

## Local unity essential in global fight against school privatisation

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The rise in commercialisation of public schools around the world must be opposed through union solidarity, according to Education International project director Angelo Gavrielatos.

The former Federation deputy president was a guest speaker at the union's Annual Conference and outlined the work *Education International* is doing on the frontline in far-flung corners of the globe to stop privatisation of public education systems.

"Commercialisation is the greatest threat to quality education for all," said Mr Gavrielatos. "We need to build a global response, but we need to think globally and act locally. There is no global response without national campaigns, state campaigns and local grunt. Acting locally gives us the power and leverage we need when negotiating with state, national and intergovernmental agencies."



In 2015, Mr Gavrielatos took his activism abroad and joined EI to help combat systematic privatisation of education in nations perceived as easy targets. "We build solidarity to confront the forces that are at our doorstep trying to destroy the great social enterprise in which we believe: public education," said Mr Gavrielatos.

"When the global response was born, we started in Kenya, Ghana, Philippines, India and Brazil. Three years later, we are operating actively in more than 16 countries. We commission research and then work with member organisations in those countries to build campaigns and generate unity through action."

"[Multinational education company] Pearson is one of our targets because you can see their tentacles around the world engaging manifestations of education privatisation. In Australia, they are trying to take over assessment, then colonise and take over curriculum and teacher development. This is why we launched our campaign here 12 months ago as the mechanics of it are exactly the same as what we are doing internationally."

Mr Gavrielatos warns that the commercial overrunning of public schools in the western African nation of Liberia is a test case that should send shockwaves around the world. "If you want to know what the endgame looks like, study the policy settings in Liberia," he said. "They have handed over all their schools to private companies, who take over existing systems through public-private partnerships, which guarantee profit at no risk to the company. It is a dangerous path."

"Thousands of kids were pushed out of their schools because of this experiment. The private providers wanted to cherry-pick their kids so they could promote the schools' success."

“The situation in Africa is very relevant here in Australia. The same week Liberia announced it was handing over schools to a private, outsourced company in 2016 [former UK prime minister] David Cameron announced his intention to make all public schools academies. The only thing that stopped it was the force of the unions.

“What they are doing in Africa is simply testing their products and using teachers and students as laboratory rats. They then aim to upscale their products in the UK, US and elsewhere.”

With the groundswell in awareness of the corporate pillaging of the public education system, the global response is only going to magnify. “We will target companies such as Pearson,” said Mr Gavrielatos. “We will target shareholders and take over their AGMs. We demand students before profits in the best tradition of our union. What these companies don’t understand is that this is a personal mission. We will keep fighting to get those bastards out of our classrooms.”