

In Celebration Of Our Teachers

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In almost every country, teachers form a very important part of the society making a significant contribution to the education and development of the coming generation. It is this profound impact that they have on the lives of generations of the world's citizens which ensures every country commemorates Teachers' Day annually. As part of the celebration of Education Week in Jamaica, Teachers' Day is celebrated traditionally on the first Wednesday in the month of May, which in 2021 will be on May 5. Each year, students, parents and the wider Jamaican community pay tribute to the teachers who have worked tirelessly to educate our nation. From early childhood development through to the primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary levels, Jamaican teachers are the gatekeepers of excellence ensuring future generations are equipped for the world ahead.

Jamaica also celebrates World Teachers' Day on October 5, which is an occasion to celebrate the profession of teaching across the globe. It was founded by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) in 1994 and is now celebrated jointly with UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Since its adoption in Paris in 1996 at the intergovernmental conference, the UNESCO/ILO recommendations have been considered a significant set of guidelines to promote teachers' status in the interest of quality education worldwide. The recommendations describe the rights and responsibilities of teachers and also puts forth the authority and obligations of international standards for the initial preparation, education, recruitment, employment, teaching and learning conditions.

The Covid19 pandemic has increased the challenges faced by teachers globally in already burdened education systems. As teachers, students and parents grapple with the new normal of online learning, almost exclusively until herd immunity is achieved through vaccination, we must support our teachers as they protect the right to education. Teachers have faced the difficulties that have arisen from the onset of the pandemic and have worked tirelessly to ensure learning is not disrupted. They have worked individually and collectively, around the world, to find solutions and create new learning environments for their students. This allows education to continue as they construct resilience and give shape to the future of education as well as the teaching profession.

Despite the overwhelming consequences of the pandemic, this global crisis has also been an extraordinary time for learning. We are learning how adaptable and resilient educational systems, policy makers, teachers, students and families can be. In fact, many countries placed a special focus on their teachers and how they had to quickly reimagine human connections and interactions to facilitate learning. The role of teachers has rapidly evolved becoming, in many ways, more difficult than when learning took place only in person. There are at least two (2) significant factors that have changed dramatically due largely to Covid19.

Firstly, because the traditional in-person teaching environment does not translate to a remote-learning environment, teachers have had to adapt their practices and be creative to keep students engaged. All this while every household has become a classroom and, more often than not, without an environment that supports learning. Secondly, the

pandemic has recalibrated how teachers divide their time between teaching, engaging with students, and administrative tasks. This has highlighted the need for flexibility and more time for student-teacher interactions.

The need for teachers to be sustained in every way, ensuring learning can continue in every country, is firmly backed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG). According to them, the Covid19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population and up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries. The shock of the pandemic on education has been unprecedented and has set the clock back on the attainment of international education goals. Disproportionately, this is affecting the poorer and most vulnerable and yet, the education community led by teachers has proved resilient, laying the groundwork for the reopening of schools worldwide.

In order to build back stronger education systems, countries will need to apply teaching initiatives that have proved to be effective during the remote learning phase and integrate them into the regular education system. It is critical to empower teachers, investing in the necessary skills development and capacity building to exploit the full potential of remote and blended learning. Equally important is to free teachers' time from administrative tasks and provide socio-emotional support for teachers. The pandemic and the extended school closures have changed the role of teachers and most of them were not prepared for such change; a comprehensive strategy is required for socio-emotional monitoring and psychosocial support to ensure teacher wellbeing and avoid burnout

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