REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION:
NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND REGIONAL CO-OPERATION
FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Declaration about Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific

Tokyo, Japan, 8-10 July 1997
We, participants of the Asia and Pacific Regional Conference on Higher Education National Strategies and Regional Co-operation for the 21st Century,¹

1. Recalling, on one hand, the terms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states in article 26 that "every person has the right to education"...and that "higher education shall be accessible to all, on the basis of merit", and, on the other hand, the UNESCO Constitution which encourages institutional exchanges in the area of education;

2. Recognizing the importance of the analysis and recommendations of the Policy Paper on Change and Development in Higher Education launched by UNESCO in 1995 and resulting from a world-wide reflection on the role of higher education in society; the view of the International Commission on Education for the XXI Century that "Universities in developing countries have a duty to carry out research that should contribute to solving the most serious problems facing these countries"; and the conclusion of the World Commission on Culture and Development that development is "a far more complex undertaking than had been originally thought" and that it should not be "seen as a single, uniform, linear path, for this would inevitably eliminate cultural diversity and experimentation, and dangerously limit humankind's creative capacities in the face of a treasured past and an unpredictable future";

3. Noting the exceptional diversity of and variety within the Asia and Pacific region with regard to demography, religion, culture, ethnicity and education, with the most populous nations existing alongside small states, and the region including not only some of the fastest growing and wealthiest economies but also some of the poorest; and further noting that this region has been characterized as the cradle of civilization, of the world's great religions and philosophies, and the earliest educational systems,

4. Pointing out that the rapid growth and in-depth transformation of societies and of key regional economies has resulted in a new appreciation of the role of higher education in technological development and increased demands for specialized professionals, while the increasing use of new information and communications technologies provides exciting possibilities for innovation in course design and delivery, for access to intellectual resources and for building new networks of experts and institutions, thus requiring that the concept and practices of lifelong learning be further developed;

5. Acknowledging that as the countries of the region draw closer together through trade, improved transportation and rapid communications into a seemingly common destiny, each one is consciously fostering its own sense of identity and nationhood, and rediscovering its cultural heritage and the value of its languages. In recent years, the region has demonstrated impressive capacity for innovation, especially in the application of science and technology, and exceptionally high rates of economic growth. In 1960, Asia had only 4 per cent of the world-wide GNP, whereas it now accounts for 25 per cent, with this figure being predicted to reach 30 per cent by the year
2000. However, in many professional fields there are on-going serious shortages in the supply of qualified professionals while rapid growth has resulted in major urban and social problems, and serious degradation of the environment.

6. **Observing** that significant progress has been made in recent years in the development and strengthening of higher education within the countries of the region, particularly leading to improved student access, strengthened research and postgraduate programmes, more equitable representation of different social groups among graduates, renewed curricula and adoption of new teaching and delivery methods, and enhanced institutional management and strategic planning capacity. At the same time, many nations of the region are still far from achieving a desirable number and quality of graduates required by the new economic situation.

7. **Noting** that the main trends in higher education in the region include the following:
   - Higher education across the region is under considerable strain. Student enrolments continue to increase resulting in further pressure on public funding for higher education institutions; the level of financial resources is often considered inadequate and there is widespread evidence of experimentation to diversify funding sources, including reinforced links with the productive sector;
   - Gender inequality, particularly among students, academic staff and senior management, continues to be an issue of considerable concern at all levels in the majority of countries. In a number of countries at the undergraduate level, female participation has approached or exceeded 50 per cent of enrolments, but generally female students are concentrated in "traditional" feminine disciplines. In many countries, women constitute no more than 20 per cent or 30 per cent of academics, while in other instances women are practically excluded from participation in higher education at all;
   - In many countries, higher education institutions are heavily concentrated in urban areas, whereas the majority of the population lives in rural areas, thus requiring new mechanisms to address rural disadvantage; other disadvantaged sectors of society, such as those with disabilities, are not adequately served;
   - As a result of international developments in science and technology and their impact on both economic development and social lifestyle, new demands have emerged for researchers, technicians and other specialised professionals and for an increased level of co-operation with industry in R&D. Frequently there are serious mismatches in the demand for and supply of highly trained personnel, especially in countries undergoing rapid economic growth and industrialization;
   - Dramatic increases have occurred in the number of private higher education institutions, with accompanying diversification in structures, curriculum and teaching methods and management approaches resulting from both internal factors (such as changes in academic disciplines and new instructional methods) and external factors (such as population growth, the need to cater for more diverse clienteles and changing labour market requirements). Particularly important has been the development of non-university institutions and the establishment of open universities and distance learning systems;
• There is increasing concern in many countries with regard to the quality of courses, facilities, staff and graduates and the deterioration of infrastructure (laboratories, buildings and libraries) and a lack of scientific equipment;

