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PUBLIC EDUCATION – KEY TO AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY

ACSSO President Judith Bundy reflected today on the new school year starting at a time when national and world security matters dominate the political agenda. However she cautioned that "any nation that sidelines education for even the briefest period, is guilty of short-changing its youth and its own future".

"There can be no greater long term investment in national security than through support for a strong public education system".

Judith reflected on the divides that still characterise Australian education, and asked how we as a society can continue to tolerate the inequities that are so evident.

"What is fair about the funding mechanisms that see some children starting school in well equipped air-conditioned classrooms whilst others are consigned to shabby and hot transportables?"

"How can a decent, multicultural society encourage the creation of gated mono-cultural schools which shield their children from the critical thinking and questioning of the kind that contributes to the very foundations of our democracy, and is so evident in our public schools?"

"State education ministers have signed up to the statement that quality government schooling is important for ensuring a socially and culturally cohesive society. ACSSO is concerned that the Commonwealth Government does not endorse this view."

"Unfortunately, the Commonwealth appears to have no position on equity and the relationship between quality public schooling and the health of society."

"How can we be content with the fact that whilst our highest performing fifteen year olds rank with the best in the world, there is a huge number of young Australians at the other end of the scale - and these students are generally boys, indigenous or socio-economically disadvantaged."

"ACSSO looks forward to 2003 as the year when equity is returned to Commonwealth Government school funding policies. Of the nine Australian ministers of education, only the Commonwealth Minister has failed to embrace a new set of funding principles for schools in this country."

"These principles are not radical, but they do have the fundamental principle of 'giving every child a fair go' as their base. The gap between the educational rich and poor needs to be closed, and quickly."

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