

LATIN AMERICAN STATEMENT FOR "EDUCATION FOR ALL"
On the occasion of the World Education Forum
(Dakar, April 26-28, 2000)

The [World Education Forum](#) took place in Dakar, Senegal, between 26 and 28 April, 2000. It was convened by five international organizations: UNDP (United Nations Development Program), UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. The Forum's objective was to present and discuss the [Education for All](#) (EFA) 2000 Global Assessment and to define a future agenda for EFA, since the six goals set at the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990) had not been met by the year 2000. Governments, representatives of civil society and international agencies adopted a new Framework of Action for EFA, which basically ratified the goals adopted in Jomtien and postponed the deadline to 2015.

The initiative of a [Latin American Statement for Education for All](#), on the occasion of the World Education Forum, emerged from a small group of Latin American educators and researchers: Pablo Latapí (Mexico), Sylvia Schmelkes (Mexico) and Rosa-María Torres (Ecuador/Argentina). The document was initially circulated by e-mail to a list of nearly 200 people a few days prior to the Forum. In Dakar, copies were distributed in Spanish and English. Also, it was adopted and presented, during the last plenary session, by the official delegation of Ecuador.

Since April 2000, **OVER THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE** have signed this Latin American Statement by e-mail (over **ONE MILLION MEMBERS** if we consider that many people adhere in representation of their institutions and organizations, among them five major teacher organizations in the region). Many signers send comments and suggestions, which have been enriched the document and have been added to it as an annex.

Signers come from a wide range of countries, sectors and institutions: government, political parties, universities and research centers, public and private school system, NGOs, teacher unions, student and parent associations, grassroots and indigenous organizations, mass media, churches, private enterprise, and international agencies.

This virtual community is connected through e-mail. The Coordination is located in Buenos Aires and operates through a special e-mail account and a web site www.fronesis.org/prolat.htm There is regular communication within the group. We exchange relevant information and discuss issues related to EFA and to education in general, at the national, regional and global level.

In February 2002 we created [Comunidad E-ducativa](#), a moderated Yahoo Group, in order to enhance and facilitate meaningful exchange within this virtual community and organize commonly agreed activities. The group, which uses Spanish as its main communication language, started with 505 subscribers from the larger community of signers. The Moderator is also the Coordinator of the overall initiative. Another electronic group, [Ed-Community](#), was created for English-speaking signers, many of whom do not speak Spanish or Portuguese. This group started off with 30 members.

All this was initiated and has been sustained on the basis of voluntary, non-remunerated work. There is no financial support from any source. The experience has been presented and commented in various national and international conferences and fora. The Latin American Statement continues to be disseminated through [web sites](#), electronic bulletins and printed [publications](#) within and outside the region.

Names continue to be added from Latin America and from other regions.
You may submit your message to: pronunciamento@fibertel.com.ar

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The start of a new decade and of a new century is an invitation to reflect on past achievements and to prepare a future agenda based on new available knowledge and on lessons learned.

This is a moment to evaluate, rectify, and renew commitments in education. The year 2000 was the horizon for global programs such as *Education for All (EFA)*, launched in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, as well as for regional and national initiatives for educational change and development around the world. Many evaluation activities are going on at the global, regional and national levels, to assess the fulfillment of goals and to define future agendas. At the end of April 2000 the World Education Forum took place in Dakar, Senegal. The results of the EFA Assessment were presented and a new Declaration and Framework for Action for the year 2015 were adopted.

In this context and at this moment, a group of Latin American educators and intellectuals wish to share with other colleagues and with the international educational community some concerns and reflections from Latin America. Ours is an important region in the developing world. It has its own historical, educational and cultural characteristics. We Latin Americans are proud to have developed innovative and fertile ideas, approaches and experiences in education, appropriate to our particular realities.

Our peoples deserve more and better education

1. We are seriously concerned with the situation of education around the world, in developing countries and in our region in particular. After several decades of reiterative attempts at educational reform in our countries, the results are questionable. In any case, they are not visible in the field that is at the very core of education and of any educational effort: learning and the full development of individuals. "Emphasize learning" was a fundamental mandate of *Education for All*. However, the indicator for learning (one of 18 indicators that countries had to account for) had to be eliminated from the final evaluation report of the decade since most countries had no information to offer. "Improve learning" was the mandate for the nineties in our region. However, learning assessments carried out in the last few years in different countries show results that fall far below expectations. Educational systems have not developed proper indicators nor have they evidences of achievement regarding the full development of learners' potential and creativity and the consolidation of their values.
2. Latin America, as other regions in the developing world, has a long history of pronouncements and declarations, of commitments and goals that are not

achieved and are cyclically postponed. Often, plans overlap with little regard for continuity, or run parallel to each other without coordination.

