



Joint Message on the occasion of World Teachers' Day 2017

Teaching in Freedom, Empowering Teachers

5 October 2017

Teachers are a critical foundation of every society's long-term strength -- providing children, young people and adults with the knowledge and skills they need to fulfill their potential.

But around the world, far too many teachers don't have the freedom and support they need to do their vitally important jobs. That is why the theme of this year's World Teachers' Day -- "Teaching in Freedom, Empowering Teachers" -- reaffirms the value of empowered teachers and recognizes the challenges many encounter in their professional lives across the globe.

Being an empowered teacher means having access to high-quality training, fair wages, and continuous opportunities for professional development. It also means having the freedom to support the development of national curricula -- and the professional autonomy to choose the most appropriate methods and approaches that enable more effective, inclusive and equitable education. Furthermore, it means being able to teach in safety and security during times of political change, instability, and conflict.

But in many countries, academic freedom and teacher autonomy are under pressure. For example, at the primary and secondary school levels in some countries, stringent accountability schemes have put enormous pressure on schools to deliver results on standardized tests, ignoring the need to ensure a broad-based curriculum that meets the diverse needs of students.

Academic freedom is critical for teachers at every level of education, but it is especially critical for higher-education teachers, supporting their ability to innovate,

explore, and stay up-to-date on the latest pedagogical research. At the tertiary level, teachers are often employed on a fixed-term, contingency basis. This in turn can result in greater job insecurity, diminished career prospects, higher workload and lower wages – all of which can restrict academic freedom and undermine the quality of education that teachers can deliver.

Across all education levels, political pressure and business interests can curb the ability of educators to teach in freedom. Teachers living and working in countries and communities affected by conflicts and instability often face greater challenges, including rising intolerance, discrimination, and related restrictions on research and teaching.

This year marks the 20 year anniversary of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, which complements the 1966 UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers. Together, these instruments constitute the main reference framework on the rights and responsibilities of teachers and educators. Both stress the importance of teacher autonomy and academic freedom in building a world in which education and learning are truly universal.

As the world works together to realize the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals, we appeal to our partners in governments and across the education and private sectors to commit to building a highly skilled, valued and empowered education workforce. This constitutes a critical path to realizing SDG 4, which envisions a world in which every girl, boy, woman and man has access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

This means securing decent working conditions and fair wages for all teachers including at the tertiary level. It means providing teachers with training and development. It means increasing the number of quality teachers, especially in those countries with high numbers of untrained teaching personnel. It means removing unnecessary restrictions on research and teaching and defending academic freedom at all education levels. Finally, it means raising the status of teachers around the world in a way that honors and reflects the impact they have on the strength of society.

This World Teachers' Day, join us in empowering teachers to teach in freedom so that, in turn, every child and every adult is free to learn – to the benefit of a better world.

Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO

Guy Ryder, Director-General of ILO

Anthony Lake, Executive-Director of UNICEF

Achim Steiner, Administrator of UNDP

Fred van Leeuwen, General-Secretary of Education International