

Opening of the Symposium

The Fourth Commonwealth Teachers' Research Symposium was officially opened on the evening of Wednesday, 18 March 2009 at the Press Conference Room of the US National Education Association, headquartered in Washington, DC. Following a brief introduction and welcome from Mr John Wilson, Executive Director, NEA, Dr Caroline Pontefract, Director, Social Transformation Programmes Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, brought a message from the Secretariat.

The Commonwealth message

Providing a background to the series of research symposia which the Secretariat has been presenting since 2006, Dr Pontefract said that the Secretariat's initiative in presenting these symposia was driven by a study conducted on the implementation of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol which identified the unreliability and inadequacy of data and research about teacher mobility across all regions of the Commonwealth and called on member countries to do more to capture teacher data for planning and policy-making. The first two symposia took the form of research retreats and were hosted by the Secretariat in Surrey, UK. The third symposium was held in Maputo, Mozambique in 2008. This symposium was hosted by the Ministry of Education of Mozambique. Following an invitation from the NEA, the fourth Symposium was being staged in the USA, a non-Commonwealth country.

Dr Pontefract also noted that although teachers are the single most critical resource for the attainment of quality universal primary education (UPE) by 2015, there is a global shortage of some 18 million qualified teachers, including a shortage of 13 million in developing countries, according to estimates by EI and UNESCO. Low teacher retention in many member countries is driving the momentum of large-scale teacher recruitment, mobility and migration among the large and wealthy, as well as small and developing member states.

Dr Pontefract concluded by conveying deep gratitude to the NEA leadership and Mr David Edwards of the NEA's International Relations Division in particular for their generous offer to host the event.

Keynote address



Mr Steven Obeegadoo

The keynote speaker for the formal opening, which took the form of a dinner, was Steven Obeegadoo, Director of Education For All, UNESCO, and former Minister of Education and Scientific Research of Mauritius, a member country of the Commonwealth since its independence. In introducing Mr Obeegadoo, Dr Roli Degazon-Johnson of the Commonwealth Secretariat noted that he was the son of two teachers and was called to the Bar at the Middle Temple, London, UK in 1988. Politically active since his youth, he was first elected to the Mauritius Parliament in 1991 and held the portfolios of Labour and Industrial Relations, and Fisheries and Marine Resources before his appointment as Minister of Education and Scientific Research in September 2000. During his term in office, Mr Obeegadoo spearheaded a series of major reforms in the education system of Mauritius which, in his own words, would *'make living in a multicultural society a worthwhile endeavour such that a sense of responsibility is manifested by children in relation to themselves, their environment and their society'*.

Mr Obeegadoo provided a wide-ranging overview of the state and condition of education delivery globally, embracing both Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries. He provided data on the numbers of children who are still not able to access primary education despite the Millennium Development and EFA Goals of ensuring that all children are in primary education by 2015. He stressed the importance that UNESCO and its partners placed on the quality of teaching in providing quality in education.