



## RESOLUTION ON EDUCATION: PUBLIC SERVICE OR COMMODITY?

The Fourth World Congress of Education International, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, from 22 to 26 July 2004:

1. **Notes** that in recent years numerous innovative proposals have been put forward by intergovernmental organisations, individual governments and trade unions in order to reform the public education systems so as to improve their efficiency. At the same time, however, other proposals have been advanced to subject education systems to the rules of the market;
2. **Notes** that there is a general consensus today that education systems at all levels should prepare young people to develop a socially responsible attitude, a critical approach, a positive attitude to innovation and the capacity for dialogue.
3. **Recalls** that education systems should provide opportunities for people of all ages. These should include preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society; the transmission of knowledge, skills and critical thinking capabilities; and preparation for the world of work, including retraining for older workers and citizens. Quality education systems should provide a careful balance between these three dimensions of education.
4. **Notes**, furthermore, that adequately trained human resources and the use of new information technologies have become strategic factors in the harsh competitive struggle between companies at the international level and that some political and economic actors are raising the question of the ability of public education systems to meet these challenges;
5. **Notes** that today globalisation is no longer limited to economic activities relating to material goods but is increasingly encompassing the production of immaterial goods such as education, which is viewed by some investors as a new area for profitable investments, this leads to the the privatisation of education and research bt the WTO and GATS;
6. **Further notes**, that the international commercialisation of education has the following negative results:
  - It leads to greater homogenization and the further domination of colonial languages, undercutting national and local cultures and languages;
  - It undermines and disempowers national and local education systems which cannot compete with the greater resources brought to bear and the availability of relatively cheap – in the first instance – ready made, one size fits all course material;
  - It threatens to undermine the very special role that education plays in historically divided societies in nation building, fostering democratic values, reconciliation and respect for diversity;
  - It also represents a massive disengagement and abdication of the state from one of its core responsibilities – i.e. to provide quality education to all.
7. **Notes** that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are still being little used in education in comparison with others sectors, and that the opportunities and challenges associated with ICTs cannot be mapped out completely;



8. **Notes**, however, that increasing numbers of policymakers regard the new technologies as an ideal tool to commercialise education and training via the Internet, in context to primary, secondary, tertiary and lifelong education.

## The Fourth World Congress of Education International:

9. **Gives priority** to strengthening the actions taken by affiliates against the threats to public education stemming from the neo-liberal economy and from education policies advocated by international institutions, particularly the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and the OECD;
10. **Recalls** that public education is a system open to all without discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, culture or social class, free of charge, publicly funded, and managed and evaluated in accordance with the objectives and principles established democratically by public authorities;
11. **Reaffirms** that access to quality education for all, especially girls, is a fundamental right which is enshrined in law by the international community but is far from being put into practice;
12. **Reaffirms** that the public authorities bear a major responsibility in opening up access to education for all and that transferring some or all of that responsibility to non-governmental organisations can only be considered as a makeshift crisis solution.
13. **Instructs the Executive Board** to take appropriate initiatives during the next three years to ensure that gender inequalities in primary and secondary education are eliminated by 2005, and that gender equality in education to be achieved within ten years after that, as provided in the Framework for Action on EFA adopted by the Dakar Forum in April 2000;
14. **Affirms** that education should be a common space for sharing and transmitting knowledge, where people learn to live together without any form of discrimination based on ethnic origin, religion or culture, and that undermining the public education system through privatisation policies will profoundly change the nature of our democratic societies and increase inequalities in access to education;
15. **Affirms** that, as a public service, education should pursue its efforts at modernisation and do its utmost to improve quality and ensure higher levels of achievement in order to meet the concerns of parents and young people experiencing insecurity as a result of the economic and social changes under way;
16. **Affirms** that education should be free of charge and funded on the basis of the concept of fiscal solidarity, i.e. individuals should contribute to financing public services in accordance with their average income rather than in accordance with their needs. Furthermore, these public funds should be managed with the greatest transparency and any instances of mismanagement or corruption should be publicly denounced and punished.

## The Fourth World Congress of Education International:

17. **Mandates the Executive Board** to continue EI's advocacy before intergovernmental organisations, trade union internationals and international political groupings with regard to the contents and importance of EI's proposals on these issues;



18. **Requests member organisations** to continue their reflection on the reforms to be implemented in order to turn the public education system into a school of achievement that guarantees, on the one hand, the pedagogical freedom of the teacher in conformity with the 1966 joint ILO/UNESCO Recommendation and, on the other hand, the rights of young people and adults to genuine initial and further training. To this end, further requests member organisations to establish the necessary dialogue with their respective governments, the media, and parents' and young people's associations;
19. **Reiterates** that education is not a commodity and should not be privatised, and demands that education, research and development and other social services be excluded from GATS and from negotiations towards bilateral, multilateral and regional commercial agreements;
20. **Recognise** the importance of promoting initiative and actions between ministerial meetings related to the GATS, bilateral, multilateral and regional trade agreements with a view to monitoring and influencing trade related issues, in particular, those affecting education, other public services and core labour standards;
21. **Mandates the Executive Board** to continue and broaden EI's work on GATS by campaigning for appropriate exclusions for education and research from GATS, and from regional and bilateral free trade agreements;
22. **Mandates EI** to raise the awareness of EI members of the relevance, impact and importance of international trade agreements to the work of national organisations representing education workers.