• Unemployment of graduates especially in countries undergoing rapid transition, and lack of highly qualified professionals from less developed nations, have unfortunate long-term consequences for a number of countries of the region;

• Many leaders of higher education in the region see the need for better integration of western concepts and values with Eastern philosophy and culture;

• In many countries, teaching and learning procedures are often based largely on memorization and recall, which do not develop analytical and problem-solving skills. Frequently, undue emphasis is placed on the immediate utility of knowledge rather than on fundamental wisdom while the persistence of dogmatic approaches in education seriously hinders the development of enquiring minds;

• The lack of close links, in many countries, between universities and other post-secondary institutions, and between higher education institutions and secondary school is a matter of on-going concern;

8. Recognizing the various initiatives taken over the past decade by several governmental and non-governmental organizations and higher education institutions (e.g. debates in the framework of APEC for the formulation of a regional programme in higher education for human resource development; restoration of the activities of the SEAMEO Regional Institute for Higher Education and Development (RIHED); the recent formation of the Association of Universities of Asia and Pacific (AUAP); establishment of the UMAP University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific Programme (UMAP) which aims at promoting student mobility at undergraduate level; the formation of the UNESCO-supported Asia Pacific Higher Education Network (APHEN) to foster research collaboration; progress with the UNESCO Chairs, UNITWIN and UNISPAR Programmes and the conclusions of various conferences on higher education issues and reforms hosted by different countries of the region;

9. Taking into account the conclusions of the Sixth Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and those Responsible for Economic Planning in Asia and the Pacific, organized by UNESCO in co-operation with ESCAP, which called for support for regional and national programmes to encourage mobility, networking and quality monitoring in higher education; Resolution No. 1.6 adopted by the twenty-eighth session of the General Conference of UNESCO in November 1995, which called for the strengthening of regional co-operation in higher education in Asia and the Pacific notably by taking appropriate measures to establish a Regional Programme in Higher Education in UNESCO's Bangkok Office and which invited the Director General to ensure that development of the programme be discussed "in a regional conference on higher education for the preparation of a world conference on higher education planned for 1998"; and the results of various recent major meetings within the region, including those at Armidale, Penang, Tokyo and Xiamen, and the instructional Conference which took place in Manila where a special Declaration was approved;
We, the participants of the Asia and Pacific Regional Conference on National Strategies and Regional Co-operation for the 21st Century, assembled in Tokyo, Japan, from 8 to 10 July 1997, do hereby declare that:

1- Higher education is essential for any country to reach the necessary level of economic and social development and social mobility in order to achieve increased living standards and internal and international harmony and peace based on democracy, tolerance and mutual respect. At the end of the century, we reaffirm that the aims of higher education can be summarised as follows: to educate responsible and committed citizens, to provide highly trained professionals to meet the needs of industry, government and the professions; to provide expertise to assist in economic and social development, and in scientific and technological research; to help conserve and disseminate national and regional cultures, drawing on the contributions from each generation; to help protect values by addressing moral and ethical issues; and to provide critical and detached perspectives to assist in the discussion of strategic options and to contribute to humanistic renewal;

2- All higher education systems and institutions should give a high priority to ensuring the quality of provision and outcomes. However, great care should be taken in making comparisons between the achievement of different higher education systems and institutions since it is not possible to arrive at one set of standards applicable to all countries and institutions and against which institutions can be assessed. Further, higher education institutions need appropriate financial and human resource to achieve quality of provision;

3- Modern information and communications technology provides considerable promise to enhance teaching and learning in higher education by both on-campus and distance education students, and disabled students who tend to be denied access to traditional institutions, provide access to technical and scholarly information resources, and to facilitate communications among researchers and teachers and the establishment and enhancement of networks of institutions and scholars. Already the notion of the virtual university is being actively explored within the region. At the same time, harnessing this technology will require considerable investment in hardware, software and staff development, while deliberate efforts to ensure that the human and social interaction elements of education are not undervalued.

