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WORLD TEACHERS' DAY 2013: 'A CALL FOR TEACHE

The urge for change

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WORLD Teachers' Day is being observed globally today with the theme "A call for teachers."

In 1994, Unesco proclaimed October 5 as World Teachers' Day to celebrate the great step made for teachers on this day in 1966, when a special intergovernmental conference convened by Unesco in Paris put forward the "Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers," which the ILO adopted later.

The 145-para Recommendation sets forth the rights and responsibilities of teachers, and international standards for their initial preparation and further education, recruitment, employment, teaching and learning conditions. It also contains many recommendations for teachers' participation in educational decisions through consultation and negotiation with educational authorities.

Since its adoption, the Recommendation has been considered an important set of guidelines to promote teachers' status in the interest of quality education. However, as the recommendations did not cover the post-secondary teachers and education personal specifically, a special session of a joint ILO/Unesco committee of experts was held in Paris between September 15 and 18, 1997, which approved and adopted the recommendation concerning the status of higher education teaching personnel as well. The Recommendation is immensely important due to its wide-ranging significance and implications for educators in particular and education in general.

Four features of 1966 and 1997 Recommendations are: (i) "Since education is a service of fundamental importance it should be recognised as a responsibility of the state"; (ii) "Teachers' organisations should be recognised as a force which can contribute greatly to educational advance and, therefore, should be associated with the determination of education policy"; (iii) "Teachers' salaries should reflect the importance of the teaching function and hence the importance of teachers as well as the responsibilities which fall upon them from the time of their entry"; and (iv) "Teaching in higher education requires expert knowledge and specialised skills acquired and maintained through rigorous and lifelong study and research."

Observance of the day highlights the shortage of teachers, shrinking allocation in education and the erosion in the standard of education and quality of teaching in both the developed and the developing countries. Bangladesh has particular problems like lack of congenial environment for students, especially girls, in and outside classrooms, and disparity between rural and urban and government and non-government institutions and teachers.

In his book, Future of Teaching Profession, Prof. John MacBeath of the University of Cambridge says: "Teaching is a profession that lies at the heart of both the learning of children and young people and their social and economic development. It is crucial to transmitting and implanting social values, such as democracy equality, tolerance cultural understanding and respect for each person's fundamental freedom."

The study explores research on education policies which turn teachers into "satisfiers" or "dissatisfiers." Teachers who experience more autonomy feel more satisfied in their work, are more motivated, and feel more competent, he says. Prof. MacBeath also refers to various research studies which show that, internationally, teachers have been leaving the profession in unprecedented numbers. The research team found that teachers who left did so within the first five years of teaching. Teaching is no longer a career for life. Bangladesh is also no exception to the situation.

Education International, the Brussels-based Federation of Unions of teachers and education workers, conducted an international study of teacher competences and standards in 2010. Some of the findings of the study: (i) A total of 10.3 million additional teachers will be needed worldwide by 2015; (ii) The problem is not just low teacher numbers, but also poor teacher morale and insufficient training.

Many trained teachers leave the profession because of low salaries and unfavourable conditions, such as large class size, lack of housing and even food security and lack of safety in schools, especially for women teachers. Developed countries are facing a similar problem of having to recruit, train and retrain large numbers of teachers after the existing ones retire. The worldwide declining status of teachers (partly because of cut-backs in salary) is also putting increased pressure on the profession, making it more difficult to attract new teachers.

In the face of the problems confronted not only by the educators but also the guardians and particularly the students, a change for the better is inevitable. But as the maxim goes, there is easiness in saying but some times insurmountable impediments are there in performing. The provisions of the Recommendations of Unesco-ILO, 1966 and 1997 concerning the status of teachers provide strength and inspiration to the teachers, for which World Teachers Day becomes very relevant. To the teachers in Bangladesh these two instruments continue to remain as a source of hope and inspiration not only in dealing with the issues which confront them in discharging their professional obligations, but also influencing the authorities to adopt forward looking steps in education. The Education Policy 2010 and the education law under process, amply bear testimony to that along with the representation of the teaching community in the two stipulations.

More than half a million teachers of Bangladesh earnestly crave for a change in line with their brothers and sisters in the teaching profession elsewhere in the world, which needs to be properly evaluated with appropriate socio-economic status and dignity. It is expected that all concerned with education will be imbued with the spirit of the theme of this year: 'A Call for Teachers'!

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