Dear Madams, Dear Gentlemen:

First I would like to thank you the opportunity for being here with all of you who come from all parts of the world to discuss a topic that is dear to my heart: how to improve education through inclusive ways and specially how Open Educational Resources (OER) can be a crucial element to move such debate forward and implement concrete solutions.

In this sense I thank UNESCO, the Common Wealth of Learning for organizing such high profile meeting, and all of you who have been in the OER debate for probably much longer than I have been.

I also want to thank some of my Brazilian colleagues, specially Representative Paulo Teixeira – author of the OER Federal Bill in Brazil, to which I am the rapporteur – and who have invited me to embark in such an amazing journey through the Open Education world; my colleague also present here today with us, State Representative Simão Pedro, author of the OER São Paulo State Bill, that may be approved in the next couple of weeks; to my colleagues at the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who have been moving the Access to Knowledge agenda internationally for so many years, including better exceptions and limitations for education; and least but not last Carolina Rossini, who could not be with us at this occasion, and her team and community at the OER-Brazil project, who is been pushing this debate in Brazil for so many years and has been able to engage so many of us. In this sense, I also take the opportunity to invite you for the workshop she and her colleagues have organized in the civil society/academia parallel event just behind those doors.

In Brazil, as abroad, the reality of most educational resources is that they are restricted to a set of traditional players with access through institutional employment or enrollment. As such, many educational materials can cost a lot to access; or if access is free, copyright restrictions block creative reuse, restricting the actions of remix essential to modern pedagogical activity. This follows the economic market for educational resources, which is a typical content sales market. Educational materials are packaged up as copyrighted goods that have to be bought from a store or accessed through course fees, repositories with restricted access, or directly from the manufacturer-publisher.
This reality is being directly challenged by another reality: that of Internet-supported commons-based peer production. Educational resources are subject to many of the same network effects as encyclopedia and software. They are copyrighted works, they are modular, they are recombinable—as they should be since they need to be relevant to different cultural and regional needs. But they are also subject to a set of unusual pressures, from the traditional business structures of the publishing industry to the magnified role in the market of the governments who purchase the vast majority of textbooks and other materials.

OER are teaching, learning, and research materials in any medium that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. The use of open file formats improves access and the reuse potential of OERs which are developed and published digitally. Open educational resources can include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, research articles, videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge. The importance of this definition is that it clearly reflects how the discussion is framed in Brazil within a broader movement of access to knowledge and consumer rights.

A consensus has started to form worldwide that the traditional textbook and educational resources may be a broken model in some levels. Open Educational Resources (OER), the focus of our work during these 3-day event in Paris, the city of light, offer a free and open content alternative, and new business models are emerging and should be taken into account to generate jobs and innovation in the market side. But we can never forget that education is not just about market, but actually it is a human and fundamental right.

The OER philosophy identifies educational materials as common and public goods from which all should be able to benefit. This view is supported by the notion that knowledge itself is a collective social product that naturally forms a commons which should be accessible to all. OER, when it is properly designed and reflects legal and technical interoperability, encourages and enables the open production and sharing of, as well as access to, educational content and resources. This alone is a valuable societal good, increasing the potential value of investments made in education by government. But OER creates the opportunity for a more fundamental and transformative change: the move from passive consumption of educational resources to the formal engagement of educators and learners in the creative process of education content development itself.
This discussion is extremely relevant at this point in history in Brazil. We are at a turning point in Brazilian policy history. Despite many people still fearing openness and transparency, Brazil signed the international declaration on open government. Brazil also approved legislation on access to governmental information, which entered into force in May 2012, it approved local legislation that gives preference to the use of free software within the government administration, and it is discussing implementing policy related to open educational resources (OER) at different governmental levels. Brazil is also reforming the country’s copyright act in order to strike a better balance for society. It is also a moment, to which I have dedicated my days and nights over the past few months, when we discuss the National Plan of Education, a policy that sets the next 10 years of educational strategy and goals for Brazil.

Education is one of the most important instruments of social inclusion, and is essential to reducing inequalities.

The National Plan of Education (PNE) represents the highest level of educational policy in Brazil. Formulated through a participatory process, which resulted in a text that benefited from more than 3,000 suggestions, and involved civil society, government, and Congress, the Plan sets guidelines, goals and priorities to be implemented by 2020. It was preceded by the PNE 2001–2010 and intends to present a systemic view of education through 20 goals.

The main goals of the National Plan of Education are: a) introduce the Student-Quality Cost; b) increase access to children between 0-3 years old; c) provide pre-school to all; d) provide literacy to all and extend access to school; e) promote educators in order to increase education quality; f) implement the principle of democratic management; g) provide inclusion for people with special needs, among others.

And yes, we have contemplated OER in the Plan. OER is mentioned in three different directives as part of the educational targets for 2020, specifically targets 5.3, 7.11 and 7.13 of the latest version of the PNE bill.

OER's philosophy also finds fertile ground to bloom on the Internet, where the expansion of digital technologies ruptures pre-network barriers of space, time, and money, allowing socially beneficial consequences such as new forms of knowledge production and distribution to emerge. And this is a crucial realization in a moment that Brazil has implemented a Broadband Plan, which, until 2015 will connect our more than 85 thousand rural and urban k-12 network of public schools. The
Brazilian Congress is also in an advanced pace of discussions to approve a Civil Framework Bill for the Internet, with basic principles guaranteeing rights to users, as well as safe harbors to Internet Service Providers, and the implementation of network neutrality, all of which will be essential to the innovation of the Internet, and to provide models that incentivize OER.

I am happy to provide you more details on the Bills under discussion in Brazil. We soon will publish our report and a new version of the OER Federal Bill and your suggestions as OER experts are welcome. To sum up, both Federal and State Bills establish that publicly – directly or indirectly - funded educational resources should be open to society through open licensing schemes and for free or at a low cost. Additionally, both bills provide that the government will invest in, and support, the development of a federated network of open repositories, so people can easily find and access OER material produced in Brazil.

Brazilians access OER from all over the world, we are among the 10 biggest users of Connexions, for example. So, now it is time for us to contribute back. Language still is a barrier, but we are happy with the great possibilities to collaborate with Portuguese-speaking countries, from Europe, to Africa and Asia.

It is also a moment when the concept of open education, as defined by the Cape Town Open Education Declaration from 2007 has started to be reflected in some practices that implement OER projects in the classroom. The OER-Brazil project works on it providing capacity-building and mapping such initiatives, but it is also time for all of us to ask what is the role of the government to directly engage in the development and support of projects that aim to develop OER with quality and impact.

But for that, I need your help show-casing good policy and practices, and what has been, until now, their concrete impact in providing a more democratic access to education.

The main message that moves OER forward in Brazil is that publicly-funded educational resources should be OER, and OER is necessary to foster international human rights and the Brazilian constitutional right to education. This message is also supported by the need for innovation in publishing, teaching and learning methodologies, and for the revalorization of teachers.

21 June 2012
Representative Angelo Vanhoni
House of Representatives
Workers Party – Brazil
dep.angelovanhoni@camara.gov.br