

Creeping privatisation threatens Indian Public School System

New Delhi, 1st December 2014

In a meeting with Mr. Fred Van Leeuwen, General Secretary, Education International with AIPTF President and leaders from the states highlighted that India is facing with the challenge of boosting teachers' ranks and improving school environments, India looks to curb the explosion of privatised education by once again making quality education synonymous with public education.

Of the three-and-a-half million public primary school teachers in India, seven hundred thousand are so called "para-teachers", educators who may look the same and carry out the same work as regular teachers but earn the equivalent of only \$50 USD a month, representing only an eighth of the average teachers' salary.

Sh. Ram Pal Singh, President of the All India Primary School Teachers Federation (AIPTF), says that more than half of the "para-teachers" are not qualified. "If you consider that 11 percent of primary schools in India are "single teacher schools", and that we have a shortage of some 1.1 million teachers, you will understand that we have a long way to go to ensure quality education for all children."

Finding a solution to the problem lies in the AIPTF's most important objective to properly implement the Right to Education Act, which was adopted in 2009, explained the AIPTF President. "We want our para-teachers be properly trained, and we want their terms and conditions to be equal to those of regular teachers," he said.

Quality school materials and safe and healthy learning environments are other concerns sitting atop AIPTF's agenda. "The fast growing Indian middle class no longer accepts their children to be taught in poor conditions. The explosive growth of private schools, where parents have to pay school fees, illustrate dissatisfaction with the performance of our impoverished public school system," explained Singh.

"The public authorities, both at the federal and state level, must sharply increase investment in public education. Spending should be six percent of GDP but at least keep pace with the economic growth." Today, although 80 percent of schools in India are public schools, studies indicate that this percentage may decline to 50 percent in 2030.

"Poor people cannot afford the school fees that private schools ask parents to pay, according to the AIPTF president. Many operate as "public private partnerships" and are run on a for profit basis.

Education entrepreneurs encourage their teachers not to join unions, and sometimes even forbid them to become union members, as a result of which terms and employment conditions in private education lag behind those applied in the public school system." In order to lower drop-out rates, the Right to Education Act 2009 does not allow children to repeat a school year. While All India Primary Teachers' Federation supports the idea that every effort should be made to help children successfully complete primary education, it does not want to compromise education standards and abandon exams. "More and better teachers are the solution, not loosening standards," said Singh.

With 2.3 million members, spread over 24 State organisations, the AIPTF is the largest member organisation of Education International in the Asia-Pacific region.

S. Eswaran: A force for public education is remembered in moving ceremony

New Delhi, 30th November 2014

Those who knew Sh. S. Eswaran, a teachers' union leader and advocate for children's rights, paid respects to the man who dedicated most of his life working to empower others through quality, public education. Teachers from all over India travelled to Delhi to pay their respects to Sh. S. Eswaran, General Secretary of the All India Primary Teachers' Federation (AIPTF) and Vice President of Education International (EI), who passed away on 20 Oct at the age of 76.

During a ceremony at the AIPTF Headquarters that took place on 30 November 2014 conveyed their condolences to Eswaran's family, while a photograph was unveiled in remembrance of the union's leader by EI's General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen.

Sh. Jagdambika Pal, Member of Parliament stressed the important role Eswaran played in unifying the teaching profession of India, and recalled his successful efforts in rallying wide political support in the country for achieving the right to education.

Van Leeuwen commemorated Eswaran's inspirational leadership in enhancing teachers' rights and professional status in India and the Asian-Pacific region." His commitment to improving the lives and opportunities of underprivileged, disadvantaged marginalized children was paramount in all that he did," said the EI General Secretary during his remarks. "He was not hampered by cultural barriers and didn't hesitate to champion causes, or challenge practices and biases."

Shashi Bala Singh, Chief Regional Coordinator of EI for the Asian Pacific region, who was a long time AIPTF activist, praised her mentor's "honesty, modesty and straightforwardness, as well as his principled stance on women's rights and equity in general".

Mr N. Rangarajan, President of Eswaran's mother's organisation, the Tamilnadu Elementary School Teachers' Federation, said that the union has decided to soon establish a scholarship program and library in Sh. S. Eswaran's name.

Sh Ram Pal Singh, President of the AIPTF, personally addressed Eswaran's wife and children attending the ceremony, thanking them for having shared a husband and a father, enabling Eswaran to make such a great contribution to the future of children and teachers of India.