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*Speech by

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This Founding World Congress is a celebration of what has happened over the last two years: two organisations which had been in rivalry for many years, in a fierce competition that can be called "organisational warfare", came together for discussions in a way that you might expect after all these years of conflict: a lot of mistrust, a lot of suspicion, proposals thrown at each other for a period of time, but not such a long time. What was beautiful and wonderful is that in a short period of time we all developed trust and confidence in each other. (...)

A very significant thing to celebrate. And the fact that the leaders of these two organisations were able to do that should lead all of us to think that we ought to be able to do the same, because the future of our Education International depends in part on remembering where we came from but it depends largely on seeing ourselves as one organisation, with different points of view at different times, but one organisation moving forward.

A second point to celebrate is teacher trade unionism.

There are quite a few points on which teacher organisations and trade unionism join and connect each other. For many years, teachers and the general public often felt that because most teachers are employed by their governments, that they do not need unions. After all, workers in the private sector have employers and those employers want to make profits, and because they want to make profits, they exploit their workers, but because we as teachers work for the government, and the government isn't trying to make a profit, therefore, we can't be exploited. Nonsense!

Governments want to be popular, and to be popular they like to keep taxes low or even reduce taxes, and the way to do that is by creating conditions of employment and salaries for teachers and other employees that are intolerable.

It has become very clear, over the years, that because we work in school systems, in institutions, that we are powerless as individuals. No Government will listen to us as individuals; they may send an answer to a letter or postcard, but they won't move. The only way we can have a voice, the only way we can shape our destinies as teachers is to become part of an organisation and to work together with our colleagues. This is true on the local and national scene and it is true on the international scene as well, which is the importance of our being here, of being together and being one.

Another link between us as teachers trade unionists and the general trade union movement is this: in most places in the

world, teachers and other public employees were among the last to be able to enjoy trade union rights. Indeed, in most places, teachers and other government employees still do not enjoy full trade union rights.

That is part of our agenda before the ILO and other international bodies to get equality with other workers. If we think about the arguments that we use as to why we too should enjoy these rights, one of our strongest arguments is that we should have the rights that other people who work for employers should have. We base our arguments on what others have, but unfortunately, as we look around the world, in many countries the labour union movement is declining: smaller numbers, smaller percentage of the workforce. In my country, it's down to about 10% of the private sector workers who are in unions, and it's still going down. And so we have to ask ourselves how long will we, as teachers and as government employees, be able to enjoy these rights or argue that we should have these rights if fewer and fewer other workers in society do not have them.

So we have an interest not only in securing our own rights, but in securing and expanding the rights of other workers because we can be sure that our societies and our governments will not bestow on us rights that are not enjoyed by others.

There is still another relationship and that is in most of our countries, other workers who are part of the union movement are the strongest supporters for education for all children. Why? The rich can buy their own school, and they do. The schools that are publicly supported by tax money are essentially schools for working people, and unions in countries around the world understand that when there is a movement to privatize, they know what this means; it means that instead of guaranteeing a good educational system for all children in the country, that at some point they will have to look for themselves and that there will be a further stratification within each society of schools for poorer people and schools for richer people and schools for those in the middle, and they know what that means for their children; and because of that, trade union movements in most countries were among the first to demand that there be free public schools for all the children and continue to be our strongest supporters.

Rich people know that they can pass on money to their children, they can pass on land, they can pass titles, but there is one great gift that workers can give so their children will live better lives and that is good education.

That is the basis for the hope that their children will be able to move to a job, to a position within their countries and within their societies that is different and better than the one they enjoy. So this is a central issue and it is clear the role of the ICFTU all around the world in strengthening unions and the work that they do is a key and is central.

One final point on trade unions and why we as teachers, whether or not we are formally part of a trade union centre in our own countries, why we have such identity of interest.

All reports that come out all over the world show that the single most important influence on whether children are able to learn or not, is what kind of situation do they have in their home, their family and their community.

You could have excellent teachers and excellent schools but if you send in children who have been starved for years, you send in children who have had no health care, send in children who live in communities where you have poverty and violence and discrimination and conflicts, those children do not do well in school, no matter even if one could provide excellent textbooks and excellent teachers and a wonderful school, although usually that is not provided to the children of the poor either.

The most important thing we can do to make sure that children are able to benefit from an education is to eliminate the poverty that exists throughout the world.

There is an identity between workers and their organisations around the world trying to lift the workers from the horrible, miserable and dangerous exploitative poverty conditions to conditions where they will be able to provide lives for their children so they can benefit from an education. These are all important points of identity of interests between us and the trade union movement.

