

# **WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

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

### **Vision and Action**

UNESCO, Paris, 5 – 9 October 1998

#### **VOLUME V – PLENARY**

##### **Palestinian Authority**

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.

Palestinian Authority

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**Speech of His Excellency Dr Munther Salah  
Minister of Higher Education**

Mr Chairman,  
Mr Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO,  
Ladies and Gentlemen, Heads of delegations.

Allow me at the beginning to express my deep appreciation to UNESCO, for adopting and hosting this World Conference on Higher Education.

There is a need to diagnose the current situation, in order to be able to plan to move forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus allow me to summarize briefly the realities of Palestinian higher education before I present my comments and recommendations to this conference.

The initial challenges faced by the Palestinian people have been to combat a set of adverse conditions. These included isolation from the rest of the Arab World in particular and the international community in general. The Palestinian national institutions of education in general and of higher education in particular which represented the pillar of continuity and resistance throughout the history were rejected.

I will present to you the major, critical stages, which composed the development of Higher Education in Palestine.

1. Palestinian Higher Education institutions were established as an act of will to face all challenges imposed by the occupation and to lay the corner stone for Palestinian civil society. The aim was to develop human resources and raise the awareness of the people to exercise freedom and democracy on their land and through their cultural and intellectual heritage.
2. Institutions of Higher Education played a unique and exceptional role during the second stage-the Intifada. They were able to operate and educate the youth under the most adverse conditions using non-conventional means such as distance learning and open learning.
3. The third stage started immediately after Oslo. The Ministry of Higher Education placed high importance on the creation of a viable, efficient and high quality system which is tuned to the requirements of development, participation in the process of building a Palestinian state, and needs of the Palestinian people, and competitiveness on the Arab, regional, and international scenes to enable us to forcefully enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Institutions of higher education in Palestine are facing tremendous difficulties and the possibility of a complete shut down. The stalemate in the peace process coupled with the economic, social and cultural deprivations are hindering the prospects of planning and development in the sector of education.

Mr Chairman,

The world is heading towards globalization in this age of scientific and technological advancement. It is our belief to have all the channels open as democracy requires, and since the developing countries have been always on the receiving end, therefore, we find ourselves facing a great challenge which might threaten our identity and could lead to social disorder in the new educational experience of the Third World.

In order to maintain the cultural heritage of all countries of the world in general, and in the Third World in particular, and to enhance democracy and stability and the participation of Third World countries in the globalization process, and for the importance put upon the creation and production of knowledge, I would like to propose the following recommendations to be included in the final resolutions of this conference hoping that they will contribute to the regional interaction and constitute a peace education based on fairness, equality, and human rights:

1. call upon the international community and its organizations to support the scientific, cultural and educational institutions in developing countries and provide the necessary training to alleviate their potentials capabilities in becoming initiators and producers of information in all fields and sectors to enhance regional and international understanding and to build a just culture for peace;
2. appeal to the international community to support and help in abolishing all kinds of political occupation in Third World countries based on the International Declaration on Human Rights which grants the right of education to all and encourages countries to live freely and peacefully on their own land and exercise their right to education.

I congratulate you on holding this ambitious conference wishing it all success.

Thank you.