4- Access to scholarly communication is an essential element of cultural understanding and the further development of higher education institutions. With the increased emergence of digitalization and the increasing reliance on telecommunications as a means of scholarly communication, it is important that access to communication be open and affordable. Governments of the region should work to ensure that control of telecommunications links and software infrastructure is widely shared;

5- While recognizing that globalization and internationalization are irreversible trends, support for these concepts should not lead to dominance or new forms of imperialism by major cultures and value systems from outside the region; rather, it is of vital importance that every effort should be taken to protect and promote the strengths of local cultures and intellectual and scholarly traditions;

6- Regional co-operation among the countries of the region, especially in higher education, can make significant contributions in addressing major policy problems, strengthening national capacity in economic and social development, and facilitating the sharing of important expertise and experience. Regional co-operation is especially desirable in view of the
diversity of the region and the potential for dynamic collaboration. In addition, higher education institutions should explore opportunities to promote processes aiming at regional integration without losing diversity;

7- Involvement in decision-making by all key stakeholders of higher education institutions is of utmost importance. Experience has demonstrated the value of such participation in bringing to decision-making a variety of different perspectives.

8- The concept of lifelong learning is of utmost importance. In rapidly changing economies, the labour market will constantly require new and different skills and so mechanisms must be enhanced to allow professionals to upgrade their skills at regular intervals and develop new competencies. People's needs of lifelong learning have expanded in all countries of the region. Higher education institutions thus must offer learning opportunities in response to diverse demands and work co-operatively with other agencies and employers to ensure that appropriate courses are widely available. Ready access and flexibility in timing are of utmost importance.

9- Determined efforts are necessary to increase access to higher education, especially for groups currently poorly represented. Distance education and open learning can play a major role in widening access.

10- There is an urgent need to develop a plan of action and accompanying guidelines for co-operation especially related to the key issues of relevance, quality, management and finance, and co-operation which are summarised as follows:

**Relevance** refers to the fit between what higher education institutions do and what society expects of them. Relevance requires higher education to make an enhanced contribution to the development of the whole education system, notably through improved teacher education and educational research, and through reinforcement of its community service functions, including activities to eliminate poverty, hunger and disease. Relevance requires better articulation with the world of work and democratization of access to higher education, wider opportunities for participation during the various stages of life as well as the full involvement of the higher education community in the search for solutions to pressing human problems, such as population control, environmental degradation, and the quest for peace, international understanding, democracy and human rights. Academic freedom and responsible institutional autonomy particularly in the core academic functions are crucial for the achievement of the goal of relevance.

**Quality** refers to standards of resourcing and provision, and the achievements or outputs of an institution or system. Quality is a multi-dimensional concept and it is not possible to arrive at one set of quality standards applicable to all countries and against which institutions can be assessed. Quality embraces all the main functions and activities of higher education: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, infrastructure and the academic environment. It can be implemented through comparisons between observed and intended outcomes and constant analysis of the sources of dysfunction. Both internal self evaluation and external review are vital components of any well developed quality assurance system. The concept of accountability is closely allied with quality. No system of higher education can fulfil its mission unless it demands the highest quality of itself. Continuous and permanent assessment is necessary to reach this objective. At the same time, it must be acknowledged
that great care must be exercised in making quality assessments since it involves matters of judgement, academic values and cultural understanding.

**Management and Finance** covers both internal institutional management, funding and resource issues, as well as relations of higher education institutions with the state and national planning and co-ordination. Higher education institutions need to adopt forward-looking management practices which respond to the needs of their environments and which are articulated in their missions. Today, despite the general trend towards diversified sources of funding, public support for higher education and research remains essential to ensure achievement of educational and social missions. Both institutions and national agencies can develop appropriate strategies to strengthen management, planning and policy analysis capacities.

Co-operation at the national, regional and international levels is essential as, today, no institution can realistically expect to attain the highest standard in every field by itself. Furthermore, the steady advance of information and communication technologies must facilitate inter-university co-operation. Society as a whole must in a democratic system support education at all levels. Mobilization for this purpose depends on the awareness and involvement of Parliaments, the media and governmental and non-governmental organizations.

