

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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Israel

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.

Israel

**Speech of Professor Nehemia Levtzion
Chairman
Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC)
Council for Higher Education, Israel**

Higher Education in Israel into the 2000s

Mr President,
Mr Federico Mayor, the Director-General of UNESCO,
Mr Power,
Honorable Ministers, Heads of Delegation, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Mr President, the Delegation of Israel wishes to express its appreciation for the excellent preparatory work by the Steering Committee and its full support to the World Declaration on Higher Education.

Institutions of higher education in Israel enjoy complete academic and administrative freedom that is guaranteed by the Law of Higher Education. The responsibility for the administration of this law is with the Council for Higher Education, an independent body composed of 24 members, two thirds of whom must be university professors. The Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC), a sub-committee of the Council, is a buffer between the government and academia. The PBC, a committee of six persons, four of them university professors, with an excellent professional staff, negotiates the total budget of higher education directly with the Ministry of Finance. The committee is solely responsible for the allocation of the budget to individual institutions. A five-year agreement between the PBC and the treasury permits long-term planning, including continuous growth in the number of students. Funding from the state through the PBC covers about 70% of the budget of the universities, with tuition fees paying for 15%-20% of their expenditure. The rest is self-financing through fund-raising, research grants, contracts with government and industry, as well as services to the community.

In addition to allocations for teaching and research, the PBC is remunerating universities for improving the quality of teaching, staff development, and services to students, particularly handicapped students and those with learning difficulties.

The number of students in higher education in Israel has more than doubled during the last decade. Expansion has been greatly aided by diversification of the higher education system. Ten years ago, about 90% of the undergraduates studied in research universities. By the year 2000, about 40% of the undergraduates will study in colleges that are oriented more than the universities towards the labour market.

With expansion and diversification, new social groups gained access to higher education. Thus higher education, which in the past was the privilege of elite groups, now contributes to a greater equality in Israeli society.

Women are about 57% of the student body, and 46% among the doctoral students. Most of the latter are in the sciences. Change in the academic staff is slower, because, unlike the short cycles of three to five years in which the student body changes completely, the staff has a longer cycle of about thirty years. In 1995, women were 20% of the academic staff in universities. Their percentage will constantly grow because about a third of all recent appointments in universities have been women. It is likely that there will be a higher percentage of women in the colleges, where new staff is currently being recruited.

In recent years, the rate of growth in the number of Arab students in universities has been similar to that of the general population of Israel. But because Arabs had a very low starting point, with only 256 students in 1956, they make up no more than 7% of the student population in universities. It is gratifying however that in the academic teacher training colleges Arab students reached a percentage as high as 16%, which is closer to the proportion of the Arabs in the population of Israel. The Council for Higher Education will soon discuss a memorandum prepared by Professor Majid al-Hajj, the head of a Research

Centre on Arab education, and a member of our delegation to this conference. This memorandum will include proposals that should facilitate the admission of more Arab students to universities and colleges.

The Council for Higher Education has initiated a programme to accelerate the recruitment of Arab lecturers in universities. Twenty new Arab lecturers have been appointed in the last four years in the framework of this programme.

As a planning committee, the PBC is responsible for supplying the necessary academic manpower to the economy of Israel. The fast growth of the electronics and the software industries in Israel in the 1990s created a shortage of graduates with a bachelor's degree in computer sciences and in electronics engineering. Because this shortage has been identified as the bottleneck for further growth of the industry, there was a direct connection between economic growth and the capacity of the institutions of higher education to train academic manpower. With guidance and funding by the PBC, both universities and colleges responded to the challenge, and the number of graduates in these fields has been doubled between 1990 and 1997 from 1,000 to 2,000 per year, and will more than double again to almost 5,000 in the year 2003. Between 1998 and 2003 the higher education system will produce 18,000 graduates which seems to be enough to supply the demand of the industry.

A major feature of university research in Israel is its international character. Israeli researchers are responsible for one percent of the world scientific publications, which is the highest production per capita in the world. 96% of the articles in science and technology authored by Israelis are published in foreign journals. About one third of the scientific publications by Israelis are co-authored with scientists from other countries, which is again the highest rate in the world. The majority of Ph.D. recipients in Israel go abroad for post-doctoral research, and 40% of newly recruited academic staff in Israeli universities received their Ph.D. abroad.

Israeli universities are committed to international cooperation, and they are also in the forefront of the pursuit of regional peace. As one of the first fruits of the peace with Egypt, Israeli universities created in 1982 an Academic Centre in Cairo, whose library serves Egyptian students of Hebrew and Jewish studies. The Centre also facilitates the collaboration of Egyptian and Israeli scientists in the fields of agriculture and tropical diseases.

Since the beginning of the peace process with the Palestinians and with Jordan in the mid-nineties, new projects of academic cooperation have been initiated. The International School for Molecular Biology and Microbiology was established by an agreement between UNESCO and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as a regional research centre. The vision is to harness science and knowledge in the service of peace.

Another ongoing UNESCO project is the University of Tourism and Culture that was established in July 1995 as a unique experiment to teach simultaneously via satellite classes at the universities of Marseilles in France, Ben-Gurion in Israel and Beth-Lehem in the Palestinian Authority.

Jordanian graduate students study at the Hebrew University and at Haifa University. Haifa University is now launching an exciting experiment, in cooperation with representatives of the Palestinian Authority, to admit Palestinian students, who would commute to Haifa from the region of Jenin.

In the midst of the ups and downs of the political process in the Middle East, the culture of peace is cultivated by small teams of Palestinian and Israeli academics who design new projects. Some of these projects wait for funding, and others wait for better days.

Israeli universities are looking also to the wider horizons of cooperation with developing countries in Asia and Africa. We consider post-doctoral research as one of the crucial stages in the process of staff development. The young scientist who joins an advanced research group is lending his talent to a pool from which he draws back invaluable experience.

Mr President, in response to the call of this conference the Council for Higher Education has decided to initiate a programme of post-doctoral fellowships in Israeli universities to promising young scientists. This programme will be open to candidates that would be presented by governments of developing countries. It will hopefully be conducted under the auspices of UNESCO.

I wish to thank UNESCO and its enterprising staff under the leadership of the Director-General Federico Mayor for making this gathering a source for inspiration.