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## 'Global Action Week' Puts Spotlight on Education of Poor

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From Bangladesh to Uruguay, a global grassroots effort to make public education more accessible in poor countries is scheduled to kick off this week with rallies and other awareness activities, as well as letters to government officials around the world.

During what is being billed as Global Action Week, almost 12 million educators in more than 65 countries plan to pressure their governments to draft national education plans, increase education aid, and end school fees, says the Global Campaign for Education, the umbrella group for the effort. The GCE is a coalition of trade unions, development agencies, and education community groups based in Brussels, Belgium.

Scheduled activities include a children's press conference with the deputy education minister in Bangladesh, and meetings with education officials as well as the

creation of radio and television spots in Senegal. And information about the campaign will be posted on the Web site of the National Education Association, the largest U.S. teachers' union.

Educators and activists are also e-mailing postcards and petitions to politicians and leaders of the "Group of Eight" countries that confer on economic issues, including President Bush and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

### 'How We Prioritize'

It's the responsibility of rich nations such as the United States to help make free public education a reality worldwide, argued Jill Christianson, a senior professional associate in the international-relations office of the NEA. The NEA and the American Federation of Teachers are two of the nearly 100 organizations participating in the campaign.

"It's a question of how we prioritize, and a sound education is a component of stable futures for children and societies," Ms. Christianson said.

### Advocates seek free public education for all children.

Ending school fees would be another step toward making public education accessible, organizers of the campaign say. Those costs, charged for schooling in many countries, often deter poor families from seeking an education for their children, especially girls.

An estimated one-fifth of the elementary-age children worldwide—approximately 125 million—are not attending school,

according to Education International, a 24.5 million-member federation of teacher unions based in Brussels and a campaign participant. An overwhelming two-thirds of them are girls.

The future doesn't look any better, campaign supporters say, despite an agreement made two years ago by 180 governments, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, and the World Bank to achieve free primary education by 2015 and gender equity by 2005 for the world's children.

Those goals, set at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, will likely be missed by 88 governments, and many haven't even developed plans for them yet, according to the Global Campaign for Education.

**FOLLOW-UP:** More information about Global Action Week is available on the Web at [www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)