**PLAN OF ACTION**

Based on the principles, observations and recommendations set out in the Declaration of Higher Education approved by the Conference, and considering that strong support is needed for the renewal of systems through new policies and new paradigms for higher education founded on such concepts as sustainable development, lifelong education, globalization of knowledge, continuity of the reform process, anticipatory capacity, transparency and accountability, involvement of Parliaments and the media, and preservation of cultural identity and values, the following is recommended:

**Joint Action Plans** must be established, in order to prevent duplicated efforts, to optimize efficiency and to ensure the further development of higher education through the enhanced mobilization of additional resources, by international and regional organizations dealing with inter-university co-operation and strengthening of global networks, by all regional, sub-regional and national associations of universities and higher education institutions, by the representatives of private and public universities, by networks of institutions for research and teaching, as well as by development organizations and agencies, governmental and non-governmental organizations. The United Nations University and, in particular, the Institute of Advanced Studies in Tokyo, should co-operate with higher education institutions of the region in strengthening networks and in building global networks leading to the solution of pressing global problems of human survival and welfare. The mass media of the region should be called on to support these initiatives.

**Governments and Parliaments** must fulfil their commitments to higher education and be accountable for pledges made at regional and world conferences over the past decade with regard to the provision of human and financial resources. This includes, inter alia, the establishment of effective new mechanisms to deal with policy and legislation, appropriate follow-up activities, monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the achievement of stated goals and the promotion of institutional autonomy.
Each higher education institution must define its mission in harmony with the overall goals of the sector itself, translate this mission into observable indicators and allocate the required resources. The culture of evaluation should thus be established or strengthened in all institutions. These plans of actions should be based on the principles mentioned above and on the principles and considerations of the Declaration approved by this conference and on the proposals stated in this plan of action.

UNESCO, through the joint efforts of Headquarters, PROAP and other regional offices in Asia and the Pacific and specialised agencies such as the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), and in co-operation with other UN agencies such as the Economic and Social Council of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), must reinforce the programmes of higher education in Asia and the Pacific, including its contribution to the development of the whole education system, and, in particular, must reinforce its Unit in Higher Education at its Bangkok Office, so that this may:

• carry out studies, analyses, projects and research activities to support the elaboration of public policies and other initiatives related to higher education in the region. In particular, UNESCO should sponsor a regional process to explore the possibility of developing a framework for quality assessment to feed into the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris;
• provide a venue for the discussion of issues, current problems, long-term challenges and opportunities related to higher education in the region;
• foster training for leaders and senior managers of higher education institutions in the region;
• function as information centre that supports both the work of research groups and of the academic community in the field of higher education in Asia and the Pacific, as well as that of civil society, the state and the productive sector.
• co-ordinate the implementation of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme in the region and, in particular, to stimulate the development of regional centres of excellence, through the creation of thematic or geographical networks (with special attention given to networks for innovation, for the utilization of new technologies and for distance education and also for studies on higher education issues);
• work in partnership with regional institutions, associations and networks;
• act as a regional clearing house for inter-country information on higher education institutions and systems in Asia and the Pacific.

The elaboration of plans and decisions taken by the organizations mentioned above should be based on the principles stated below:

**Relevance**

**Major social problems of humankind**

1. Higher education must give every student the philosophical, historical, psychological and anthropological foundations of knowledge with regard to humankind, its environment and its different societies. In addition, the motivations, aspirations, transactions and achievements of different peoples, within the context of their respective histories and cultures must be communicated.

2. Higher education must support research and pilot curriculum projects which provide expertise to facilitate access to modern technology and scientific
discoveries, but which also lead to the understanding, appreciation, internationalization and dissemination of human and societal values, with special attention to the goals of peace and democracy and the protection of the environment.

**Responsibility towards other education levels**

3. Higher education must act on its responsibility and role towards other levels of education. This is needed not only to ensure that students are better prepared for higher education, but also to bring to bear the resources and expertise of the higher education community to the tasks of teacher training, socio-economic research on such education variables as school retention and repetition, appropriate pedagogies, and educational policy alternatives, thereby improving education at all levels.

**Regional integration**

4. Higher education institutions must promote processes aimed at regional integration. Furthermore, cultural and educational integration should be the bases for political and economic integration. In a global environment, higher education institutions must approach their studies on regional integration in the light of the specific economic, social, cultural, ecological and political aspects involved.

**Access**

5. Governments must expand and diversify opportunities for every citizen to benefit from higher-level skills, training, knowledge and information which are the qualifications for entry into the world of work. Serious efforts should be made to increase participation rates in higher education. Appropriate strategies should be taken for increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups, including women, who must be encouraged to undertake higher degrees and enter academic and graduate employment. Similar efforts are also needed to encourage the participation of ethnic minorities.

