1. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to convey to you greetings on behalf of your colleagues around the world. Let me also thank you for your active involvement in the work of our International, for your contributions to our policies and our strategies, and for helping us to accomplish Education International’s core missions:

- (1) achieving quality public education for all,
- (2) protecting the rights and professional freedoms of teachers; and
- (3) building strong and independent education unions around the world.

2. Seldom have circumstances be more unfavorable than today, economically and politically. To put it bluntly: public education is under attack, our profession is under attack and our unions are under attack. Both in the industrial economies, in the emerging democracies and in the developing countries, many of our member unions are engaged in a battle, two battles, if you will, a political and a professional battle.
3. There is a common thread in the responses to the debt crisis of most OECD member states and of all members of the EU. Whether governed by the left, the center or the right, policies focus on austerity, on cutting back public expenditures, including education budgets. In our view those policies are slowing down recovery, reduce the opportunities of millions of young people to proper education and employment, and yes, even jeopardize democratic development. Sometimes we wonder whether our political leaders see more benefit in serving the needs of the financial markets than in addressing urgent social needs. Suffice it to say that we question these policies. With the international financial institutions, at the G8 and G20 summits, with the European Union and in all other places where our political leaders get together to find a way out of the crisis.

4. Our message is clear. Investment in education, investment in people, investment in social dialogue is the key to recovery. And we know that the resources are there. To give you an example: Last year we completed a study on corporate taxation in the real economy, showing how and how much global corporations avoid paying taxes by manipulating their prices and balance
sheets along their global supply lines. Between 10 and 15 trillion dollars! At the G20 summit last June in Mexico I confronted Christine LaGarde, Head of IMF, with these staggering figures and suggested that IMF should start helping governments close these fiscal loopholes and collect those trillions rather than pressing them to slash education budgets. She promised us to look into this. Well, we’ll see. They have not yet called back. My point is: The resources are there, it just takes political will... and political courage.

5. The draconic cutbacks that are planned for your national education budget, the freezing of salaries, the pension reforms, and the break down of the social safety net, will not, in our view, bring any sustainable solution. Allow me to also express concern about recent measures restricting your trade union freedoms. The unilateral abolishment last autumn of arrangements for trade union leave and “secondment” does not only show contempt for the labour movement and for social dialogue, it may also, clearly, undermine democracy itself. Suffice it to say that we cannot accept Spain to return to its less democratic past.
But let me not just criticize. The Spanish government wants to improve education quality nation wide and at all levels. We support that ambition. However, to think that this is possible without making additional investments in the teaching profession and in the sector as a whole, is wishful thinking. I also question some of the provisions in the new education law, as far as these reduce teachers’ autonomy, limit the role of the school councils, and allow for a redistribution of funds at the cost of the public school system, at the cost therefore of equal accessibility.

I understand that your government is looking at Finland, Germany and the USA for ideas. To put it in simple terms: they want your future schools to match the high quality of the Finnish school system, they want to import elements of the German vocational education model, and they want to finance all of this the way they do in the United States. I am afraid this kind of cherry picking abroad doesn’t work, certainly not when at the same time the education budget is drastically reduced.

6. Education reform in Spain and elsewhere is mainly driven by the wish to enhance the ability of our nations to successfully compete in the global markets. Sure, there are reasons to be pleased about all the interest shown in our sector, but if
investments in our school systems are solely or predominantly driven by the desire to boost our economies and satisfy markets, we need to be cautious. Education is a public good. It is not just an instrument to promote economic growth. Education is not a commodity. The values of public education, are essentially the values that underpin democracy as well as our prosperity. They encompass the principles of equity and equal opportunities, of non-discrimination and social justice. In this regard it is interesting to note that in the past two decades the education agenda has not been set by the organization that was established for that very purpose, UNESCO, but by the World Bank, the largest lender of education loans, and by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Yes, we are led by the philosophy of merchants and marketeers.

7. Another directly related concern is the erosion of our profession. We call it de-professionalization, which, I believe, is one of the main challenges facing our sector today. [The writing is on the wall). There are seven signs, signals, or perhaps I should say “plagues”, which pose a serious threat to the future of our profession and its capacity to ensure high quality
teaching. Number one: the influx of unqualified teachers; number two: the casualization of teaching; number three: the growing gap between teachers’ pay and remuneration in other sectors; number four: the restriction of teachers’ autonomy; number five: the rapid spread of standardized testing; number six: (mechanistic forms of) high stake teachers’ evaluation; and number seven: private sector management practices sneaking into our educational institutions.

8. Colleagues - This is the time for us to work together and go on the offensive – nationally, regionally and globally, in the North as well as in the South. Working together does not come naturally. It is difficult. Education International combines close to 90% of the organized teaching profession on the planet. A truly united front, you would say, but at country level, particularly at times when membership growth is at stake, competition (between organizations) often prevails over cooperation. You won’t mind me saying that also in your country there is room for improvement.

Colleagues, Friends,
9. Education International is about solidarity. We bring colleagues together, to share, to exchange, and to support each other.

10. Let me take the opportunity to thank FECCOO for the fantastic work your organisation has done throughout the years, particularly, in Europe, in Latin America and in the Middle East, helping educators build and strengthen independent education unions. Allow me to also thank your General Secretary for his outstanding contributions and giving guidance to our International. Thank you, Pepe, for sharing with us the benefits of your exceptional talent to bring people together, to bridge gaps between individuals, between organizations. You have made an important difference.

11. We face in so many countries, more than ever, I believe, a crossing of the roads. One path leads towards de-professionalization, weakening of unions, especially in the public sector, and continuing inequity in society. The other road leads to a new vision for the teaching profession in the 21st century, quality education and opportunities for all, quality public services for all, equity, justice and sustainable growth.
12. The key message is this: We are not, must not, be mere bystanders watching to see which road the governments will take. We are not for gloom and doom. Through the union movement, through a united profession, through our impact on public opinion, we can muster the strength to have our elected representatives to make the right choices.

13. Colleagues, let us be very clear: A new global economy must be built on a stronger foundation – based on the education, the skills and the capacities of citizens, based on equity and justice, and based on quality public services. The stakes are high. For the financial and economic crisis comes on top of other crises – the food crisis in many developing countries, movements of refugees, migrants, and guest workers, conflicts between cultures, and last but not least, climate change. I repeat: the threats to social cohesion and democratic change are great.

14. Together, through our education unions and in solidarity with others, we can make a difference. That conviction – that we can make a difference – must drive us forward. Quality public education and solidarity are powerful weapons. Solidarity
between nations, solidarity between trade unions, solidarity between people. And quality education for everybody. That is the challenge before EI globally, and each member union nationally. That is the challenge before FECCOO today. You can count on us. We continue counting on all of you.

15. Thank you.