, he added.

Teacher trade unionists overseas are well informed of developments in Paris and act in solidarity with colleagues on the mainland. Last October, for example, they went out in support of the strike launched jointly by unions across the education sector, Michel explained.

“SE-UNSA mounted a caravan travelling around the island to get signatures on a petition demanding that more teachers be hired or, at least that more publicly-funded



Arnaud Michel, a teacher unionist, stands in front of one entrance to the secondary school of Le Vauclin, in Martinique.

contracts be maintained and not cut. We need to retain pedagogical assistants to help out with school activities and maintain the premises,” he said. The parents’ groups are also very involved, and participated actively in the caravan.

SE-UNSA is able to operate autonomously from the union headquarters on the continent. For example, it can go to court without having to get permission from the national level. “We can take decisions without having to ask the headquarters for authorisation,” says Michel.

Reacting to commentary in a local newspaper criticizing teachers’ absenteeism in the neighbouring island of Guadeloupe, he insists that teachers in Martinique are not absent any more frequently than colleagues on the mainland. Absences can be due to

attending union training or elections, meetings with the local education authorities, or professional development opportunities.

Unlike on the mainland, students in Martinique wear uniforms. Michel says the uniforms are seen as “security measures which reassure parents.”

On the regional level, his union is affiliated to the Caribbean Union of Teachers (CUT). Every year fruitful exchanges, including sport competitions, are organised among secondary schools and students from all the Caribbean islands.

What was the motivation for Michel to become a teacher? “Simply to pass on knowledge.” ■

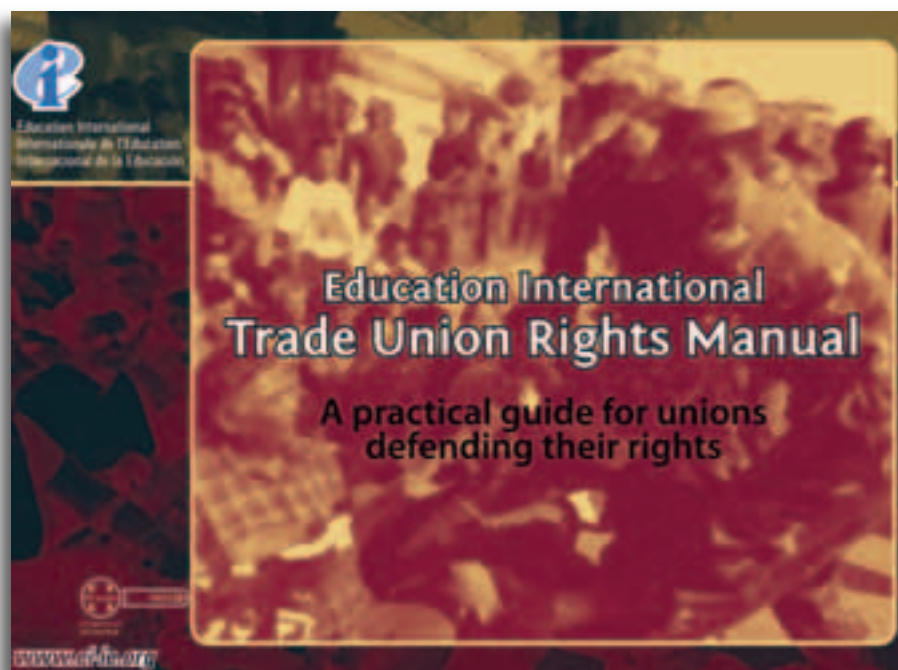
See p. 29 for an update on education issues in France.

EI launches Trade Union Rights Manual

EI is strengthening its support of national unions and workers' rights by publishing its Trade Union Rights Manual, a guide for union activists around the world.

The Manual shows how national unions can draw the world's attention to local threats to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and workers' rights. It de-

scribes international mechanisms that can be called upon to urge countries to live up to their commitments in support of human rights and trade union rights.



Focusing on issues encountered by teacher organizations, the manual will be of practical value across the trade union movement.