**The world of work**

6. Higher education institutions should promote continuous and interactive partnerships with the productive sector using both reactive and proactive approaches. They must adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of the workplace and ensure that new disciplines and specializations are incorporated into its content. Also, they must help shape the labour market on one hand by identifying, independently of conjunctural interests of enterprises, new local and regional needs, and on the other hand by designing mechanisms for retraining and career-switching. Curricula should be organized to stimulate the entrepreneurial skills of students. This requires flexible, innovative and interdisciplinary approaches.

7. Countries should create ‘observatories’ to monitor changes in the labour market in order to facilitate the elaboration of national educational plans and to improve the capacity of higher education institutions to align their policies with national priorities. Special attention needs to be given to career prospects and job conditions of students in course areas of high skills such as engineering and technology for long term development.

8. Governments, the productive sector and local communities should, based on experience gained within and outside the region, encourage institutions of higher education to foster incubator projects which help create new enterprises. Governments, in particular, should provide incentives for the creation of micro-enterprises and fostering of university-industry links.
9. Greater emphasis should be given to the regionalization of specific disciplines, through programmes which target specific needs that will generate employment. In addition, more industry-based projects and new paradigm of university-industry partnership must be instituted, specially in developing countries. UNESCO, UNIDO, UNDP, World Bank, other regional development banks and other funding agencies must be sought in these activities.

10. Innovative approaches such as those of community colleges need to be encouraged. In countries with a large affiliated college system, specific attention needs to be given to strategies for improvement of colleges. Special efforts are needed to strengthen programmes to assist under-privileged groups in society.

**Autonomy**

11. Responsible institutional autonomy should be stimulated in the region. This principle upholds the freedom to select staff and students, to determine the conditions under which they remain in the university and select research topics. Freedom to determine the curriculum and degree standards and to allocate funds (within the amounts available) across different categories of expenditure are other aspects to be respected. At the same time, institutional autonomy should be accompanied by a high level of responsibility and accountability.

**Quality**

12. Appropriate, and if so required, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the renewal of the curriculum, on new approaches to both classroom and distance education teaching, on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies and on vocational education programmes as alternatives to traditional university courses. Innovative approaches to higher education, such as community colleges, international collaboration, and twinning arrangements, need to be encouraged as appropriate.

13. The experience of certain countries regarding the creation of co-operative research centres linking higher education institutions, government research laboratories and industry should be the subject of case studies, the results of which should be available to all countries in the region.

14. Pedagogical programmes should be established to encourage students to be more entrepreneurial and initiative-oriented.

15. UNESCO along with other intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations specialized in higher education must carry out a series of case studies on the region's priorities in the field of higher education. These can include, inter alia, strategic management and planning, interaction among all levels of education, the revision of programmes and training, strategies to enhance the participation of women in higher education and in decision-making bodies, and the development of distance education schemes. Distance education and Open Learning provide important alternative mechanisms of higher education access and learning. In particular, such approaches provide opportunities for those already in the work-force to upgrade their competencies and knowledge levels. The possibilities of these approaches for school leavers, however, needs further analysis and experimentation.

16. Each country of the region should establish a mechanism for evaluating the quality of its higher education institutions. Countries must introduce quality assurance methods at both institutional and systemic levels. These may include academic accreditation, academic audits and institutional evaluations, performance funding, review of disciplines and professional areas, qualifications
frameworks and competency-based approaches to vocational education and training.

17. Each higher education institution should establish a teaching and learning resource unit staffed by qualified personnel and charged with the development of pedagogical skills and other forms of teaching-support activities.

18. Countries and institutions must stimulate, through the creation of networks, the development of regional postgraduate studies.

19. Governments and institutions of higher education must adopt appropriate strategies for the recruitment of staff, for their further professional development and for the recognition of their achievements. Governments, Parliaments and institution of higher education should pay particular attention to the draft Recommendation concerning the Status and Conditions of Higher Education Teaching Personnel, approved recently by a governmental experts meeting, which will be submitted to the General Conference of UNESCO in November 1997.

20. Higher education institutions must provide orientation and counselling, remedial courses, study skills training and other forms of student support, including measures to improve their living conditions.

21. Higher education institutions must modernize libraries and scientific equipment and include measures for the purchase and replacement of scientific equipment in their long-term management plans.

22. Higher education institutions must adopt new approaches for the packaging of information, for course delivery, and for rethinking traditional approaches to teaching and learning. The utilization of multi-media, CD-ROM, the internet and interactive video is necessary to promote interaction between students and their lecturers. Agreements should be stimulated among regional institutions to exchange programmes and to organize joint debates and symposia.

