

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS/MIEC)

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 Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS/MIEC)

**Speech of Walter Prysthon Junior,
Representative of the International Movement of Catholic Students**

Mr President,
Mr Director-General,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen participants of this Conference,

It is a great pleasure for the International Movement of Catholic Students, being one of the students' organizations participating in the Collective Consultation between UNESCO and the Non Governmental Organizations, to be able to contribute to the definition of new perspectives for Higher Education in the 21st century.

Our contribution is based upon many years of joint work with our fellow students who, through their studies, want to take part in the social life of their countries and communities.

IMCS has always been concerned about studies and has constantly underlined their importance. The formation and the development of skills which are acquired through higher education must not only pursue an utilitarian vision and a personal benefit linked to a mercantile vision, but, on the contrary, should be put at the service of the whole society. We believe that the pertinence of higher education lies within this ethical perspective of being a service to humanity.

We are confronted with the challenges brought about by the rapid social transformations, the globalization process, the accelerated changes of the productive systems, as well as the impact of new technologies.

Some answers to these challenges start to be articulated around concepts such as "life-long learning", employability, inter-disciplinary studies, international co-operation, diversification of funding and the use of new technologies.

Mr President, there is, in our opinion, a temptation to believe that these new answers will solve all the old problems. But an ethical discernment appeals to us to examine the realities of exclusion which, unfortunately and more and more significantly, mark out the end of this century.

For instance, is it possible to imagine that the new technologies will solve the problem of access to higher education - distance education - while a great part of the world population has never simply used a telephone?

This and a lot of other complex paradoxes are today in front of us. They can only be overcome through an integral vision of higher education, which put human being at the centre of its preoccupation and where cultural diversity in the world will be assumed as a source of creativity and collective wealth.

The World Declaration on Higher Education and the Framework for Priority Action, which will be the concrete results of this Conference, request as a matter of fact an integral answer, and it is in this way that we should understand them. They represent a set of ideas and initiatives towards a global horizon which we shall only reach through the commitment and the work of all the actors involved.

Students, through the plurality of their expressions and forms of organization, want to be present in this process. Student mobilization around this conference has been intense and clearly shows their readiness and commitment to contribute in the change.

Many student organizations have been working together with UNESCO in the discussion of the themes proposed for this Conference. Similarly, throughout all the continents, student representative organizations have organized congresses and seminars aiming at contributing with ideas towards the definition of a new vision of Higher Education.

The desire and the claim to be recognized as students and to actively participate in the definition of the policies concerning their academic life are the motivations behind the work done by the students during these days. We were searching for common agreement to contribute in a responsible manner to the work of this Conference.

This dialogue *per se* represents the richness and the plurality of students' perspectives and testifies the significant effort towards promoting a genuine citizen perspective. The whole academic institutions must foster the autonomy of the persons, human relationships and team work, responsibility and awareness-building regarding responsibility to the others.

Yesterday, the debate on student perspectives demonstrated the enthusiasm which students bear. The challenge of the follow up and the implementation of the results of this Conference lies in front of us. We, students, can offer our daily work, our critical and constructive spirit as well as our creativity.

We can also offer, Mr President, a compass for us to move around the new environment of Higher Education. In this compass, there are no more North and South, East and West. Its cardinal points are constituted by genuine solidarity with the excluded, peace, sustainable development and strict respect of all human rights.

Thank you.