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HEMISPHERIC COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(Adopted at the ninth plenary session held on November 16, 2007)

[Pending revision by the Style Committee]

HEMISPHERIC COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(Adopted at the ninth plenary session held on November 16, 2007)

WE, THE MINISTERS OF EDUCATION OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS), gathered in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia from November 14 to 16, 2007 for the Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Education,

WE REAFFIRM, after taking stock of the lessons learned in designing, executing, monitoring, and evaluating early childhood policies, that early childhood is a decisive phase in the human life cycle and a comprehensive approach to it will allow us to overcome the challenges of poverty, inequity, and social exclusion.

WE AGREE, for the purposes of this Hemispheric Commitment, that early childhood education is fundamental in the process of comprehensive development of children from birth to eight years of age, and we recognize that it is provided in different ways in different countries, but must include a joint effort by the family, school, and the community to develop effective public policies, as well as the contribution of the various sectors in society.

WE RECOGNIZE that equitable and timely access to quality and integral education adapted to global and local contexts and global realities is a human right, a public good, and a political priority, including in the framework of comprehensive care for the very young, and we underscore the need to give priority to the most vulnerable groups and those with special educational needs.

WE RECOGNIZE the family as the first and irreplaceable medium for educating and taking care of girls and boys, as well as the role of communities and governments in promoting policies of equitable access to quality early childhood education and its effective incorporation into each country's educational system.

WE UNDERSCORE the importance for States of promoting and conducting research and evaluation of early childhood education and of disseminating the findings, in order to generate the new knowledge and indicators needed to make better decisions based on empirical evidence. Of particular interest would be research into the relationship between integral care for the very young and repetition and drop-out rates, and aggression, and violence at later stages.

WE REAFFIRM that governments should aspire to guarantee their peoples a quality education for all that: (i) satisfies the basic need to learn, which includes, *inter alia*, creating, reflecting, valuing, participating, knowing, doing, living together, and being; (ii) promotes participation and responsibility on the part of families and the community, and mass media, and local and municipal governments; (iii) fosters the development of factors relating to peace, development, and human rights, education in democratic values and practices, and protection of the environment; and (iv) incorporates technological innovation in order to develop the human skills needed to live in a knowledge society. In order to achieve an education with these characteristics, it is necessary to start in early childhood.

WE recognize the significant progress achieved in education in the region, thanks to governments' and civil society's efforts to guarantee inclusive, quality, and intercultural education adapted to global, local, and cultural circumstances, sponsored by the investments and institutional reforms set in motion.

WE UNDERTAKE to redouble our efforts to continue forging a democratic culture in our Hemisphere by implementing the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices, emphasizing that the values and practices that foster peaceful coexistence begin to be formed in early childhood.

WE ALSO UNDERTAKE to continue advancing in the development of reliable education indicators through the Regional Educational Indicators Project (PRIE) and to explore ways of developing appropriate early childhood and preschool education indicators, based on existing international efforts. We are convinced that effective policies are based on reliable and timely information and, for that reason, we stress the need to have early childhood indicators based on scientific evidence.

WE AFFIRM the commitment of States or pertinent authorities to promote quality professional preparation and ongoing development for early childhood education staff, teachers, and technical personnel. We recognize the commitment of educators throughout the Hemisphere to the education of our children and young people.

WE RECOGNIZE the efforts undertaken by member states to:

- a. Eradicate the worst forms of child labor and reduce the number of children that work in violation of national laws, ensuring educational opportunity for children and youth;
- b. Develop educational plans for youth and adults, including literacy teaching and continuing education in the framework of efforts to eradicate illiteracy;
- c. Advance the development of community, intercultural, and multilingual education;
- d. Encourage and implement strategies for providing education to the most vulnerable groups and others with special educational needs, linked or not to disabilities;
- e. Forge ahead with the dissemination, appropriate use, and inclusion of information and communication technologies in our countries' educational processes and systems, and
- f. Support the drafting of a Social Charter and its corresponding Plan of Action through the "Joint Working Group of the Permanent Council and CEPCIDI on the Draft Social Charter of the Americas."

WE RECOGNIZE the contributions of the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), to the follow-up, implementation, and evaluation of our mandates. We delegate to CIE the task of following up on and evaluating the agreements reached at this meeting.

WE RECOGNIZE ALSO the support given to CIE by the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) through its Department of Education and Culture, and instruct SEDI to continue assisting the Committee with its work of following up on the achievement of our goals.

WE RECOMMEND to our Heads of State and Government that we make a joint hemispheric commitment to quality education and comprehensive care for the very young, with a view to considering in the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Fifth Summit of the Americas, to be held in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009, guidelines for strengthening policies for early childhood that may contribute to the integral development of our countries.

WE agree to work together and with other relevant institutions – governmental, international, and civil society –to achieve the following objectives:

- a. Develop legal, ethical, and regulatory frameworks and/or financing mechanisms to ensure sustainable implementation of early childhood policies;
- b. Increase quality comprehensive early childhood education coverage, in accordance with each member state's possibilities and with the long-term goal of universalizing its integral care for the very young;
- c. Establish early childhood comprehensive care and education policies and processes and criteria for focusing on attending to the poor and vulnerable segments of society, ethnic groups, migrants, and groups with special educational needs;
- d. Implement comprehensive care programs for children that are tailored to their particular needs, characteristics, and contexts;
- e. Coordinate educational sectors and institutions with other national, local, and subnational authorities responsible for providing protection, nutrition, health, culture, and social welfare-related components in such a way as to guarantee the provision of comprehensive early childhood care;
- f. Strengthen initial preparation and quality on-going professional development for educators in early childhood education, including teachers, families, and communities as the first educational influences;
- g. Formulate policies and educational, inter-institutional, and inter-sectoral coordination strategies for the successful transition of children between the different stages in early childhood;
- h. Promote mechanisms for evaluating the quality of comprehensive care and early childhood education, and
- i. Encourage communication and dissemination policies regarding comprehensive early childhood care and education.

WE INSTRUCT the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), to implement our mandates in its 2007-2009 Work Plan, paying special attention to the need to supplement efforts to move toward comprehensive care in early childhood. To that end, the CIE should use the document "Guidelines for Early Childhood Education Programming" (CIDI/RME/doc.7/07), which includes *inter alia*, to carryout the following actions aimed at:

- a. Evaluating comprehensive early childhood care programs with a view to identifying ways of improving and generating databases to facilitate the exchange of meaningful experiences among countries;
- b. Identifying best practices in comprehensive care programs; experiences with intersectoral coordination; and legal, regulatory and funding frameworks, with a view to designing and implementing bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation agendas; as well as putting in place communication and dissemination strategies for comprehensive care and education for the very young;

- c. Exchanging experiences and practices in the evaluation of children's development in early childhood, and in the training of teachers and other personnel responsible for early childhood care and education;
- d. Strengthening and extending regional educational indicators for early childhood within the Regional Educational Indicators Project (PRIE);
- e. Broadening the scope of the Educational Portal of the Americas, the Latin American Network of Educational Portals (RELPE), and the educational portals of the member states, with a view to facilitating the sharing of successful experiences and contents among countries, thereby helping to strengthen early childhood care and education policies, and
- f. Fostering the participation of civil society in programs, projects, and strategies for early childhood.

WE EXPRESS our gratitude to the Government of Colombia for its warm and generous hospitality and its contribution to the success of this Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Education in the framework of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) of the Organization of American States (OAS).