

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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NGO Collective Consultation on Higher Education

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.

NGO Collective Consultation on Higher Education

Speech presented by the Representative of the Collective Consultation on Higher Education

Mr President, Mr Director-General, fellow participants in the World Conference,

I have the honour to address the Conference in the name of the **Non Governmental Organizations** which in their diversity form the Collective Consultation on Higher Education.

These NGOs represent students, teachers, higher education institutions as well as other groups active in the development of higher education. As a group, we are delighted with the efforts of UNESCO, and particularly of its Director-General, to highlight the role of higher education in society and in the education system as a whole, of which it is a "cornerstone".

This World Conference is an important moment and a time of hope for us.

Since work on organizing the Conference first started, the NGOs in the Collective Consultation have spared no effort to ensure its success: they have been active world-wide. The NGOs recognize themselves in the main ideas of the documents submitted for discussion, because they share their humanistic vision: universality of higher education, whose "supreme mission is to serve the human being and society".

Since UNESCO's origin, and especially since the development of the Collective Consultation, the organization's work on higher education has been nourished and enriched by the NGOs' reflection. Recall for a moment:

- the six sessions of the Collective Consultation;
- the contribution to the development of a Global programme of action 1996-2001;
- the specific initiatives concerning students and women;
- the collective agreement which, in June 1997, linked 56 NGOs in partnership with UNESCO.

The success of this consultation process is mainly due to the continuing support of UNESCO's Higher Education Division. We take this opportunity to thank those who have worked with us.

We would like to emphasize that through our NGOs, it is the civil society, and within it a wide range of partners, that provides an original and irreplaceable contribution to an intergovernmental organization. This contribution includes, ideas, a huge human investment, resources, an audience.

Consequently our support will be neither passive nor aligned. The force of our intervention comes from our independence and our ability to rally around common objectives. It is in such spirit that the Collective Consultation, invited by the Director-General to react to the preparatory documents, has been heard and followed on several points. For example:

- a greater recognition of the status and role of teachers in higher education;
- a stronger accent on the place occupied by students as partners of the higher education system;
- a specific reference to the access and participation of women, especially in the decision-making functions;
- the respect for human rights;
- stronger attention to the place of research;
- a focus on the social responsibility and the cultural dimension of higher education;
- the accent on assessment implemented with respect to academic freedom.

Of course, there are the texts... and then there is the usage which will be made of them. The success of the Conference will be measured by the quality of what follows. It will also depend on whether it mobilises the energy of all the actors and NGOs are indispensable catalysts for this.

We are ready, Mr President, as long as the action Plan we develop together meets our aspirations, to work to spread the results and to implement the initiatives which will be launched.

Thank you.