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EI Statement on student action on climate change

Education International welcomes the energy and engagement shown by students across the globe in their fight for climate justice. Their determination and commitment are exactly what we need at this crucial moment. Students are showing the leadership that too many politicians are lacking.

We hope that governments will be infected by the students' sense of urgency to save our planet. Climate change is a well-established scientific fact, not a matter of opinion. It should be taught in all schools, even in areas that produce fossil fuels. Schools must be spaces for learning about and taking action for climate justice. There should be full and free discussions about the consequences of climate change as well as of possible solutions, including dealing with the social consequences of slowing and stopping the growth of carbon emissions.

Unfortunately, in too many countries education is narrowed down to target producing a skilled workforce, and curricula and syllabi is driven by standardised testing. Such systems undermine teaching and learning and the purpose of education; they will not build active citizenship or critical thinking or understanding of a wide range of human concerns and experiences.

Curricula and teaching and learning materials need to be urgently revised and improved to address the environmental crisis and give all learners the skills and knowledge needed for climate justice. But as important as curricula and materials are, educators must also have the freedom to teach. Their creativity should be encouraged, not blocked or diverted. Teachers' professional autonomy is central in the struggle to build a better world; the fight of education trade unions is also a fight for climate justice and active citizenship.

Students, by taking to the streets, have rejected cynicism and apathy and embraced hope. Hope is contagious and can inspire others to take charge of their destinies. The action of students on climate change has not only forced discussions in many countries about that issue, but has also revealed the weak response of many democracies to the most

compelling needs of the population and the planet. This mobilisation can contribute to and help inspire a process of re-invigoration of the democratic process.

Education unions stand with the students. We urge governments to make the necessary structural changes for a just transition towards a climate-resilient and low-carbon economy. Climate change is not combatted through the “good behaviour” of consumers. Coordinated and sustained participation of students and workers and their representatives may be the first step towards climate justice. We stand by students in the demand for urgent climate action and a just economic transition.