EI's Trade Union Rights Manual shows how unions can take advantage of international reporting mechanisms, both to gain and to contribute information. It gives practical advice on making submissions to relevant bodies: addresses, what to include, how to draft. The Manual includes in appendices the full text versions of no fewer than 20 international conventions, charters and declarations that articulate and affirm the international legal support for democratic trade unions. III

INFO

The EI Trade Union Rights Manual can be downloaded from:
www.ei-ie.org/rights.

Son of Iranian trade unionist released from prison

Sajad Khaksari, the 25-year-old son of one of Iran's leading teacher trade unionists, was released from prison in Tehran on 3 February, but only "on condition." In other words, he is not really free and clear.

Because his court file remains open, he could still face a new detention order or another type of restriction, such as a ban on travel, which has often been invoked against human rights defenders and other activists. In many cases the courts keep files open in an effort to intimidate defen-

dants, who never know when their case could become active once again.

Sajad's father, Mohamad Khaksari, has faced years of intimidation and court charges due to his role at the head of the Iranian Teacher Trade Association, which has been banned by the Iranian government. EI has reason to believe that the son's arrest is connected to the father's union activism.

In many letters to the Iranian authorities, EI has deplored the fact that teachers are de-

prived of freedom of association guaranteed under Convention 87 of the International Labour Organisation. As long as the Iranian authorities maintain their ban on the ITTA and the imprisonment of trade unionists such as Farzad Kamangar, Mansour Osanloo and others, and as long as the harassment of teachers participating in union meetings continues, EI and the trade union movement worldwide will continue to advocate for the full respect of trade union rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. III

Australia wildfires

Teachers help with healing and rebuilding

Teacher unions in Australia's southern state of Victoria are working hard to help members, students and parents cope with the horrific consequences of the worst natural disaster in 110 years. A combination of scorching weather, drought and tinder-dry bush created prime conditions to spark the massive wildfires, which killed more than 200 people, burned down six schools and 2,000 houses, leaving thousands homeless.

"The fires have been absolutely devastating," said EI Vice-President Susan Hopgood, who is also Federal Secretary of the Australian Education Union. "It has been a very bad week – one that nobody in Victoria will ever forget. Many tears have been shed."

Mary Bluett, President of the Victoria branch of the AEU, agreed: "It's a very traumatic time. It's hard to grasp the enormity of what's happened. The loss of lives is without precedent."

Fifteen students from one secondary school are known to have been killed, and dozens of children from primary schools also died, Bluett said. Other students survived, but lost their parents or other family members in the blazes. Some parents, fearful of allowing their children out of their sight, are now staying at school with their youngsters.

Three primary schools and three pre-schools were completely destroyed, and about 90 other schools had to be closed for a significant period of time because of the fire danger, Bluett added.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd immediately visited the disaster area, and reassured citizens that with government help they would be able to start over in their home towns. "Together we will rebuild each of these communities — brick by brick, school by school, community hall by community hall," Rudd said.

**"Together we will rebuild —
brick by brick, school by school."**

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd



© BELGA/ANDREW BROWNBILL

Scientists say Australia, with its harsh environment, could be one of the nations most seriously affected by climate change.

Bluett said that the Prime Minister's reassuring words "were exactly what those school communities needed to hear."

The AEU immediately made a member assistance package available, including financial, medical and legal assistance for those who had suffered losses. The union's branches in every state and territory made financial contributions to the Victoria Branch and the federal union called on schools across the country to hold a fundraising day to contribute to the Bush Fire Appeal.

In addition, the union website posted resources to help classroom teachers support

students dealing with the trauma of seeing their homes, schools and communities destroyed.

"Union to union, member to member, student to student: that sense of solidarity is amazing. It makes you enormously proud of your community at times like this," Bluett said. ■■■

INFO

For more information:
[www.aeuvic.asn.au/
campaigns/fire](http://www.aeuvic.asn.au/campaigns/fire).

Union skills and radical action needed on climate change

By Nancy Knickerbocker



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A teacher in China educates her students about the importance of the ozone layer.

Planet Earth faces the real danger of abrupt climate change in the next 10 to 30 years, the consequences of which would be so catastrophic that the international community needs to take concerted and radical action now.

