

# **WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century**

### **Vision and Action**

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### **VOLUME V – PLENARY**

#### **Jamaica**

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.

Jamaica

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**Statement by Minister of Education and Culture  
Senator the Hon. Burchell Whiteman**

The Government of Jamaica is pleased to recognize the stimulating quality of the documents that will animate this World Conference on Higher Education. Our satisfaction derives from several sources. Two are immediately pertinent.

The first is the nature of the ideas that have been brought together in the documentation. The second is the contentment that comes from seeing the lines of the Caribbean region's own development being endorsed in the form of proposals for international emulation. We express our pride not as blowers of our own trumpets, but with a profound sense of willingness to share the outcomes of our own experiments and experiences in international cooperation in higher education.

The Caribbean region (and more explicitly the English-speaking CARICOM states) has for 50 years shared a common university. It is not the only one in our region, but it functions as a kind of hub in the centre of a network of tertiary level institutions which constitute the vehicle for social and economic transformation through higher education.

The third pillar of education for the 21st century identified in the Report of the Delors Commission - "learning to live together"- would in the process be addressed by an examination of the Caribbean experience where multiculturalism and pluralism are a way of life.

We are creating through a multi-campus structure and its operational presence in the sixteen participating states a network of access points for its programmes using contemporary information technology. We are reaching out across the linguistic fences of our region into Haiti and the Dominican Republic to build even richer tapestries of relationships in areas of common economic concern. In brief, we are piloting the very essence of the ideas for cooperation and development in and through higher education of which our working documentation speaks.

The arguments for ensuring the relevance of higher education are particularly strong within the subregion and the universities. As peoples from small and developing states or emerging economies, with a fairly clear understanding of the realities of globalization and specific imperatives related to our accession to the Free Trade Area of the Americas, we share a clear commitment to ensuring relevance. The caution is observed, however, that there must be a balance between short-term needs and longer-term objectives. Indeed, as the distinguished Prime Minister of France said this morning, the university student - who is correctly the focus of all our activity in higher education - must be prepared first of all to think, to be adaptable, to be prepared for lifelong learning in an environment which is rapidly changing. The graduate cannot simply be prepared in a narrow sense for the market with its immediacy of demands and expectations.

It is for that reason that the issue of quality has been an overriding preoccupation of the university system within the Caribbean. We subscribe to the view that the international dimension of university education and the globalization of knowledge as well as of economic arrangements demand that international quality benchmarking must be a desirable feature of our ongoing work and collaboration.

In that connection, we commend to others our own initiatives in the field of accreditation using a still evolving model which has national, regional and international operating fields and acceptability across the board.

Those initiatives allow us also to take advantage of the synergies of a range of tertiary institutions operating within the region, and by implication the benefits of competition to which our systems, our major university and our member countries are by no means closed.

The irony of our posture of openness is the corresponding marginalization of Caribbean voices in the formation of world policy. Despite that marginalization, Caribbean intellect finds respect in the Nobel Prize listings and in the rolls of honour of all the fields of competence of UNESCO. We therefore seize the

opportunity of this appreciative forum to offer our region and our institutions as living laboratories for the transformation of higher education globally.

Our government wishes to endorse explicitly the provisions in the draft Declaration devoted to equity of access, the principle of merit and effort as passports to higher education and the perspective on lifelong learning.

We express some reservations though on the restricted formulation of Article 16 of the Declaration and related to that Clauses 10 and 11 of the Plan of Action. We feel that a fairer formulation would be achieved if the Declaration spoke of "developing countries and especially those in transition" rather than specifically identifying a region or zone. If the conference feels that the emphasis of specific references is critical, our government would humbly propose that Asia and the Caribbean should be similarly identified in that article.

Clauses 10 and 11 correctly identify the promotion of international academic mobility for both faculty and students, better application of regional conventions on recognition - which we in Jamaica expect to sign formally in the near future, greater use of South-South co-operation and the Academics without Frontiers programme.

I would wish however to put forward for your consideration one further elaboration. The international funding agencies, recognizing the interrelatedness of our economies, the importance to peace, prosperity and sustainability of human development of higher education worldwide, should be encouraged to make special interventions in support of research and development. The supplementing of Research Funds in developing countries by meaningful grants in the first instance and soft loans at a later period would help to kickstart or to accelerate within the developing countries the process of

- strengthening the link between the universities and the world of work
- enhancing the productivity of the industrial, commercial and service sectors
- facilitating an effective balance between curiosity driven and project based research

and in the process therefore giving regions like ours and the countries of the developing world a chance to make a more effective contribution to the creation of knowledge both for our own development and to share with the rest of mankind as equal partners in an increasingly interdependent world.

I hasten to add that despite our limited resources, we have committed to such a fund for the reasons outlined, but I advocate a global principle to serve global purposes and to seek to reduce the gap between the world communities where by UNESCO's own statistics, higher education expenditure in the developed world is more than six times per capita what it is in the developing countries.

In conclusion, Mr. President, may I thank all those who have brought us this far; may I express my government's commitment to the articles of the Declaration and share the hope that as we seek to actualize the Plan of Action the experience and the aspirations of small states and the developing world - both categories typified by the CARICOM states - will find their way in a meaningful sense in the programmes which go forward into the new millennium.