

**Welcoming remarks by Fred van Leeuwen,  
General Secretary of Education International**

Honorable Ministers, Colleagues, Friends,

On behalf of Education International and as a joint Summit partner, I would like to congratulate the standing conference of education ministers of Germany KMK for hosting this Summit on the teaching profession. I also want to recognise the contribution made by EI's affiliates, GEW and VBE for their work. In particular, I want to thank them for organizing school visits yesterday to see first-hand refugee welcome classes. I found it a profoundly moving experience, as we all did. Again teachers and their unions made us proud. We commend the Federal Government of Germany for having taken their responsibility and for setting an example for others.

When teachers teach their classes they do not teach a category or label, such as 'refugees', they teach children; in this case children whose lives have been traumatised in ways most of us can't imagine, such as the Syrian girl from Aleppo who shared with us her nightmare, as well as her dream: she wanted to become a teacher, an English language teacher.

That is the backdrop for this 6<sup>th</sup> ISTP. And, despite the excellent work done here in Berlin and in many other places, we must, I am afraid, recognise a collective failure by the Europe and the international community at large to systematically and effectively meet the needs of all refugee children. Our "backdrop" is now clearly also the foreground for the teachers and communities who are working hard to create equitable and inclusive learning environments for them. And doing this work in the current context is risky, it requires courage and conviction.

In fact, one of our teacher union leaders in this country is receiving death threats; death threats for standing up for the education of refugee children. If that's not a good example of outstanding teacher leadership, then I have no idea what is.

At this point let me stress that the democratic tradition is at the heart of the teaching profession. It is also at the core of our member unions. The teachers leaders who are here were elected by their peers. They are the voice of the teaching profession.

I know that for all of us here today, moving forward is key. We want to move beyond the discussions of past summits. We talked and debated about collaborating, and now we are doing it. It's not perfect by any means, but we reached principled agreements informed by evidence and grounded in experience.

Colleagues, it is only by building trust that we will take teaching and education forward. I've heard Andreas say that without quality labour relations you cannot have quality learning environments. We are here to create the best possible conditions to make both a reality.

We are not going to rehash and revisit the past. The background report says that creating a professional, self-confident, well-supported and versatile teaching profession requires professional autonomy and professional capital. Teaching higher order thinking skills

requires higher order professional learning opportunities for us to continuously learn from each other.

The theme we have chosen for this Summit, *teachers' professional learning and growth* could not be more relevant.

Policies supporting teachers' learning, and the development of professional self-confidence are vital to an effective and self-sustaining profession. Our experience is that many teachers unions themselves are in fact at the centre of providing teacher learning and vital professional spaces.

Colleagues, two years ago, no one thought that the governments of the world would commit themselves to Agenda 2030 and its 17 goals. For us as educationalists we take special satisfaction in them having agreed upon a framework for action to achieve Goal 4: a free, equitable, inclusive quality education for all. That was big.

But let's go bigger in terms of implementation Let's begin implementing the goal today.

The ISTP has the potential to make a significant contribution to delivering on all of the goals. In a time of uncertainty, of intractable problems, of declining confidence in our political leadership and democratic institutions, the ISTP may provide a new democratic model for engaging sectors in addressing global challenges. Others are watching us!

Education is the foundation for everything else that we want to achieve.

The commitment of the teaching profession is to ensure free quality education for all children. Today, the teaching profession reiterates its willingness to develop and implement national education strategies to reach all children, including refugees and other vulnerable groups.

Both the OECD and EI, as members of the UN Education 2030 Steering Committee, would like to recognise the ISTP as an example of how meaningful collaboration can deliver better quality education.

We believe that teacher unions working with governments at the national level can enhance and further develop the quality of the education service provided in each country. The ISTP provides the facility for encouraging dialogue between the unions and the governments. And we as unions expect governments to seriously commit and engage in this process, just as the teaching profession has done.

The quality of education for our future generations depends on the ongoing success of this process.

So let's get on with it.