Jonathan Neale, a long-time trade union activist and international secretary of the Campaign Against Climate Change in the UK, told delegates at EI's annual meeting of affiliates from the OECD countries that the

international trade union movement is well placed to make a significant contribution to the struggle to save the planet.

"In the environmental movement we've gone as far as we can go with lobbying, publicity and individual action. Now we need the things unions do very well," Neale said. "We need to count on our time-honoured trade union traditions: Mobilisation and organisation to look for public collective solutions. We need government action on a massive scale because we can't do it individually in the time we have to face this problem." Tackling climate change through union structures can help bring more young peo-

ple into a stronger and revitalised labour movement. Neale recommended reaching out to mobilise young people, environmentalists, faith groups, and others in broad coalitions with trade unions.

He sees much broader public support for taking the kind of radical action needed because people around the world now understand the basic science and know that climate change is real. "People may not know the details – and in fact the details are so frightening that most people don't want to think about them," he said. "But the big important change is that the general public and the corporate elites and world

leaders now understand and accept the scientific warnings.”

Neale said that strategies to avert climate change can play an important part in broader initiatives to confront the global economic crisis. “Doing something about global warming is a way to get the world out of the financial crisis,” he said, pointing

to the period before World War II when the Allied powers completely transformed their whole economies in order to win the war. “The cost was enormous, but it made many more jobs and pulled the world out of the Great Depression.”

The massive global inequities in GHG emissions must be addressed so that develop-

ing countries can industrialise, but not on the polluting model of 19th century Europe. “We have to work towards equity of emissions,” Neale said, noting that average annual emissions of greenhouse gases are about 1 ton per person in India, 10 tons per person in Britain, and 20 tons per person in the USA.

Emissions can be brought down sharply and relatively easily if governments everywhere commit to taking on the most advanced technology, developing wind, solar any other renewable energy sources on a massive scale.

“The solutions to climate change have to be global,” Neale said. “We need massive programmes of investment in green jobs— in wind farms, solar energy, public transportation, home insulation and many other initiatives all over the world. We can do it!”

Taking action on climate change: Practical steps for education unions

1. Mobilise: Encourage colleagues and others to take part in meetings, demonstrations and campaigns. Persuade your union to put climate change high on the agenda, and then take it to the street with your union banners.

2. Negotiate: Work to have environmental representatives recognised with the same status and statutory rights as shop stewards or health and safety reps. Negotiate with management about energy savings in your workplace. “An activist for the climate on a global scale is a defender of energy on a local scale,” Neale said.

3. Teach: Educate your students about the importance of global citizenship and democratic involvement. Help build a new generation that can make sense of the science. In higher education, Neale said, it’s important for the climate scientists to assert greater control over the research agenda because right now governments are deciding which questions are to be asked and thus driving the research agenda. ■

A primer on global warming

After 150 years of rapid industrialization, our world is getting significantly warmer and our climate is changing. Many scientists are warning that the atmosphere that sustains humankind is reaching a so-called “tipping point,” beyond which civilization as we know it will be radically altered.

As a result, international leaders have endorsed the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Kyoto sets binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European community for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These amount to an average of five per cent against 1990 levels over the five-year period 2008-2012.

Kyoto recognizes that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of CO₂ and other GHG emissions and places a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities.”

Currently, the UN is trying to come up with a more aggressive replacement treaty for Kyoto. Many scientists say this new post-Kyoto protocol must be endorsed at the next annual UN climate change conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 if the world is to avoid the most devastating effects associated with global warming.

The average temperature of the Earth’s surface has risen by 0.74 degrees C since the late 1800s. It is expected to

increase by another 1.8° C to 4° C by the year 2100. Even if the minimum predicted increase takes place, it will be larger than any century-long trend in the last 10,000 years. Eleven of the 12 years between 1995 and 2006 were the warmest on record.

Scientists say global average temperature rises should be kept to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels if society is to be spared the worst of global warming.

The current warming trend is expected to cause extinctions. Numerous plant and animal species, already weakened by pollution and loss of habitat, are not expected to survive the next 100 years. Human beings, while not threatened in this way, are likely to face mounting difficulties. Recent severe storms, floods and droughts, for example, appear to show that computer models predicting more frequent “extreme weather events” are on target.

