

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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International Association of Universities (IAU)

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.

International Association of Universities (IAU)

**Speech of Dr Wataru Mori
President of the International Association of Universities (IAU)**

Mr President,
Mr Director-General of UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Representatives of Member States and of Organizations,
Dear Colleagues,

Let me start by thanking UNESCO and its Director-General for having taken the initiative of organizing this World Conference of Higher Education. The International Association of Universities should like to congratulate the organizers particularly on the way they have been able to set in motion a broad consultation and mobilization process and thus to create a remarkable synergy and dynamic already in the preparatory stage.

This Conference is indeed a most timely opportunity to underline the importance of higher education as an integral and decisive part of the education system as a whole, and to focus on the essential role of higher education, and of higher education institutions as actors of change and renewal, for the development of our societies.

The conference will allow us, those responsible on the national, international and institutional levels, actors and partners, to identify together the challenges ahead and to clarify our respective, and shared, responsibilities as well as the necessary conditions that will need to be met at the various levels to allow us to assume these responsibilities.

On the international level, cooperation in the production and dissemination of knowledge is both a prior condition and a consequence of political and economic integration. Higher education can play a crucial role in both contributing to the ongoing process of globalization and attenuating and counter-balancing some of its adverse effects on social and cultural diversity and intellectual pluralism. Its role is also crucial in assuring that the ownership and advancement of knowledge together with highly qualified human resources are recognized as being equally essential for the least developed countries as they are for the economically advanced.

Here lies an important and most legitimate role for UNESCO to lead a process with a view to federating the efforts of Member States and of partner organizations around the basic and perennial values this Organization has been founded on and which have to remain an inalienable reference in light of, often short-term, "market" pressures.

On the national level, sustained support of stakeholders and the public is essential, if higher education is effectively to carry out its increasingly complex mission, whether educational, scientific, social or economic. And, while fully acknowledging the need for diversifying the sources of funding for higher education, the crucial and abiding role of governments in taking responsibility for what is a public good and in assuring the resources necessary for higher education and research is paramount.

At last - the institutional and individual levels: This is where the notions of academic freedom, university autonomy and social responsibility come in. If - as several of the Working Documents point out - academic freedom and wide autonomy of higher education institutions are essential for them to carry out their mission and to be accountable for what they are doing, these principles need to be strengthened and protected. A value essential to the relationship between university and society is trust, the exclusion of arbitrariness and abuse, on both sides.

This is why the International Association of Universities should like to make **one specific proposal** with regard to the Draft **Framework for Priority Action**: We propose to include an appeal to governments to set in place the guarantees necessary to allow those working in higher education to respond to society's expectations. This appeal is to be complemented by a request to UNESCO to pursue efforts in view of the elaboration of an international instrument on academic freedom and autonomy, as suggested in the

feasibility study which IAU has carried out upon the Organization's request, following the resolution adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 27th Session.

In closing my remarks, I should like to express our hope that this Conference will mark a culminating point in the dynamic that has been created up to now, but not its end. We hope, quite on the contrary, that it will lead to the adoption of a broad strategy for higher education and allow the forming of strategic alliances among the different partners and stakeholders, under the leadership of UNESCO, and supported by a common sense of commitment. As for IAU, which has enjoyed a long-standing close relationship with UNESCO, we certainly stand ready to be an active and reliable partner in implementing a new, forward-looking vision and mission for higher education into the Twenty-first Century.