

PRESS RELEASE

Democratic Practices in Education: Major International Conference

Democracies will thrive throughout the world only when all children learn and experience the fundamental principles and values of democracy from the earliest ages. To explore how education for active citizenship helps children learn democratic values, 350 early childhood practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and NGO activists from more than 70 countries from Europe and around the world will convene in Budapest, Hungary 9-12 October 2008, at the international conference *Active Citizenship: Democratic Practices in Education*.

This event will be a meeting of networks, hosted by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), a leading network of ECD professionals and organizations primarily from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Through the event, ISSA and other key international organizations involved such as UNICEF, the World Forum Foundation, the Open Society Institute, Children in Europe, the Roma Education Fund, Early Years, and the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Education will not only contribute to the development and promotion of democratic practices in education but will further strengthen international partnerships to support quality education for all.

Building on the increasing prominence of early childhood education and care in European policy agendas, this exciting and prestigious international event will focus on the crucial role of citizenship education as an important part of early childhood development. During the conference, participants will explore how the promotion of democracy, both in practice and through advocacy, can affect the quality of children's lives.

The Opening Reception of the Conference will take place in the **Hungarian Parliament Building**, further reinforcing the strong connection of decision-makers to the conference topic of active citizenship. ISSA is proud to welcome **Maria Calivis**, Regional Director, UNICEF Regional Office CEE/CIS as keynote speaker. The organizers are also very pleased to welcome distinguished guests from Hungary: **Dr. Zoltan Szabo**, Chair of the Education and Scientific Committee of the Hungarian Parliament, and **Mr. Gergely Arato**, State Secretary, Ministry of Education. ISSA believes that the active participation in the conference of government representatives, researchers, and practitioners from cross-cutting sectors, will strengthen mutually supportive partnerships between research, practice, and policy.

ISSA welcomes to the conference a diverse roster of distinguished keynote speakers whose inspirational speeches will address the issue of democracy and education from many different angles: **Prof. Jaap E. Doek**, Former Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; **Dr. Judith L. Evans**, Director Emeritus, Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development; **Dr. Jacqueline Hayden**, Programme Manager, Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity, Bernard van Leer Foundation; **Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed. D.**, Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Early Childhood and Family Policy, Co-Director of the National Center for Children and Families,

Associate Dean for Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University and Professor Adjunct at Yale University's Child Study Center; **Prof. Dr. Tatjana Koke**, Minister of Education, Ministry of Education and Science, Latvia; **Dr. Richard A. Nuccio**, Director, Citivas International Programs, Center for Civic Education; **Prof. Dr. Audrey Osler**, Director, Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Education, University of Leeds; **Dr. Charles N. Quigley**, Executive Director, Center for Civic Education; **Prof. Jacques van der Gaag**, Professor of Development Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Amsterdam; and **John Clark**, Hampshire's Deputy Director of Children Service's, Rights Respecting Schools.

In addition, on 10 October at 14:30, **Patrick Butler**, Vice President of Programs at the International Center for Journalists (USA), will present a session "*Why Don't They Cover us? Getting the Media to Focus on Early Childhood.*" Butler will address obstacles to better media coverage of ECD issues and how to overcome them. He will also announce the launch of two new initiatives to spur more and better coverage of ECD in newspapers, broadcast outlets, and web sites, including the *Oscar van Leer Fellowship for Journalism* sponsored by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and an interactive web-based training module sponsored by the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development.

A full program of the event and more information about the organizers can be found on the conference website: <http://www.diamond-congress.hu/issa2008/00home/00home.htm>. Media representatives are invited to attend conference sessions and to contact the conference organizers for additional information. Opportunities for interviews with keynote speakers and representatives from ISSA will also be available.

For further information please contact Eva Izsak at: 36-30-3535433 (Hungarian) or Liana Ghent at 36-30-9911855 (English).

###