Melting glaciers, rising sea levels, dropping agricultural yields, fouled freshwater supplies, and an increased range of diseases could spur mass migrations.

In addition to ongoing international discussions, some nations and regions are already setting climate change targets. The European Union, for instance, has agreed to a 20% reduction in GHG emissions by 2020 from the 1990 levels. This target will increase to 30% if other industrialized nations agree to similar reductions.

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS

Education International responds to the Global Monitoring Report 2009

Again this year, EI has published an analysis of the Education For All Global Monitoring Report for use by affiliates.

The Global Monitoring Report (GMR) was first published in 2002 to monitor progress towards the Education For All (EFA) goals enshrined in the historic Dakar Framework for Action. This year's report looks beyond the six goals to a range of issues in education governance, finance and management, seeking more complex solutions to the current situation. It focuses on equality as the overarching policy goal of any government and as a key to measuring the success of initiatives by the international community. It also focuses on sound education governance as a critical tool to achieve new momentum towards the EFA goals.

The 7th edition of the GMR argues that equity must be at the centre of the EFA agenda. There has been strong progress towards many goals, but key targets for 2015 will not be achieved and time is running out.

Financing and governance have important roles to play. Governments are failing to tackle inequality, as are current approaches to governance. Developing countries are not spending enough on basic education and donor countries have not lived up to their commitments. Stagnating aid to education is a serious concern for educational prospects in a large number of low-income countries. But increased financing without provisions built in to ensure equity will not benefit the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

A pro-poor approach to education policy is imperative for the goals to have meaning for the world's out-of-school children and 776 million adult illiterates. Projecting the

enrolment needs of just two-thirds of those countries which account for 75 million children out of school today, the Report estimates that there still will be 29 million out of school in 2015¹.

Ambitious objectives under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including universal primary education with gender equality, will not be met by 2015 on current trends. Most importantly, despite this prognosis, the 2009 GMR reaffirms that there is no alternative to accelerated progress towards EFA, and governments must act with a renewed sense of urgency and political commitment. However there has been significant progress and it shows that international commitment matters, whether or not deadlines are met.

The GMR makes recommendations to governments, donors and non-governmental actors on a wide range of important points. However, EI concludes that the whole set of recommendation fails to put forward the three key messages from this year's report. They are:

- The role of education as a human right and as a catalyst for social justice and sustainable development.
- The essential role of teachers and the need to attract, train and retain qualified teachers in all classrooms. To achieve this, participatory management and predictable aid should be developed. The low importance given to the role of teachers in the Fast Track Initiative strategies should have been stressed. EI would have expected a clear call to bring a halt to the increased recruitment of unqualified teachers.
- The negative impact on EFA goals as a result of the non-delivery of commitments



by the donors, despite high level statements and declarations. This should have been linked with the poor results on equity and quality in education.

The report's key message is: "If we are serious about EFA, it is high time to invest in equitable education and in quality teachers." Regrettably, this message does not receive sufficient prominence in the recommendations. III

¹ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009, UNESCO, 2008, p.25.

Global Action Week

Yes to youth and adult literacy and lifelong learning

Today there are still millions of people around the world who cannot read and write: 75 million children are not in school and 776 million adults are illiterate, of whom two-thirds are women. Without adequate literacy skills it is very difficult for people to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Providing adults with access to literacy programmes and children with access to school are fundamental steps in tackling poverty.

This is why “Youth and Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning” is the theme of the seventh annual Global Action Week organized by the Global Campaign for Education, of which EI is a founding member.

From 20-26 April many EI affiliates will organise activities in support of literacy and quality Education for All, under the slogan “Open Books, Open Doors.”

The main activity will be “The Big Read,” using a new book published by the GCE containing a series of short stories written by remarkable people about how education can change the world. Participating teachers’ unions are encouraged to use the stories to explore literacy themes. The book will be distributed to millions of campaigners in 100 countries around the world.

Individuals are asked to read one of the stories that interest them and then sign their name to a statement printed in the back of the book that asks their government to provide the necessary funding and political commitment to make sure everyone is able to read and write. Thousands will add their names before posting the back pages to their respective governments during the Action Week.