I would like to turn to a third point of celebration: professionalism.

When I started teaching, I immediately joined the union; I joined the union because my parents were union members, and there was hardly a day that went by when they didn't tell me about when they came to America and when they were working 72 hours a week for very little money, in factories which later burned down and hundreds of people died because the owner locked up the factory because he was afraid that the workers would steal shirts or something like that when they left. So I became a teacher and I joined the union.

In those days, I didn't like the concept of professionalism; I thought that professionalism was a concept that the employers tried to convince teachers that we were professionals and that was a way of convincing us that we did not need a union.

I have changed my mind on that one. I strongly believe that if we are unionists only, if we are viewed as a group only devoted to our self-interest, we will lose the support of the public within our countries. We have to show them that we have the same right to fight for our decent work conditions and salaries that everyone else has the right to fight for.

No one else will do it for us if we don't do it ourselves. We have that right and we must take it, but in addition to that we must be seen as fighting not only for ourselves but for the children that we serve, and also since many children are not learning in schools as they are now organized, and since schools are about the only institutions today that look exactly the way they looked one or two hundred years ago. It's the only thing

that has not changed. If someone were reborn and came back to this world who was around 200 years ago, they would not recognize airplanes or banks or almost anything else, but the only thing that they would identify immediately is the school.

We as teachers, just as doctors have not cured all diseases (many are still there and as they work on the old ones, new ones unfortunately arise) but we do not say doctors are no good or ineffective because they have not found answers, because we know they are looking for answers; and just as we respect them, not because they have succeeded in everything but because we see that they are constantly trying, we as teachers must constantly try to improve schools and we must keep working at changing and experimenting and trying until we have developed ways of reaching every child who sits in schools, every single one of them.

This I believe is also the answer to privatisation. The answer to privatisation is in two areas. One, we must be politically strong enough to fight it off when governments propose it. Those of us in the United States are very happy because we have just defeated a president who devoted his four years to trying to privatize our schools and we have elected a president who has pledged to improve the schools for all the children, not just private schools. So one aspect of the fight is political.

The other aspect of the fight is professional. We are accused of being teachers who are part of a government monopoly, we are told it's like the old soviet system of bureaucracy. That is what they are saying about the American schools (I read about it in The Economist about British schools), that we are a monopoly, and the only way to break up this monopoly is to privatize it.

I submit that the two answers are political action and professionalism. The other is to show the public that we are searching for the answer and that if anyone finds the answers, we will find them, not a bunch of private businessmen who are trying to take the education of children and turn it into private property, into private profits for their companies.

My final point of celebration: we have within the Constitution or Statutes of our organisation built in a special recognition for the relationship of democracy to all the things we strive for.

Let me make something clear: I am not talking about democracy as practised in any country whether it is the United States or the United Kingdom or France or Japan, or the many other countries that are democratic. I am not talking about a specific form of government. I am talking about democracy as a notion that people find ways of making decisions without violence, find peaceful ways in their countries of resolving differences. There are many different ways of doing that, not one system; in all democratic systems, you are able to change direction, leadership, able to change without killing, without suppression, without violence, without threats.

That is very important; there is no unionism without democracy. The first thing that non democratic governments do is to destroy

unions, because the union is an independent source of power and ideas within a society, they go together.

Secondly, as teachers, without democracy, we are not free to think or to say what we think because we have to say what we are told to say and we are not free to teach children how to think, we have to teach them what to think if we do not have a democratic country.

So, the very heart of what teaching is about, which is to look at children gain, to join in seeing them having discussions among each other and learn they are able to think through their differences and problems, is not there without democracy.

I am moved by the horrors that we see before us around the world in those wars that are now taking place, but it is not only during wartime and in wars between countries that people are being killed; from 1900 to the present time, 37 million people have been killed in wars around the world.

However, 151 million were killed by their own government, not at war, not as soldiers, not as victims of bombing during the wars, but as a result of internal suppression and terror.

Of the 151 million, one million people were killed in or by democracies, because we know that democracies are imperfect, they too commit crimes but I submit to you that if we want the end of war and the end of killing, we have to deal with war and armaments but we also have to deal with the issue of democracy, that is fair, peaceful ways of resolving conflicts inside of a country.

Here we are, a new organisation; we are an idea, a hope. Many things can come out of this. What will come depends on the way all of us act with and toward each other. Given the way leaders of both sides have come to live and work with each other and respect each other, I have no doubt about the future of this organisation: it will be great, and I am proud to be your Founding President.

*NB: Transcription from video recording.