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Vision and Action

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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.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**Speech of His Excellency Dr. Khalid Al-Ankary
Minister of Higher Education**

Praised be God, Almighty in the universe! And may peace and praise be on his honorable prophet, Muhammad, whose mandate was to guide and to be a messenger to all mankind.

Mr Conference President, Director-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, and in the name of the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I have the honour to convey to you the best wishes of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the success of this international conference, the realization of our objectives and broad expectations we all aspire to achieve. We hope the next stage of the history of human kind will witness a qualitative change in the advancement of education in general, and in particular of higher education, a move that meets the needs of humanity, to advance its thinking and to contribute to its moral and spiritual advancement.

I have the pleasure to express appreciation of the endeavours of UNESCO under the leadership of his Excellency Mr Federico Mayor, thank him for his initiative in organizing this international conference, and other regional conferences held before. I praise the efforts exerted by his deputies, assistants, directors of units, members of the conference committees and others for this high level of preparation and organization.

We owe to the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the late King Abdulaziz Al Saud the great privilege of modern education in our country. His farsightedness and keen intellect considered education not only as an effective means to build a united country able to spread welfare and morality, but also as an inherent human right. To spread education is an ideal way to build a human being, to enable him use his potential and benefit his society. Although he faced difficult circumstances and met great challenges, one of the first decisions Abdulaziz decreed after completing the unification of the Kingdom in 1932 was the establishment of a modern education system in the Kingdom. It was a system that conformed to the identity of the Kingdom's society and coped with the needs of the time. To build an educational system, he sought the help of experts from a number of countries and achieved remarkable steps in the field of education. 1926 was the date the first educational Saudi mission was sent abroad. Those sent were to finish their education and return to carry out the establishment of educational institutions in the fields of planning, administration and education.

The care and attention given to education by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a practical step in the propagation of Islam to all humanity, and Islam is a message that makes education, research and thinking a guiding beacon, a means to build and live on earth. This care led to the First Institutional Educational Meeting in the history of the Kingdom. It was held in 1922 at the invitation of the founder King and was attended by scholars and educators in Makkah. It was a first step in spreading education. Among the first results of this meeting was the establishment of an educational administration. The first department of education in the Kingdom opened in 1924. This department, after furthering education several steps, became the Ministry of Education in 1952. The first to be appointed a Minister of Education was Prince Fahd bin Abdulaziz, who has now been King since 1982. Prince Fahd assumed several responsibilities in the leadership arena.

For decades, this leader has worked to spread education throughout the Kingdom, and exerted great efforts to eradicate illiteracy. He was the one who established the first university and the first vocational institute in the Kingdom. He was keen that the Ministry, and the many educational and training organs affiliated to it, make use of external expertise, including expertise offered by UNESCO. The Kingdom was third country to sign the UNESCO charter at the directive of his father, the Great Founder, King Abdulaziz.

The nucleus of higher education in the Kingdom was the establishment of the College of Jurisprudence in Makkah al-Mukarramah in 1949. The Teachers' College followed, three years after, in 1952. Other colleges in other cities of the Kingdom were to follow. In 1957, a historic royal decree was issued to establish the first university in the Kingdom in the city of Riyadh, i.e. King Saud University. Higher education, after the establishment of this university, witnessed a turning point in its long march. From this date until 1957, the year

Higher Education acquired an independent separate ministry, the Kingdom has witnessed the establishment of a number of universities and several other specialized colleges in the main cities of the Kingdom.

It is worthy of note, that higher education encompasses other specialties and spheres in the Kingdom. They are connected with a number of government institutions and organs, in parallel to organs supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education. The Ministry of Higher Education supervises eight large universities. The most recent university is King Khaled University in Abha, in the southern part of the Kingdom. His Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz inaugurated this university a few months ago.

Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen of the Conference:

The basic philosophy of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is adherence to the principles, morals and ideals of Islam. They are deemed a complete work plan for a system of higher education. Those ideals, principles and morals, as is acknowledged, urge coexistence and interaction with international cultures. They stress that human civilization is a venue for the contributions and genius of all. This philosophy based on a solid creed that encourages the use of the accumulated wealth of human knowledge available in the fields of science. Education and culture made a remarkable contribution to the crystallization of higher education in the Kingdom. Education enabled tens of thousands of the citizens of the Kingdom to pursue their higher studies and to develop their research talents easily in prestigious universities and renowned scientific centers in developed and developing countries as well.