It is thus more important than ever that teachers and education unions advocate



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Women comprise two-thirds of illiterate adults in the world.

and lobby for the development of relevant policies for literacy, and remain focused on the achievement of Dakar Education for All goals, such as: ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes; and achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

As Kimani N'ganga, a Kenyan citizen who became the world's oldest student when he made his first trip to school at the age of 84, and great GCE supporter, poetically expressed it: “For me, liberty means education... You are never too old to learn.”

To download GCE materials, go to EI Global Action Week webpage where you can also find ‘Big Read’ posters, stickers and flyers, which can be customised. III

INFO

Please join the campaign and help make EFA a reality for millions of adults around the world!
www.ei-ie.org/globalactionweek.

Indigenous languages, education and cultural diversity important for all humanity

Bilingual and multicultural education is not only “important for the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, but also for all other children, as well as for humanity as a whole, collecting and conserving relevant knowledge to help our planet survive.”

That was a key message from EI Vice-President Susan Hopgood to participants in an EI seminar on “Quality Education and Social Justice for Indigenous People” held in Melbourne in advance of the World Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education.

More than 100 delegates from 25 different trade union organisations took part in the seminar, which was organised jointly by EI and its Australian affiliates: the Australian Education Union (AEU), the Independent Education Union (IEU) and the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). Grahame McCulloch, EI Executive Board member and NTEU General Secretary, made an opening speech, as did IEU Federal Secretary Chris Watt.

In her keynote presentation, Hopgood made the link between language and education which are vital for the transmission of knowledge and skills. She noted that language has been used by colonial powers to suppress authentic Indigenous cultural expression.

She said: “Language is considered to be the cornerstone of culture and the ultimate expression of belonging, as it is through the language that culture is shared and transmitted. The non-recognition and the prohibition of the use of Indigenous languages in the education system and work place have impacted negatively on the lives of many In-

digenous Peoples. It has affected them from childhood to adulthood, has limited them in the creation of their own unique multi-identities and has frustrated the development of their communities.”

“This linguistic genocide is unacceptable,” Hopgood said. “Language is an essential part of the development of diverse identities, as well as being the carrier of Indigenous community values, culture and Indigenous knowledge. It is through bilingual and multicultural education that Indigenous children are made to feel welcome in schools.”

She predicted that with more inclusive policies in schools, the “sometimes still shocking drop-out rates of Indigenous children will then come down.”

“Once again,” she concluded, “inclusion is the answer: Inclusion of all children into child-friendly schools where well qualified, caring and committed teachers are able to use relevant and respectful curricula to meet their needs, learners at the centre of the process.”

In another session, Govind Singh, EI Pacific coordinator and Secretary General of the



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Aboriginal dancers perform at the World Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education in Melbourne.

Council of Pacific Education, also spoke of the common legacy that unites all of the Pacific Island countries: their common experience of colonialism.

“The pre-contact social values and the evolution of a polity was arrested by the colonizers who used their own system, while still being trained in India, Africa and the West Indies for governing the colonies,” Singh said. “It meant that the education system and the economic exploitation were to serve the colonizers for manpower needs and for administration and trade.”

Indigenous Pacific values, social ethos and cultural nuances remained submerged until the post-colonial period. The search for their national identity will remain an ongoing challenge for the Pacific Island communities, he added.

Singh said that “current research in Pacific education is questioning the assumptions

of Western type learning, parameters and constructs of knowledge in the curriculum offered, and the very pedagogy which has become the norm for training colleges, university teacher training and classroom teaching practices. The extent to which Pacific teachers have imbibed these values remains a matter for research. The dilemma between the old and new will remain a challenge.”

Wayne Costelloe, the AEU’s Federal Aboriginal Education Officer, reported that the EI seminar provided an excellent opportunity to share models of unions working positively with Indigenous Peoples.

“This very successful initiative resulted in inputs and recommendations on future work for Education International to move forward its agenda on Indigenous matters, including the role of unions in achieving quality education for all children and social justice for all people,” Costelloe wrote.



