

JOINT MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

5 October 2001



On World Teachers' Day last year, we drew attention to the goals and resolutions of the recent World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, where governments pledged to achieve quality basic education for all and gender equality in education by the year 2015. One year later, as they apply themselves to the practical tasks of implementation and follow-up, educators and governments all over the world are increasingly aware of the indispensable role that teachers play in attaining these and other educational goals and targets. Over 113 million children, more than fifty percent of whom are girls, have no access to primary education, and for many millions more the quality of education is inadequate.

Recognition of the importance of teachers is heightened by the fact that many countries, for a range of different reasons, are facing severe shortages of qualified and experienced teaching staff. Good teachers are essential for the effective functioning of education systems and for improving the quality of learning processes. Consequently, the search for comprehensive and sustainable solutions to the problem of teacher shortages should give central importance to the training, recruitment, deployment and retention of motivated, well-paid and well-resourced professional teachers. We call for adherence to the international recommendations on the status of teachers, 1966 and 1997, which would help the quest for these solutions.

Although good teaching/learning materials and an environment conducive to active, gender-sensitive, and child-centred learning certainly pave the way to the achievement of quality learning outcomes, it is teachers who point learners in the right direction and guide them towards higher levels of knowledge, understanding and personal development. Learning is not an impersonal process but occurs largely through regular, direct interactions between learners and their teachers as well as by means of teachers facilitating learning among learners. Good teachers guide learners in the process of understanding the enormous amount of accumulated knowledge available today, using it constructively, and communicating it effectively. These are serious responsibilities which can only be fulfilled by dedicated professionals who have received specialized training.

Today, teachers in many parts of the world face huge challenges. HIV/AIDS and local conflicts are causing severe disruptions of school systems, and persistent gender and other forms of discrimination are denying children access to quality education for all. These challenges – particularly in today's world of conflict – underscore society's need for and appreciation of dedicated teachers, who are being called upon to play key roles in preventive education, education for a culture of peace, and education which combats discrimination. Teachers, too, must play a fundamental role in adapting the newer technologies to the learning process in a world in which these technologies, though potentially an empowering force, can lead to widening disparities. Teachers are important agents in using technology to overcome the digital divide and its negative effect on development and to enhance their pupils' prospects for decent work in the future.

On World Teachers' Day 2001, we invite people from every walk of life to recognize the indispensable, often difficult and self-sacrificing role played by teachers in providing quality education. We pay tribute to all members of the teaching profession, not least to those who are working in the most difficult conditions. We encourage all teachers to take pride in their vocation and to continue working within their chosen profession. Through their unceasing quest for greater knowledge, for improvements in the quality of their teaching and for enhancing the learning outcomes of their pupils, teachers are vivid exemplars of lifelong learning. As we move towards the creation of learning and information societies, the role model provided by teachers is as relevant and important as ever.

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