

ADDRESS CEMEA CONGRESS

Dear friends, congress delegates, distinguished guests,

My name is Mikael Leyi and I am the Secretary General of SOLIDAR, a progressive European network that has existed for more than 70 years and of which CEMEA is a member. Thank you for the opportunity to address you all in these trying times for France, Europe, and the world, as we are suffering from the effects of the global pandemic of Covid-19. The global response has been resolute and unprecedented, leading to a full or partial closure of most of the world's countries. We have saved hundreds of thousands of lives but as a side effect we also find ourselves in the middle of what risks being the worst economic downfall since the Great Depression with hundreds of millions of jobs lost, especially in the informal sector and affecting the most vulnerable. There is an imminent risk that the world is set back several decades in the fight against poverty and persisting inequalities. The economic and social effects will be long lasting and defining. It has also tested the EU institutions, the internal solidarity, and the coherence in response of our union.

There is good reason to regard this global systemic shock as a pretrial to the global effects of the ongoing climate and environmental crisis. We will overcome this pandemic, but our societies still must face multiple threats, all of which demand progressive and creative answers from our movement:

- The climate and environmental crisis pose a real threat to our civilization.
- Rapidly growing inequalities and destructive conflicts tear our societies apart.
- Democracy, democratic values, freedoms, and rights, as well as regionalism and multilateralism are under attack in a way not seen in decades.

If the current experience of the pandemic tells us anything it is that a strong society based on trust and solidarity is required to face the challenges it comes with, to build enough resilience and offer much needed hope. It has underlined, once again, that a strong public sector is fundamental to secure the welfare for citizens and to cope with the recurrent crisis our societies are exposed to. It demonstrates how interdependent, unequal, and unfair our Europe and our world is.

The Conference of the Future of Europe therefore comes timely and should offer an opportunity to re-envision the European project in a progressive way. Because the time is ours as progressives. It is time for our values, ideas, and dreams. It is time to set a new political agenda in Europe and globally based on the values of freedom, democracy, equality, sustainability, and solidarity. Characterised by the participation of its citizens and by new more transparent forms of decision making.

The central question is how we now rebuild our societies. It should not be by looking back for answers, but by identifying a different course to a new normal. Coming out of this crisis we need to realise that the path can only be shared to be successful. There is a need for more European and international cooperation to reinvent our economic development model, to create new kinds of jobs, to bring focus on the well-being of people, counter the threats to our health and to organise and educate for the future to win the societal transformation that we need.

And as CEMEA you have an important role to play **in forming the ideas and minds of an active citizen, to use education as the powerful tool it is to liberate the capacity and potential in each child, youth and adult to be their very best and actively take part in the shaping of our shared future. As a member of SOLIDAR and a broad network of organisations CEMEA is vital in the work to shape a more progressive and sustainable future for France and Europe, to educate and motivate citizens and activists to be more than they thought they could be, and to support the broad alliances of**

progressive organisations that we will need to achieve a true Social and Sustainable Europe. Together we shall seize the possibility to become the leading European force for alliance building of progressives with the capacity to play an important role in the fight against nationalistic and right-wing populism in Europe and beyond, and a platform for expressing and articulating progressive demands for action.

With this I want to thank you for listening, I wish you a great congress and look forward to meeting you all!

Thank you.