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From left to right: Jan Eastman, EI Deputy General Secretary, Susan Hopgood, EI Vice President, Wayne Costelloe, AEU Federal Aboriginal Education Officer, Rebeca Sevilla, EI Coordinator, Adam Frogley, NTEU National Indigenous Officer.

The World Indigenous People’s Conference on Education is a global forum that promotes best practices in Indigenous Education policies, programmes and practices. The fundamental right to protect Indigenous and endangered languages became an overriding theme at the conference. III

Saudi Arabia: Teacher appointed first ever woman deputy minister

Noura Al Fayez, a US-educated teacher, made history in February by becoming the first ever woman to hold the post of deputy minister in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Al Fayez, who is seen as being extremely well-qualified for the post, was appointed deputy minister for girls’ education – by far the highest government position any Saudi woman has attained. Al-Fayez’s appointment appeared to be King Abdullah’s response to increased lobbying from women’s rights groups against the severe discrimination that still confronts Saudi women in many aspects of their lives, including education, employment and the justice system. III

Tanzania: Teachers caned for students’ poor exam results

Nineteen primary school teachers were given the cane by a police officer in front of their pupils after an investigation into poor exam results at three schools in the northern Tanzanian region of Kagera.

Ativus Leonard, one of the caned teachers, said he had been kicked by a police officer to make him lie down before being beaten. “I have not been able to teach since this happened. I feel inferior to the children now,” he added.

“The caning of our teachers is shameful. It’s intolerable and it’s time the teachers take action against Albert Mnali – the DC who ordered the caning – through the

judiciary,” Kagera teachers’ union chairman Dauda Bilikesi told the BBC.

Besides taking legal action, the Tanzania Teachers’ Union called for a demonstration to protest the incident. Union officials explained that the caning happened in the wake of an ongoing row between the union and the government on two major issues: salaries are often delayed and teachers are denied transfer allowances when they are moved to new schools.

Deputy Education Minister Mwantumu Bakari Mahiza called for an investigation, saying that those responsible for the caning “should have their heads examined” and that the District Commissioner’s action was “abnormal.” III

Zimbabwe

Teachers hope an end to the education crisis is near

Hopes were raised that the desperate plight of teachers in Zimbabwe could soon be alleviated, as Zimbabwe's new Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change, promised that from now on all civil servants, including teachers, would be paid in foreign currency.

At an inaugural celebration in Harare, Tsvangirai said: "As Prime Minister, I make this commitment that as from the end of [February] our professionals in the civil service, every health worker, teacher, soldier and policeman will receive their pay in foreign currency until we are able to stabilize the economy. These hard currency salaries enable people to go to work, feed families and to survive."

Raging hyperinflation is at the root of the crisis. Independent estimates put Zimbabwe's annual inflation rate at 516 quintillion percent: that is, 516 followed by 18 zeros! The alarming economic downturn and the Mugabe government's failure to respond to teachers' salary demands have put the education sector and indeed the entire society under severe pressure, creating an educational and humanitarian disaster including a cholera epidemic and food shortage crisis.

Teachers' minimum monthly salary was an incredible 26 trillion Zimbabwean dollars, yet that is equivalent to only US \$2. The paltry sums meant that most teachers, no matter how dedicated to the profession, simply could not afford to continue teaching. Still government officials and school administrators threatened legal action to force teachers back to the classroom.

"Teachers should not fear the piece of legislation that does not bring food to the table," said Tendai Chikowore, President of the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association



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Zimbabwean dollars have no purchasing power.

(ZIMTA). “If names are demanded for people who are failing to go to work, let us all submit our names without fear and if we are to be fired, let us all be fired, for we have not been surviving on these salaries. We are as good as fired.”

“In case we are misunderstood, let us be clear,” Chikowore added. “Teachers and ZIMTA, their union, are ready to go back to work, but not on promises that are not backed by practical action and interventions. A process of engagement with the incoming Administration must be top priority so as to address the education crisis urgently.”

In response to Tsvangirai’s promise of payment in hard currency, ZIMTA posed important questions: How much will teachers be paid? How? What are the timelines for our salaries?

