

TTUTA SPEAKS – 23/11/21

Education action for climate change

IN MARCH 2019, TTUTA on Tuesday would have highlighted action taken by students around the globe to underscore the need to move climate change higher up onto the global agenda in terms of securing a future for all children, interestingly the theme of this year's commemoration of World Children's Day – "A future for All Children."

At that time, the point was made that 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.

COP26 – the climate change conference which recently concluded in Glasgow, Scotland – witnessed a further step towards making climate education a significant tool in the battle to control emissions that, if not curtailed and maintained at the appropriate levels, make the planet virtually inhabitable for some countries – particularly those located in the global south of which the archipelago of Caribbean islands is a part.

Education International (EI), the umbrella organization for teachers' unions worldwide, participated in various side panel discussions during the conference and reports that while education made it onto the COP26 agenda, there is still a lot of work to be done. EI's deputy general secretary, Haldis Holt, in her various contributions emphasised the need "to guarantee quality climate change education for all, while highlighting teachers' crucial role in educating on climate change.

Additionally, she underscored the point that while teachers around the world are motivated to teach for the planet, they will need an enabling environment policy to do so including curriculum reform, training on teaching climate change, relevant teaching and learning materials and professional autonomy.

As part of the deliberations, participants witnessed a first-of-its-kind initiative – Together for tomorrow: Education and Climate Action Summit. This summit, held with the conference, provided a space for decisive action to be taken at the country level to bring about the change that is needed surrounding climate action. As obtained in 2019,

students' voices reverberated once again as they continued their advocacy for climate education.

The young activists pointed out that “climate education cannot just be an add-on, it must be integrated through a whole-school approach, and every student, whatever they study, must be a sustainability student.” Moreover, they further added that climate education must be developed with young people, not for them, and more importantly, governments need to invest in teachers.

As an education union we stand with the students. We applaud their depth of understanding in this matter. It reflects a social conscience that adults would do well to emulate. By their robust call for urgent, sustained, targeted, collective global action they have demonstrated a sense of civic responsibility that has eluded many developed societies.

We urge governments around the world and in particular the Caribbean region to make the necessary economic structural changes for a just transition towards a climate-resilient and low-carbon economy. As a region we are cognizant of our unique vulnerabilities to climate change given the delicate balance between development and environmental impact. Many of the economies in the region cannot afford to risk adjustments to fragile ecosystems. The signs are already ominous with marine resources already reflecting their vulnerability to climate adjustments.

While a few countries have committed to particular actions around ramping up climate education in schools, EI noted the “deafening silence” on the participation of educators and their unions in co-constructing climate education policies, human rights, or the role of education to ensure just transitions. As educators, we need to fight harder for a place at the table, especially when decisions that will directly impact on us are being made. In the words of EI, as we move towards COP27, education unions have a critical role to play in holding governments to account for implementation of pledges made and urge for even stronger pledges to be made.

Here in 2021, our closing remarks from our 2021 article bears repeating.

Climate change is not only combatted through the “good behavior” of consumers, but

the responsible behavior of corporate interests led by strong political will. Co-ordinated and sustained participation of students and workers and their representatives may be the first step towards climate justice. We stand by students and all climate activists in the demand for urgent climate action and a just economic transition. We also urge other unions and non-governmental organizations to join forces in this fight.