

## **Joint message on the occasion of World Teachers' Day, October 5, 2008<sup>1</sup>**

Today is World Teachers' Day, a day when we acknowledge the essential role teachers play in providing children, young people and adults with a relevant and appropriate education. However, in many countries, there is a severe shortage of teachers, with an estimated 2 million new posts and 18 million additional teachers needed worldwide if universal primary education is to be achieved by 2015. For some countries, this will mean an increase in their teaching force of up to 280 percent. An even greater number of teachers will be required if adequate provision of secondary, higher, technical and vocational, or non-formal education is to be assured. These numbers will be higher still if all teachers are to be fully and appropriately qualified for the levels and subjects they teach.

Even when the overall supply of teachers is sufficient, remote and disadvantaged areas across the globe may suffer persistent problems in recruitment and retention. This shortage of qualified teachers is one of the biggest challenges to achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals.

The teaching profession also faces the challenge of providing a quality education to meet the new demands of the 21st century. Economic, social, scientific and technological needs, the issues of sustainable development, poverty reduction and related questions of decent work for all, the AIDS epidemic and school violence are increasingly impacting on the profession.

Since women constitute the majority of the primary teaching workforce, and are often disproportionately affected by these issues, the potential impact is compounded. Gender must therefore be central to the solutions. Furthermore, progress towards EFA, and in particular universal primary education, is leading to an increasingly diverse population of learners, with implications for schooling and teachers.

Faced with such high expectations, teachers often feel undervalued, insufficiently supported and ill equipped professionally to cope with the realities of the environments in which they work. More recruitment, full and appropriate teacher training, better targeted deployment and management, salary and incentives which compare favourably with those in other occupations requiring similar qualifications, better working and living conditions, ongoing professional support and opportunities for career development are all crucial to meet the new challenges. The 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers and the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel provide comprehensive guidance on a range of teacher policies, rights and responsibilities. As such they are a foundation for forward-looking national policies and practices to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century, professional teaching force.

National level teacher policies need to be coherent with existing global and regional frameworks, to help assure quality, identify benchmarks in the interest of greater harmonization as international teacher migration and mobility increases, and contribute to improved status and working conditions for teachers. They must also be aligned with broader Poverty Reduction Plans and education policies. It is important that teacher policies be set firmly within local and national contexts, evidence-based and realistic in order to facilitate the recruitment and retention of a sufficient and effective teaching force.

They must take into account the findings and implications of research at all levels and national, financial and managerial capability and economic prospects. Meeting the 1990s benchmark of 6% GDP invested in education would help in many under funded national systems. Plans and policies also need to be prioritized, sufficiently financed and flexible in order to respond to evolving demands. For example, if the traditional higher education based model is not able to supply timely and sufficient numbers of teachers, innovative approaches to teacher training could be deployed, without undermining quality.

Throughout the process of policy development, it is crucial to ensure that social dialogue takes place between stakeholders, including policy makers, teachers, and their organizations. Social dialogue will help build national consensus and ownership towards a more efficient

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, UNICEF, Education International, UNDP, ILO.

implementation of teacher policies. It is addressed in the ILO/UNESCO and UNESCO Recommendations. Much work is being undertaken to build the capacity of key stakeholders to participate in educational policy development, but more capacity building is needed.

On World Teachers' Day we celebrate teachers across the world, in all countries, towns and villages. We assert the need to ensure that the role of teachers in achieving quality Education for All is clearly articulated and reflected in policies which will foster a motivated, valued and effective teaching force. On this World Teachers' Day we thank the teachers and affirm that yes, TEACHERS MATTER.