Meanwhile, The Guardian has reported that Tsvangirai may not actually be able to fulfill his pledge to pay public employees in dollars. The UK newspaper said sources question whether the prime minister will be able raise the \$50 million monthly salaries

bill, given the reluctance of the international community to resume spending in Zimbabwe.

Without prompt resolution to the crisis, ZIMTA fears that the situation threatens a total breakdown of the school system because it is compelling thousands of teachers to emigrate. Zimbabwe’s teaching force has shrunk from 150,000 teachers in 1995 to 70,000 in 2008.

EI’s other affiliate, the Progressive Teachers’ Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), also expressed concern at the continued deterioration of education standards, noting that June and November 2008 O and A level, Grade 7 examinations results have not yet been released.

“The poor are the worst affected because their children cannot afford to sit for other external examinations,” said Raymond Majongwe, General Secretary of the PTUZ. “The threat by the Education Permanent Secretary that temporary teachers will be engaged if striking teachers do not return to work does not solve the problem in any way. Instead, it worsens it. We demand that government take a holistic approach to solving problems in the education sector and avert further flight of remaining skills.”

PTUZ and ZIMTA are trying their utmost to support their members, but they too face extreme economic hardship and, as a result, union capacities and activities are limited. All possible help is needed to support teachers in Zimbabwe in these difficult days. Education International has set up a special Solidarity Fund for this purpose and urges members and concerned individuals to contribute. ■■■

France: Education cuts hurt

- › 11,200 jobs already cut in the 2008 school year
- › 13,500 additional job cuts planned for 2009

Educators from primary school to university level across France are critical of the deep cuts made by President Nicolas Sarkozy and Education Minister Xavier Darcos. The cuts have already done a lot of damage to public education, and teachers fear worse will come if their policies are not reversed.

On 10 February as many as 80,000 people demonstrated in 19 French cities in support of academics and researchers, who have gone on indefinite strike to protest the planned reform of their status and career development. The successful strike motivated the government to announce the nomination of a mediator to lead the reform of higher education. Academics and researchers fear that the government plans to give too much authority to university deans, especially in terms of distribution of work hours.

A broad-based union movement in the higher education sector is calling for another day of action on February 19. ■■■

Here’s where to send your contribution to the EI Solidarity Fund for Zimbabwe teachers

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Technologies in education

Wikis: Fast, effective and productive

by Timo Linsenmaier

Have you noticed? More often than not, when you look up a word in an Internet search engine, the first result that shows up is an article in Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia. What is the technology behind the website that makes this free, collaborative on-line project so successful?

In 2006, Time magazine recognized an unlikely candidate as its "Person of the Year:" You. The magazine's editors thus acknowledged the amazing success of on-line collaboration and interaction by millions of users from around the world, and they cited Wikipedia as one of three examples of "Web 2.0" services, together with YouTube and MySpace.

So, MediaWiki, the actual software running Wikipedia, is probably the most visible of a whole number of programmes designed to enable anyone to contribute articles or modify existing content using a simplified markup language rather than the more complicated HTML. The technology was developed in 1994 by Howard "Ward" Cunningham, an American computer programmer. He chose the name WikiWikiWeb after taking one of the Wiki Wiki shuttle busses that connect the three terminals of Honolulu International Airport – "wiki" simply means "quick" in Hawaiian, and the repetition signifies "very quick."

Indeed, once you get the hang of the simple markup technique, contributing becomes very straightforward. That's probably the reason why, even before Wikipedia took off to its staggering success in 2001, the WikiWiki



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Wiki Wiki shuttle bus at Honolulu International Airport

technology was – and still is – used widely in corporate intranets for knowledge sharing and collaborative writing.

Wikis can also be useful tools for teachers. Andreas Heutschi, a Swiss secondary school teacher, recently told *Bildung Schweiz* magazine about his experience using wikis in the classroom. "I found them to be ideal instruments for teachers as well as pupils to gather and structure information, to alter content and work collaboratively on certain topics. A wiki is a tool that is relatively simple to operate and handle, and productivity and efficiency gains are accordingly very noticeable."