- In 1979 (Mexico Declaration), the "[Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)" was approved. It was launched in Quito in 1981, under the coordination of the regional UNESCO office (UNESCO-OREALC). This project set three goals for the year 2000: universal access to primary schooling, eradication of adult illiteracy, and improvement of the quality and efficiency of education.
- Later, in 1990, in Jomtien, Thailand, "Education for All" was launched in a world conference organized by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank. The conference was attended by 155 government delegations as well as by 125 non-governmental organizations from around the world. Six goals were agreed to in Jomtien, partially coinciding with those of the Major Project, and also for the year 2000.
- Four years later, in 1994, the [Miami Summit](#), convened by US President Clinton, took place. A "Plan for Universal Access to Education for 2010" was launched and later ratified as "Education Initiative" by the II Summit in Santiago, in 1998. This hemispherical initiative adopted goals for the three educational levels, including tertiary education. The initiative is headed by the US government, and is coordinated by the governments of Mexico, Argentina and Chile, with the participation of several international, regional and national organizations (OAS, World Bank, IDB and USAID among the most important).

Now, the World Forum in Dakar acknowledges that the Education for All goals were not met in the agreed time span and fundamentally ratifies the same goals, renews commitments and postpones the deadline for reaching these goals to the year 2015.

International agencies and national governments design and approve these global and regional goals and commit themselves to their fulfillment in the deadlines they define, and continually rectify and postpone such commitments and deadlines. Each of these plans implies important investments of energy and financial resources. When goals are not met and results are not evident, social credibility regarding education is inevitably deteriorated, and with it the possibility of educational progress and change.

3. The tradition of educational reform in our countries has been to seek the blame for the problems on the lack of financial resources and to situate the problems on the side of implementation. Nevertheless, it is now evident that there are also severe problems on the side of policy formulation and design. Thus the need for a profound revision and reorientation in the way both governments and international agencies address education in general, and education reform in particular.

Education policies recommended and adopted in the last few years are not responding satisfactorily to needs and expectations of the Latin American population. They have been unable to reach the education system, particularly teachers, and they have not achieved the expected results. The [comparative assessment carried out by the Regional Office of UNESCO in 1997](#) in 13 Latin American countries in the areas of language and mathematics among 3rd and 4th grade students of private and public schools, revealed that Cuba is, within this region, the country with best learning results in both areas. Cuba is precisely the only country that did not follow international recommendations of educational policy in the nineties, and the only one that did not rely on loans from international banks to carry out its education reform. We believe these facts are sufficient evidence of the need to critically reflect on past actions and to review contents and strategies for education reform currently tried out in our countries.

Required revisions

4. Our analysis of the development of basic education in our region and in the world leads us to propose some rectifications that pertain directly to Latin America but that could also be considered by other regions with similar concerns:
 - a) Policies for educational development should be inspired by fundamental human values and should seek to insure that the educational service contributes to the growth and development of people and of societies. Indicators used to evaluate progress in education, currently centered around coverage and efficiency of school systems, do not reveal the contribution of education to these fundamental values: full development of learners, awareness-building, responsible exercise of liberty, capacity of relating to others with respect. Neither do they reveal whether education systems are responding to the basic needs of the majority of the population, or whether these responses are adequate and meaningful.
 - b) Decision-makers must think ethically. Educational systems are there not only to serve the economy, consumption or material progress, but also mainly to serve the development of human potential. In particular, the expansion of knowledge that characterizes the start of this millennium and that is deeply affecting educational systems, should be understood within this framework of integrality and responsibility.
 - c) We are by no means satisfied with what has been done to attain greater equity in the distribution of opportunities of educational access, retention, graduation, transition to further educational levels and, above all, learning. Greater equity has been achieved as a consequence of the tendency toward universalization of a given educational level, mainly primary education. However, this has not meant increased equity in

terms of learning results, which are the true measure of educational policies aimed at social justice. The growing use of information and communication technologies in the field of education threatens to produce even deeper and more serious inequalities if we continue to extend basic education with the same criteria used in the past. The problem must definitely be faced in a different way. Society and governments, but especially the latter, must allocate the necessary resources and make the necessary efforts to improve the quality of educational services offered to the poor in both rural and urban areas, to indigenous populations, and in general to all those excluded from the benefits of basic education. If we are not able to offer improved education to those who need it most, and an egalitarian education for both men and women, it will be difficult to progress towards educational equity. Without educational equity, we will not progress towards social justice.