Higher education in the Kingdom, however, follows an open-door policy and provides equal opportunities for all citizens without any discrimination, and according to individual potential and scientific capabilities. Admission criteria in higher education institutions in the Kingdom, as the case of other educational systems that have contributed in the progress and development of their societies, have contributed to the advancement of those who joined these institutions during the past fifty years. These admission requirements and criteria have been subject to revision and evaluation with the objective of matching innovative developments in those areas.

The policy of education in the Kingdom is considered, from that clear point of view, a specialized field of study that is open to those who possess potential, merit and talent, for the satisfaction of the various and increasing needs of the society. This policy takes into consideration the present and future circumstances. In addition to deepening belief in Almighty God, preparing qualified citizens to serve themselves and their society, higher education focuses on scientific research in all its theoretical and applied fields. It enriches activities in research, publication and social service.

The Kingdom's Higher Education Council Statute on the other hand stresses the principles of freedom and academic independence through the support of scientific councils at various levels. It enables scientific councils to take academic decisions without any outside influence, without being subjected to individual whims. It has tangibly helped the development of the qualitative level of services and academic decisions.

The government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has adopted a clear-cut policy, based on one of its principles, not to open a university or a higher education institute except to meet the needs of the country.

The institutions of higher education in Kingdom increased to 168 colleges in accordance with the policy adopted by rational government. They cover different majors and scientific specializations. They exist in parallel to military colleges affiliated to the Ministries of the Interior and Defense as well as the National Guard. The number of male and female students enrolled in these institutions since the first institute was opened in 1949 totals over 300,000, and Saudis constitute 98% of that total.

Higher education in the Kingdom, to be noted, follows a liberal framework. All these institutions do not fall under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. Some colleges and higher institutes meet special needs, needs that require their affiliation to other ministries and governmental authorities, such as the Ministry of Education, the General Organization for Vocational and Technical Training, the General Presidency for Girls' Education, and the Ministry of Health, etc.

As for staff employed by educational institutes, I believe it is necessary to present some figures and percentages to grasp the size of the educational organization in higher educational institutes in the Kingdom. The faculty employed by these institutes totals 16,758. Saudis are about 52% of total. The ratio of faculty to students stands at 1:15. About 53% of the faculty are holders of Ph.D.'s, and 21% are holders of masters degrees. The remaining are holders of higher diplomas and bachelors degrees. The staff employed in

administrative and technical divisions total about 15,858. 50% are male and female Saudis. The ratio of administrators to students stand at 1:17.

In continuation of the mention of figures, it is appropriate to add that a university student costs the government US\$ 10,000 per year. This represents 8% more than the per capita expenditure of the government for each citizen. The percentage of higher education students to the whole population is about 22% (between ages 18 and 23). Students enrolled in higher education total 2,062 students (female and male) per 100,000. Graduates total 301 students (male and female) per 100,000.

Among the aspects of development in higher education that carry social and developmental significance is the education of the female. The number of female students in higher education increased from only four female students in 1961 to 150,000 female students in 1996, representing 53% of all students of both sexes in higher education. Saudi women are privileged to receive scholarships to pursue graduate studies outside the Kingdom. They also receive stipends to pursue different majors according to the needs of the country. Female staff can go on sabbatical for one year after they spend a number of years in their teaching. Other female staff have similar privileges to develop their scientific and research skills and abilities.

Mr Chairman, Director-General, Your Excellencies, Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is distinguished by a unique model of support for higher education students (both male and female), through the principle of free education for all at all stages and in all specializations. In addition,, the government grants monthly stipends to all students in higher education, to help them concentrate fully on their studies. Further, educational institutions and students are allowed to set up student funds to help and financially support any students who are too poor to continue otherwise.

If one refers to the annual education budget in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the last fifty years, we realize that it has multiplied dramatically. The budget has increased from SR 666,000,000 (US\$178,000,000) in 1970, to SR21,294,000,000 (US\$5,678,000,000), within a decade, to reach in 1995 SR 31,942,000,000 (US\$8,517,000,000). This education budget represents a percentage of between 9.8% to 19.9% of the total state budget for every year of the same period.

The budget of higher education increased from 55 million Saudi riyals (15 million US dollars) in 1965 to about 6 billion Saudi riyals (equal to 1.6 billion US dollars) in 1995. This represents that a higher education budget that doubled more than one hundred times during the years under discussion. The continuous support and interest in higher education are shown through the establishment of several university campuses complete with a high standard of educational facilities, infrastructure, laboratories, support complexes and vital services.