23. Teachers, professors and technical and administrative staff must be given training that enables them to integrate new information and communication technologies (NICTs) into their teaching programmes, and to examine the multiplier effect with regard to their use. Frequently, the staff development needs of technical and administrative staff are not properly approached.

**Management and Finance**

24. Governments must formulate national action plans to enhance both access to and the relevance and quality of higher education institutions. As a consequence, institutional management should improve. The concept of higher education as a public asset implies that its appraisal cannot be restricted to economic quantitative indicators alone. These plans must foresee a diversification of funding sources through, in particular, the encouragement of various income-generating activities, such as contract research, a broad range of academic and cultural services, short-term courses and, if so appropriate, the operation of scientific and technology enterprises. Public support to higher education remains essential to ensure its educational, social and institutional missions. Therefore, the state should take the main responsibility for funding this sector. But, since the challenges for higher education concern society as a whole, the solution to this problem must involve not only the state but all stakeholders - students, parents, the public and private sectors, local and national communications, authorities and academic association, as well as regional and international organizations.
25. Where appropriate, governments should consider creating, or reinforcing, agencies to act as a buffer between ministries and higher education institutions and to provide advice on resource needs and allocation, regulatory frameworks and the administration of grants and financial assistance.

26. In countries where privatization is accepted, governments should provide a legal framework to regulate institutions, to develop appropriate accreditation and monitoring mechanisms, and to ensure academic freedom and maximum autonomy. The complementary and supportive role of private universities and colleges must be recognized.

27. Management capacities should be strengthened by, inter alia, the recruitment of new senior staff with specialized expertise, appropriate training and staff development programmes for all line managers (and especially for those in executive positions), the introduction of greater clarity in job descriptions and reporting channels, improved management procedures, and the introduction and enhancement of computerized management systems.

28. At the regional level, an association or forum should be created to mobilize the contribution of student organizations to current efforts aimed at making higher education institutions more forceful, active and efficient partners in the promotion of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

29. Staff involvement in decision-making bodies should be considerably strengthened through greater recognition of their needs and by taking into consideration their perspectives, which are often relevant to the analysis of problems and to the search for viable solutions. In the case of students, appropriate consultation is of great importance.

30. Countries of the region must renew the commitments made by them at the Social Development Summit in Copenhagen and at other world bodies to "make new and additional resources available" and thus effectively increase their budgets allocated to education in general and to higher education in particular, measured as a significant percentage of their gross national product.

Co-operation

31. Individual institutions must develop international linkages, such as those for the exchange of staff and students and for academic co-operation. As well, they must support the activities of international organizations and bilateral agreements between countries within the region.

32. International and regional organizations should support projects aiming at establishing or strengthening university networks. For their part, institutions of higher education - with the support of national, regional and international organizations dealing with inter-university co-operation - should network centres of excellence which respond to the most pressing training and research needs of the Asia and Pacific region. The transfer and exchange of knowledge and experience between higher education institutions, carried out in a spirit of solidarity, should be the basis for these initiatives. It is recommended to establish an evaluation of existing networks in the region, including those covered by the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme.

33. In the framework of the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific and the International Recommendation on Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education, there is a need to encourage student, academic and professional mobility to benefit the process of economic, educational, political and cultural integration within the region and to develop mutually accepted
standards for the recognition of credentials. This will need collective effort by governments, professional bodies and international organizations;

34. Each institution of higher education, as well as all professional associations, must envisage the creation of specialized units for managing international co-operation.

35. Higher education institutions should strengthen their endogenous and co-operative capacities related to priority issues in the region. In particular, centres of excellence can have a positive impact on the solution of major social problems related to the environment and sustainable development, on research in higher education institutions, on educational research in general, on institutional leadership, staff development and teacher training, on the diffusion of new communication and information technologies, on human rights and democracy, on technology transfer, on patents and intellectual property and on the protection of cultural heritage, as well as on the strengthening of education for all and of social development in general.

36. Attempts should be made to develop under the leadership of the Asia and the Pacific distance and multi-media education network under AUAP a general pool of programmes of study for Asia and the Pacific region to cut the cost of distance education.

37. Within their capacity, UNESCO and other international and interregional governmental and non-governmental organizations should respond to the requests to provide technical assistance to smaller and poorer countries in the region, in particular those of island nations, and to collaborate with them in the preparation of joint plans of action with a view to the development of higher education institutions.