- d) Given the cultural diversity that characterizes Latin American peoples, educational quality implies recognizing the need to diversify educational supply in order to insure not only respect for, but also the strengthening of, different cultures. Each group has a cultural contribution to make to the education of the population as a whole. However, governments and societies must be wary of permitting that diversification of basic educational services are used to conceal an impoverished supply. The comparatively lower capacity of the disadvantaged groups to demand adequate quality of service and of results should always be taken into account and never be taken advantage of.
- e) It is necessary to recuperate the original spirit of *Education for All* in its "expanded vision of basic education": an education capable of satisfying basic education needs of *all* (children, youth, and adults), both within and outside the school system (family, community, workplace, libraries and cultural centers, media, modern technologies, etc.) and throughout life. A *multi-sectoral* approach to education and educational policy must be enforced, since problems cannot be explained nor solved exclusively from within the education sector, and require a responsible economic and social policy concerned with the welfare of the majority of the population. Only a *system-wide* view of education will be able to overcome narrow conceptions that fragment education and prioritize education policies according to ages, levels, components or modalities. A *long-term* vision of educational policy, able to overcome the immediate and short-term-oriented decisions that are often imposed by the dynamics of politics or of international financing, is also a must in our region. The emphasis on primary education that characterized the nineties, while important in itself, was done at the cost of postponing the need to face the problems of secondary and higher education, and of practically abandoning education and training of young people and of adults.

Preservation of Latin American values

5.

a) In the present globalized context, we wish to preserve some values that are essential to our Latin American identity.

- The supreme value of the human being and the quest for meaning of human existence. We value the respect for the human being and his/her development over and above material progress based exclusively on increased consumption and comfort. We believe in the importance of creating the necessary conditions for each person to find meaning in his/her life and responses to his/her existential questions.

- The communitarian meaning of life, which is characteristic of our cultures, especially Indian cultures: sharing and serving, solidarity rather than competitiveness, learning to live together, favoring collective over personal well-being, respecting differences against tendencies toward exclusion, and caring for the weak and unprotected.

- Multiculturalism and interculturalism. Each of our nations is a people of peoples, developed through processes of biological and cultural interaction and mingling. The value of pluralism -- of races, ethnic groups and cultures -- is essential to our identity and should be reinforced through education.

- The value of ways of knowing and approaching reality that go beyond instrumental rationality: symbolic languages, intuition, sensibility to human vulnerability, as well as a creative recuperation of tradition and the appreciation of beauty.

- Liberty, understood – as Paulo Freire did – as a conquest over our selfishness and that of others, as the building of each person's autonomy and sense of responsibility, as overcoming all oppressions through the understanding of the oppressor and the willingness to share with him or her the task of building a world for all.

- Work as a means of personal fulfillment and thus as a basic right, and not as an a-critical submission to the interests of capital or as an efficiency-based search for profit.

- The quest of the "other" in the construction of "ourselves", as the basis of the ethical meaning of human life and the continuous presence of hope and utopia.

- The values that give us identity should be preserved through education. They are the basis for achieving peace based on justice and on respect for all. We would like these values to transcend towards every-day interaction, the media, laws, philosophies that guide education and, in general, to all cultural domains. Within the education system, we would like

these values to inspire the education of educators and students, curricular contents and teaching methods, school organization and mission; the distribution of resources, the criteria for planning and evaluating, and the interpersonal relationships of all those involved in education.

- b) We strongly state the need for societal participation not only in the implementation of educational plans and programs, but also in policy design and discussion. Education is a public issue and should, therefore, involve all its actors and elicit their responsible participation. This is particularly critical in the case of teachers, who are the key actors in education and educational change. To proclaim the need for participation is not enough; times and spaces must be defined and procured, and criteria and concrete mechanisms put in place for participation to occur as a regular process in education: from the local to the global level, from the school to the ministries and inter-governmental instances where education is defined and educational decisions are made. Valuable initiatives that materialize citizen participation in education have emerged in a number of countries in the region over the last few years, and should be strengthened and multiplied.
- c) We request our governments and societies, as well as international cooperation agencies, to multiply efforts towards equity, prioritizing the more marginalized sectors of the population, and articulating educational programs with wider policies aimed at improving economic and social equity.
- d) We make a strong call for the preservation of cultural and educational diversity at the regional, country and local levels, and against a homogenizing and hegemonic globalization process.
- e) We require international organizations to revise their role in the definition of educational policies and in their implementation at the regional and national levels. We are concerned with the growing importance of these organizations, particularly of multilateral financial organizations, as decision-makers and actors not only in financial aspects, but also in technical assistance, research, monitoring and evaluation of education policies and programs in our region. We are concerned with the dominant thinking about education that has spread over the last few years, which is characterized by a strong economic bias and by an overwhelming predominance of administrative aspects in the understanding of education and in the implementation of educational reform. The need for reviewing the traditional model of international cooperation, especially in the field of education, is acknowledged by scholars and specialists the world over, and by international cooperation agencies themselves. The role of international organizations must be that of facilitating, promoting, communicating, and catalyzing.

- f) We convene our governments and national societies to regain initiative and leadership in the definition and conduction of educational matters, to develop a critical mass of professionals and specialists of the highest level, and to consolidate an informed citizenship able to significantly participate in educational debate and action. After a period of strong homogenization of educational policy and of simplification of educational processes, we must regain the ability to think and act on the basis of accumulated knowledge and of the particular characteristics of each national and local context.

We invite the international education community, and in particular those participating in the Dakar Forum, to ponder on these reflections that we fraternally share.