Solidarity for global public education



Photo: AEU Federal/Facebook

The recent AEU Federal Conference saw delegates hear and engage with our comrades from other education unions across the world.

As a unionist and activist, it always fills me with pride to know that the SSTUWA is part of the AEU's international movement to defend and protect public education and make it accessible to all.

Education International (EI) represents over 33 million teachers and education support staff and has 375 member organisations from 180 countries and territories.

One of EI's objectives is to promote free, quality, publicly funded education for every student in every country.

EI's *Go Public! Fund Education* campaign shows how education unions from across the globe are coming together to build inclusive quality public education for all, which is a fundamental human right. To learn more about the campaign read the article at this end of this column.

Mugwena Maluleke (pictured above right) is the president of EI and the general secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). He spoke to conference about some of the current issues facing education.

He stated how world leaders have failed this generation's right to an education, instead prioritising on global military expenditure.

Most shockingly, over 220 million children in the world (often from war torn areas) require educational support and 70 million school aged children do not have access to school, due to displacement and conflict.

For all these children, educational settings and centres provide protection from physical danger such as abuse, exploitation and recruitment into armed groups.

They provide essential services such as school meals, safe water, healthcare and psychosocial support to help cope with

the everyday traumas. To read more click here.

In Sudan, less than 10 per cent of school aged children have access to education.

Another barrier to education is the climate crisis. This is no surprise to us in Australia as we see the impact of floods and bush fires on our community and also our schools.

As reported in UNICEF's report, *Learning Interrupted: Global Snapshot of Climate-Related School Disruptions in 2024*, approximately 242 million students in 85 countries or territories had their learning interrupted due to climate disasters. The report highlights other findings, too:

- At least one in seven students had their schooling disrupted due to climate hazards in 2024.
- Seventy-four per cent of the 242 million affected students are in low and lower-middle-income countries.
- South Asia was the most affected region in 2024, with 128 million students affected by climate-related school disruptions. East Asia and the Pacific region followed, impacting 50 million students.
- In 2024, heatwaves were the most significant climate hazard worldwide to disrupt schooling, affecting an estimated 171 million students.
- April saw the highest global climate-related school disruptions, with heatwave as the leading hazard, affecting at least 118 million children in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, the Philippines and Thailand.
- September recorded the most frequent climate-related school disruptions. At a time of year when schools reopen in many parts of the world, at least 18 countries suspended classes. Typhoon Yagi affected 16 million children in East Asia and the Pacific, making it the top hazard in September.
- In Africa, while over 107 million children are already out of school, climate-related disruptions in 2024 have put an additional 20 million children at risk of dropping out.



Photo: AEU Federal/Facebook

Already in 2025, WA has been hit by cyclones and heavy floods that has resulted in several schools being closed.

Mr Mulaleke described the greatest crisis facing education today is the global teacher shortage.

Currently there are 44 million teachers needed across the globe. We see many developed countries (including Australia) offer incentives to recruit international teachers to fill the teacher gap but that increases the shortage issue in their country.

For example, the United Kingdom's heavy recruitment of Jamaican teachers has left a dire shortage of teachers in Jamaica.

Unfortunately, many teachers from Jamaica are working in UK's Academy schools where they are earning less than their British colleagues and still being classified as an unqualified teacher.

EI's commissioned report *The Global Status of Teachers 2024* primarily draws on survey data from 204 senior union

representatives across 121 countries.

The report focuses on issues that teachers are facing today and provides recommendations for action to attract and retain teachers for current and future generations of students.

Unsurprisingly, key findings and recommendations from the report include:

- The need to reduce excessive workloads and to redesign teacher roles to focus on teaching activities.
- Promoting teaching as a high-status profession.
- Offering competitive and attractive salaries for large class sizes.
- Promoting teacher wellbeing and mental health.
- Ensuring teachers work in safe and respectful environments, free from discrimination.
- Securing adequate public funding for public education.
- Enhancing consultations between unions and governments on critical education issues.
- Prioritising equitable distribution of educational resources to ensure all students have access to quality education.
- Providing opportunities for teachers to engage in high-quality professional learning.

None of this information is new to us at the SSTUWA.

In fact, a lot of these findings have been stated in the union's commissioned *Facing the Facts* report, the Department of Education's (DoE) independent report - *Understanding and Reducing Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools* and the Agency Capability Review of the DoE.

As a union, we know our role is to continue tackling the issues that are driving our teachers out of the classrooms, and we hope that our recent General Agreement wins are a step in the right direction.

This, alongside showing support and solidarity for public education globally is what makes us unique as a body of people and as a movement – it is what makes us union.

Urgent call for funding

Go Public! Fund Education is an urgent call for governments to invest in public education, a fundamental human right and public good, and to invest more in teachers, the single most important factor in achieving quality education.

This means guaranteeing labour rights and ensuring good working conditions, as well as manageable workloads and competitive salaries for teachers and education workers. It also means valuing teachers, respecting teachers, ensuring they are central to decision-making and trusting their pedagogical expertise.

Education unions around the world are joining forces to build inclusive, quality public education for all.

We are mobilising to fully fund public education systems and resist budget cuts, austerity and privatisation.

We are working together across borders to guarantee every student's right to have a well-supported, qualified teacher and a quality learning environment.

Let's act together in solidarity to Go Public and fund education. For more information click here.



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