Using a wiki behind a firewall in the local school or union office computer network also solves a problem that larger, openly accessible wikis sometimes face: vandalism. Unfortunately, as the open philosophy behind the WikiWikiWeb allows anyone to edit content, this also means that users with malicious intent find it easy to do damage. Larger public wikis such as Wikipedia often use sophisticated methods to automatically identify and erase vandalism. On the other hand, a smaller, password-protected site where all

users know each other personally will be relatively free from such excesses.

So, how can you start to try wiki technology in your school or local union office? The MediaWiki software is open source and one of the most wide-spread, but it is fairly complicated to set up and requires a web server. Maybe you could start exploring the wiki universe by using Foswiki, which is also open source but does not require a database to run. It is readily available with a Windows installer to make deployment easy.

Then again, why clog up your hard drive? There are a number of so-called "Wiki Farms" on the internet that allow you to sign up and start your own wiki without any further ado. There are many ways to start your expedition into the collaborative world of Web 2.0. And if you need more details and information, you can always turn to – what else? – Wikipedia! III

INFO

More information on Wiki technology:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>.

Ecuador: Union optimistic about reaching an agreement with the government

A new situation has emerged with the possibility of engaging in dialogue after the dispute between the President of the Republic, Rafael Correa, and the Unión Nacional de Educadores (National Teachers' Union – UNE) eased up and both sides adopted a more conciliatory attitude in order to sit at the negotiating table and map out the future of education in Ecuador.

In the opinion of UNE President Mery Zamora, the Ministry of Education's decision to create new teaching vacancies in state schools is a significant step towards improving the quality of education.

Zamora told Education International that the measures adopted by the Correa Government would significantly benefit the education system thus paving the way for a new academic year without so many of the problems that previously hindered educational institutions.

The President of UNE also hopes that the arrears owed to teachers and other education workers in respect of reserve funds (\$300 million) will soon be paid, following a ruling by Ecuador's Solicitor General, Diego García, to the effect that the payment should be made on the basis of 100% of teachers' salaries rather than on a proportional basis, as has been the case until now.

According to unofficial sources, President Correa submitted a plan to the Legislative Commission to provide "payment facilities" which would enable the employers to settle the debt without negatively affecting the assets of the Ecuadorian Social Security System ("Instituto Ecuatoriano de Seguridad Social" – IESS).

UNE has been actively involved in the social and political transformation process to build and Ecuador with greater social justice. It even took part in the drafting of the new Constitution, upholding the principle of free, public education for all and strongly opposing the "municipalisation process" which aimed to broaden the jurisdiction of local governments.



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CALENDAR

March 2009

- 2-13** 53rd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women – New York, USA
- 23-24** Global Unions Communications Task Force meeting – Geneva, Switzerland
- 24-26** 33rd EI Executive Board meeting – Brussels, Belgium

April 2009

- 1-2** EI Pan-European Equality Standing Committee – Brussels, Belgium
- 20-21** EI/ETUCE Pan-European Committee – Brussels, Belgium
- 20-26** Global Action Week – Worldwide
- 28-29** Bologna Process Conference – Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
- 28-29** Working Group of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD on Education, Training & Employment – Paris, France

May 2009

- 6-8** 3rd EI School Leadership meeting – Helsinki, Finland
- 9** UCU Conference on Trade Union Responses to Marketisation and Privatisation of Education – London, UK
- 4-15** 17th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development – New York, USA
- 14-15** Inaugural Conference of the Education and Solidarity Network – Paris, France

June 2009

- 3-19** 98th Session of the International Labour Conference – Geneva, Switzerland
- 10** Council of Global Unions General Secretaries' meeting – Geneva, Switzerland
- 15-19** Commonwealth Teachers' Group meeting – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 23** 122nd Plenary Session of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD & related meetings – Paris, France

Worlds of Education is published by Education International, the global union federation representing 30 million teachers and education workers from pre-school to university in more than 171 countries around the globe. To learn more about EI, go to: www.ei-ie.org.



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Cité Soleil, Haiti—An 11-year-old girl looks like an angel as she tiptoes through an open sewer rife with malaria-infected mosquitoes. In Cité Soleil, one of the largest and most dangerous slums in the Northern Hemisphere, the illiteracy rate among 15 to 24-year olds is 66%. This picture was honoured by UNICEF as photo of the year for 2008.

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