



The Director General of UNESCO,  
Sra. Audrey Azoulay,  
UNESCO  
7, place de Fontenoy,  
Paris.

7<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Dear Director General,

As members of CEAAL's Working Group on Educational Policy (GIPE), we have frequently collaborated with UNESCO in the field of Adult learning and education. In 2017, we were responsible for producing the report on the Status of adult learning and education in Latin America and the Caribbean for the Mid-term Review Meeting of the CONFINTEA VI, held in Suwon, South Korea. CEAAL is an association of 120 organizations which was founded in 1982. It is present in 21 Latin American and Caribbean countries and is dedicated to strengthening processes of education for young people and adults based on the principles of Popular Education understood as a human right and as the foundation for democratic and participatory societies. Paulo Freire was one of its first presidents.

Since its creation, UNESCO has played a vital role in calling the attention of governments to the importance of literacy as part of the basic human right to education. At the same time, as socio-economic contexts change, UNESCO has constantly called attention to the need to update our understanding of literacy and its role in contemporary society in which access to internet, social media and ICTs in general have increasingly gained greater weight. The annual International Literacy Day accompanied by its message from the Director General as well as the awarding of Literacy prizes contributes to maintaining global awareness concerning the continuing challenge of illiteracy. Much has been done to deepen public understanding of illiteracy and to advocate for greater investments in this field.

It is for these reasons that we were perplexed to read in your message for this year's ILD, the reference to the fact that "millions of men and women have been lifted from ignorance and dependency through a broad-based movement of literacy and the democratization of access to education" (Spanish translation: "millones de hombres y mujeres han sido rescatados de la ignorancia y la dependencia gracias a un amplio movimiento de alfabetización y democratización del acceso a la educación"). Practitioners and researchers have long questioned the concept of illiteracy as equivalent to ignorance. Illiteracy is a technical term used to define those who do not have the basic tools of reading, writing and mathematics. As

the very concept of lifelong learning and education, strongly promoted by UNESCO suggests people learn in different ways and in diverse contexts throughout their lives. Access to knowledge is not restricted to the literate. Millions of people worldwide whose right to learn to read and write has been denied have accumulated a wealth of knowledge.

Clearly, we recognise the fundamental importance of literacy in our graphocentric world but to stigmatise those who have been denied this right as ignorant is a backward step. Hence, we suggest that it would be appropriate to alter the above-cited phrase of the statement and to reaffirm that this is not the position of UNESCO.

We look forward to continue cooperating with UNESCO in the challenge to guarantee good quality education for all people.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rosa Elva Zúñiga López', written over a faint circular stamp or watermark.

Rosa Elva Zúñiga López  
General Secretary of CEAAL  
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