On the 20th anniversary of its formation, a coalition of public education stakeholders met in Chicago at the Trinational Conference in Defense of Public Education. Over 160 delegates from Canada, the United States and Mexico participated in the three day conference. The Trinational Coalition is an informal organization that brings together people from the three NAFTA countries—teacher union activists, higher education faculty, students and parents who value public education and its key contribution to a democratic society. OSSTF/FEESO has participated in the Trinational for over 15 years and was represented by members of the provincial executive and staff.

Before the conference officially began, delegates toured a social justice secondary school and gathered at the Canadian consulate, Mexican consulate and the Chicago branch of the U.S. Department of Education to deliver a letter that called for adequate funding for public education and a halt to privatization. While representatives from the U.S. Dept. of Education and Mexican consulate met with a small group of delegates to receive the letter, representatives from the Canadian consulate refused to meet and did not allow anyone into the building.

OSSTF/FEESO President Paul Elliott was part of a plenary panel that opened the conference, and highlighted the struggles that education workers have faced in the wake of attacks on collective bargaining rights. In addition, Elliott drew attention to the effects of the austerity agenda and the threats to public education by neo-liberal and conservative forces in Canada.

The conference is held every two years alternating between Mexico, Canada and the U.S. This 11th conference in Chicago provided an opportunity to learn more about the different realities in the three countries, as well as the similarities that reflect the influence of globalization on public education.

Members of the Trinational Coalition will continue to share information with each other, conduct research and show solidarity to protect and enhance public education. A conference declaration was adopted and can be found at www.trinationalcoalition.org.