

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

UNESCO, Paris, 5 – 9 October 1998

VOLUME V – PLENARY

The United Nations University (UNU)

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

The United Nations University (UNU)

**Speech of Professor Ingrid Moses
Chair, Council of the United Nations University, UNU**

As Chair of Council of the United Nations' very own university, the UNU, I have much pleasure and honour in being able to address you.

The University is young, as the majority of the world's universities are. The University was conceived by U. Thant, who as Secretary General of the UN proposed in 1969 "a United Nations university, truly international in character and devoted to the Charter's objectives of peace and progress." And this UNU is, and this UNU does. Since 1975 the UNU has been operating as an autonomous organ of the United Nations General Assembly, under the joint sponsorship of the United Nations and UNESCO.

It is chartered to foster intellectual cooperation among scholars and scientists in an effort to understand and solve the "pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare". The University has a special mandate to alleviate the intellectual isolation of academics in developing countries by organizing worldwide networks of collaborating scholars and research institutions. The University is one of the few institutions which can be flexible, which can respond to scientific, social, economic, cultural needs. It is in effect a decentralized research and training organization where most of the academic activities occur in the research programmes and research training centres. There are no undergraduate students, no degrees awarded. In the past 20 plus years the University has shifted its activities to these centres and programmes which are usually partially funded by a host country.

This highlights one of the great challenges for organizations of the UN system, and indeed for all of us involved in higher education, and also highlights one of the great failures so far: namely, to put mechanisms in place, to allocate funding, to truly share, truly collaborate, truly educate all who can benefit from higher education equitably.

The Research Training Centres are mostly in the developed world, in Finland, the Netherlands, Macao, Japan, but also Ghana. There are Programmes in Venezuela, in Canada, in Jordan. But there are networks of collaborating scholars and collaborating institutions. Nearly half of the collaborating scholars are in Western Europe and North America (20.5 %, 594) – there is expertise there and funds in universities to support such collaboration.

The picture is reversed when we look at collaborating institutions, i.e. collaborating under a range of different agreements. Here we find that the vast majority are in Asia and Pacific and Latin America and Caribbean (258) [with just 146 in Europe and North America]. Collaboration through networks of scholars and institutions is not only part of what the UNU is mandated to do. It is a mode of operation, of knowledge production and dissemination which will become increasingly relevant in the 21st Century. We truly have a global university in the UNU.

The University studies the far-reaching effects of human activities, which can and have altered the world on an unprecedented scale. Particular importance is given to those that influence developing countries. The four areas of concentration articulated in the University's Third Medium-Term Perspective are:

- Environment
- Science and Technology
- Development, and
- Peace and Governance.

These areas are going to be crucial for the next century.

Like any other university, the university needs fund to carry out its mission. It is funded by an Endowment Fund and project specific funds from governments and other organizations. To the Ministers among us, let me say: we need your support. Only 39 countries have contributed to the Endowment Fund. And there are conspicuous absences: the US, and my own country, Australia, among them. Some countries

contribute to the Operating Grant, some to Specific Programmes. A total of 54 countries have or are contributing, as are some major corporations and foundations, notably in Japan but also in the US. But so far there is no groundswell of financial support, no sharing across the nations of funding the **one** university among us which is not just concerned about excellence in research, teaching and service, but excellence in research and teaching **to improve the conditions of humanity**. I am asking for your support.