The fact that the Kingdom has established more than twenty educational institutions in countries all over the world is an indication of the Kingdom's support for the process of development in developing countries and for cooperation in scientific research with international academic and research institutions. Further, the Kingdom has established a number of chairs, endowed professorships to provide students the opportunity to study at those universities. Students belong to more than 60 nationalities. They total 13,000 male and female students.

In addition to opportunities for studying and training in a number of advanced and developing countries offered by the Ministry of Higher Education and other governmental organs in the Kingdom, thousands of citizens and residents have benefited from enrolment in Kingdom's universities and other higher education institutions.

The Kingdom's interest is not limited to quality and quantity in higher education, but its interest and concern leads to a continuous evaluation of this type of education for its adaptation to every stage of development in the Kingdom. A number of conferences, and scientific symposium have been held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has participated in hundreds of conferences, meetings and seminars on higher education outside the Kingdom. The Ministry of Higher education has recently held a huge symposium entitled "Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" with the aim of exploring future prospects and with the intention of examining and reviewing present circumstances. More than 400 scholars participated in this conference, including international scholars from the U.S.A., Europe, Australia and Japan, as well as Arab and Islamic countries. UNESCO also contributed significantly.

The conference, which was held under the auspices of the Government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and attended by scholars, researchers and others from the private sector, was concluded with fifteen recommendations. The most prominent of these recommendations include: the expansion of the base of higher

education, linking higher education to the employment market, raising the standard of students in public education and equipping them with skills that qualify them to enter the employment market or to continue with higher education, to rationalize admission criteria to meet the requirements of higher education, the needs of development and the employment market. Other recommendations emphasized the importance of raising the standards and skills of teaching in higher education, to make the utmost use of the latest appropriate technology, to increase research activities to solve the society's problems, provide results to decision-makers, overhaul the evaluation of the higher education system, give special attention to engineering and technical education, diversify financing of higher education, strengthen coordination efforts between higher educational institutions in the Kingdom and abroad, follow-up and examine the future prospects of higher education at the international level. Along with these recommendations, about eighty practical steps were proposed for action.

Parallel to interest in scientific research carried out by universities under the Ministry of Higher Education is the constant keenness of higher institutes to seek benefit from available methodologies for the evaluation of programs, administration and equipment. They are encouraged through the provision of modern equipment, financial incentives, and moral support. Specialized teams of evaluators from inside and outside Kingdom to offer the accrediting services to those institutions and its programmes. Those institutions also carry out self evaluations.

One of the remarkable characteristics of this level of education in the Kingdom is the applied side of the educational system. Special emphasis is laid on advanced information technologies, computers, LANs (Local Area Networks) and WANs (Wide Area Networks), as well as information necessary to educational processes, to administration and scientific research. A number of higher education institutions are connected with international, specialized and public information networks, such as the Internet. Educational authorities in the Kingdom have paid them special attention. The Kingdom has long experience in the use of modern technologies and appreciates the great benefits achieved through their application to education and its environment.

As I mentioned a little while ago when talking about the conference on higher education held in the Kingdom, the progress of higher education, though great efforts were exerted, faces a number of difficulties also faced by other developed and developing countries. Among these difficulties is the immediate need to link higher education with, development, to expand the scientific base that relates to applied and technological sciences, to achieve a suitable model in order to reduce the great cost of higher education. In light of the fierce competition for the available opportunities in recent years and because of a situation that requires suitable alternative routes to expand the base of higher education, I would like to point out the Kingdom's need for counsel from experts or other individuals, as well as organizations or specialized -institutes. There is a need to assess the role of higher education in solving the problems of public education. The big question is: how can we restructure higher education to meet the changing needs of a society, needs that have arisen, to a large extent, under the influence of higher education's previous successes in meeting the previous needs of the same society.

The big question is: how can we accommodate the choices that human beings take for their own benefit and the requirements that the nation and the community have for his service? That is, society has to meet the changing needs of its development, and the specialities that it requires do not always accord with the desires of individuals.

Mr Conference Chairman, Director-General, Excellencies, Honorable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In conclusion to this short review of the realities of higher education in my country and its steady march ahead, I would like to express the hope of our delegation to this international conference. Since we are at a new stage of human history, we hope to form visions, take choices and attain results that help our countries and peoples and the international community in general to serve the human being and to meet human needs. Particular emphasis must be placed on strengthening peace, realizing positive international cooperation, and jointly participating in the betterment of humanity.

We hope the results of this conference and what the recommendations of this conference will include a component that is **practical and attainable** in the view of the powers and capabilities of the participating countries.

Thank you for your kind attention!

Peace be upon you.