

April 21, 2017

Dr. Jim Yong Kim  
President  
World Bank  
1818 H St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20433

Dear Dr. Kim:

The undersigned are committed to the education and rights of all children around the world. As such, we call on the World Bank to stop investment in so-called low-fee private schools in general and specifically in Bridge International Academies.

We believe that a high-quality public education must be recognized as a public good, and that the provision of education is a primary responsibility of governments, not corporations and entrepreneurs. The World Bank, in partnership with a group of opportunistic international investors, is undermining the foundation of public education and democracy in many African countries. Bridge makes education a commodity to be bought and sold, which threatens fledgling democracies, increases segregation and expands marginalization.

If the World Bank is serious about helping children succeed, it would do better to promote the United Nations' sustainable development goals, adopted unanimously by 193 countries, which mandate free, equitable and high-quality education for all—the opposite of Bridge's disastrous record in Africa.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Kishore Singh, has deemed these kinds of public-private partnerships an "attack" on public schools and educators. According to Singh, privatization, specifically low-fee private schools, not only constrains social justice in education but also limits social justice through education.

The education offered by Bridge is unacceptable and substandard. School buildings are often unsafe and poorly constructed, the majority of teachers are unqualified and poorly trained, and the curriculum is scripted and fails to address the realities of the classroom. It is hard to find any aspect of Bridge schools that resembles high-quality education.

By supporting the expansion of low-fee private schools and other competitive practices, the World Bank is ensuring a large number of the world's most vulnerable children have no hope for a high-quality education.

Access to education is a fundamental human right and must not be based on a family's ability to pay. In Kenya the "low-cost" Bridge model relies on poor families spending between 44 percent and 138 percent of their household income to send three children to school. Students are fed a cookie-cutter curriculum in run-down buildings where more than 70 percent of teachers are unqualified.

The World Bank's continued support for Bridge is impossible to understand in light of recent court decisions confirming Bridge's poor track record. In Uganda, the High Court ruled in favor of the government, which asked to close all schools run by Bridge because of unqualified



American Federation of Teachers



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Uganda National Teachers'  
Union



Confederación de Trabajadores  
de la Educación de la República  
Argentina



Kenya National Union of  
Teachers

instructors, run-down facilities and poor academic results. Similarly, in Kenya, the High Court supported the closing of 10 Bridge schools for failure to meet basic education norms and standards.

Those whose goals are to privatize and commercialize this vital public good have started a campaign of intimidation. In Kenya, lawyers for Bridge have secured a temporary court order preventing Wilson Sossion, general secretary of the Kenyan National Union of Teachers, and other union members, from publicly criticizing Bridge. This gag order is outrageous and will have an undoubtedly chilling effect on the discourse over the future of education in Kenya. Bridge's tactics of intimidation strike at a core value of democratic nations—free speech.

In the World Bank's pursuit of high-quality education for all, it must immediately cease its support for low-fee private schools like Bridge International Academies. Instead, the World Bank should bring all stakeholders together—including teachers and their unions, support staff, administrators, parents, local governments and the community—in a renewed effort to remove the financial and social barriers keeping the world's children from reaching their full potential.

Respectfully,

AFL-CIO  
American Federation of Teachers (USA)  
Australian Education Union  
CAMPE (Bangladesh)  
Confederación de Trabajadores de la Educación de la República Argentina  
Danish Union of Teachers  
Federação Nacional da Educação (Portugal)  
GEW (Germany)  
Global Campaign for Education  
Global Campaign for Education-US  
Kenya National Union of Teachers  
Libraries Without Borders  
NASUWT-The Teachers' Union (UK)  
National Education Association (USA)  
National Union of Teachers (UK)  
New Zealand Educational Institute  
Program on Human Rights/Global Economy  
Public Services International  
South African Democratic Teachers Union  
STUNAM (Mexico)  
Sudanese Coalition for Education for All  
Uganda National Teachers' Union  
Union of Education Norway  
University and College Union (UK)



Public Services International



National Union of Teachers  
(United Kingdom)



Union of University Workers  
(Mexico)



Education & Science Trade  
Union (Germany)



CAMPE (Bangladesh)



Sudanese Coalition for  
Education for All