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FLREA Director Speaks at Education for Democracy Conference in Morocco

Annette Boyd Pitts, founding Executive Director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. (FLREA), in Tallahassee spoke at the 12th World Congress on Civic Education held May 24-30, 2008 in Casablanca and Ifrane, Morocco. The conference brought together leaders in the field of education for democracy from throughout the world including Ireland, Hungary, Jordan, Argentina, Romania, the Philippines, Indonesia, Honduras, Estonia, Mali, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Montenegro, among many others. Sixty five countries were represented at the conference which was held by invitation under the patronage of His Majesty Mohammed VI, King of Morocco as well as the Moroccan Ministry of Education, the Higher Council for Education, and Al Akhawayan University.

Pitts has worked in over twenty countries to advance education for democracy efforts. FLREA currently works in Hungary, Romania, Panama, and Peru through the Civitas International Exchange Program. The Civitas program consists of reciprocal partnerships between U.S. universities and NGO's, and other entities and organizations in emerging democracies to advance civic education. The Civitas program is directed nationally by the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, California and funded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Education for Democracy Act approved by the

U.S. Congress. Additional support is provided by the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and other sources.

Pitts presented sessions at the World Congress addressing how civil society and government can work together to institutionalize civic education reforms. Mark Molli, Associate Director of the Center for Civic Education, co-presented the session with Pitts. Pitts also presented a session on involving gatekeepers in education for democracy efforts. Models were highlighted from the United States, Hungary and Romania utilizing gatekeepers from the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, Ministry of Education, legislatures, Parliament, and civic organizations. Representative Anitere Flores, Chair of the Education Committee, Florida House of Representatives as well as Representative Curtis Richardson, Florida House of Representatives also participated in the gatekeeper session via Skype.

“It was an honor to be invited to participate in the World Congress,” stated Pitts. “This is truly an opportunity to share best practices, network with other countries, and evaluate strategies for advancing civic education programs and partnerships.” Pitts added

The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. is a private, non-profit working primarily in Florida with K-12 students and teachers. Pitts visits classrooms throughout Florida regularly with government officials and is a framer and writer for the Florida Department of Education’s Committee to develop new sunshine state standards for social studies. Pitts has authored a variety of instructional materials, published articles in a wide range of professional publications including the International Journal of Social Education and The Florida Bar Journal, developed model training programs, and implemented a variety of innovative initiatives such as democracy camps.

“I am always humbled by the experience of attending the World Congress,” stated Pitts. “The people, the commitment, and the work ethic keep me motivated to continue in the field and remain optimistic about the future of democracy.”

“In the United States, many citizens do not participate in our democracy, even the most basic forms of participation such as voting,” said Pitts. “It is important for students to experience how our government works, understand their rights and responsibilities, and participate in discussions on how to sustain and improve our democracy,” Pitts added.

Pitts concluded that the conference was refreshing to interact with leaders from 65 countries to explore the benefits of civic and political engagement and to witness the interest of so many countries in developing a democratic form of government. While the countries varied in their indicators of democratization, each representative country had NGO’s, civic leaders, and/or government officials interested in expansion of education for democracy efforts.

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