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Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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Kenya

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.

Kenya

**Speech of Hon. Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka,
Minister for Education and Human Resources Development**

Mr. Chairman,
The Director-General of UNESCO,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
The Representatives of NGOs,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Kenya Government and the Kenyan Delegation, it is my humble pleasure to join the rest of the distinguished Colleagues in congratulating you on your election as Chairman of the Conference. I also wish to commend the Director-General of UNESCO, Prof. Federico Mayor, and the UNESCO Secretariat for the excellent job done in organising this 1st World Conference on Higher Education.

Higher education we believe, defines the society we want to live in: its past, survival, advancement or its extinction. It defines the ability of the society to respond to change and equips man for adaptation to various environments. But education has also been responsible for the disparities witnessed in levels of achievement between various nations, regions and even gender. It has been responsible for the exploitation of the uneducated by those who have the knowledge, skills, and modern technology. It has also contributed to tensions and conflicts between cultures and societies.

Yet, Mr. Chairman, higher education, however, has very positive side. It is a decolonising and liberating force. It frees the mind, creates equity, access, relevance, and equality for man. It fosters a sense of national unity, international co-operation and peaceful co-existence. Scientific knowledge and skills obtained in research continue to be a tool for improving our lives. It is therefore a must to invest in higher education for the good of man and the promotion of harmony and peace in the world.

Mr. Chairman, since Independence 35 years ago, Kenya's education policies spelt out in various Development plans, Reports of Education Commissions, Committees and Working parties have laid emphasis on the inter-relationships between providing holistic education for personal self fulfilment and societal demand for its social functions; in eliminating poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease, violence and promoting peace and national unity.

The central objective of our education planning during this decade has been to provide basic education for all by the year 2000 and the government has endeavoured to mobilize its resources towards attaining this goal. We have thus channelled efforts towards the training of literacy teachers, developed early childhood programmes and expanded the existing ones. In our efforts to increase access to education, we have encouraged both the private sector, the non-governmental and religious organizations to invest in education facilities at all levels and have paid special attention to education of the vulnerable groups and the marginalized including those living in slum and arid and semi-arid region of our country. We have also received valuable assistance from UNESCO, the World bank and other international organizations. We are most grateful to these agencies who have made special contribution in the development of our institutions of higher learning with establishment of UNESCO chairs.

Mr. Chairman,

A Working Party on the establishment of a second University in Kenya (1981) recommended a structural change in our education system to encompass 8 years of Primary Education, 4 years of Secondary Education and 4 years of University Education for most degree courses. It also diversified curricula. Thus the focus is on technical training for self-employment while retaining the option for further education at the end of each cycle.

Provision of higher education will only be meaningful if quality and purposeful education is provided. In order to achieve this objective, we have undertaken several intervention measures in conjunction with

donors and other Government organs. These include the provision of text books, equipment and introduction of in-service programmes for teachers. Efforts are also being made to promote linkages in higher education student and teacher exchange, and the technology transfer through International Co-operation with the aim of becoming a newly industrialized nation by the year 2020. Kenya is conscious that the achievement of this target would not be possible unless we invest more in the necessary human resource development. Higher education is the only channel of absorbing modern technology and innovation necessary for this take off.

Mr. Chairman, since the Jomtien Conference in 1990 while our emphasis has been emphasis on the provision of basic education for all, other areas have, however, continued to receive our attention. We have recognised that we cannot achieve social and economic development through education in a cultural vacuum. Culture is an important ingredient in nation building. It encompasses the whole lifestyle of a people and undermines any educational programme however noble, if it is not integrated in the whole of the education policy. Education curricula at all levels have therefore taken cognisance of this in order to reduce conflicts between various cultures, education and development.

The Higher education sub-sector in Kenya is composed of Teacher Education colleges, National Polytechnics, Technical Training Institutes, Institutes of Technology, Professional Training Institutions and Universities.

Enrolment, at this level, is low in relation to our population; the government has however embarked on a tacit expansion programme for the middle-level colleges to make them major player in the task of human resource development. Curricula in our institutions of higher learning are being reviewed periodically so as to make them responsive to the demands of the world of work as well as cater for creative innovations and new trends. Collaborative initiatives between industry, employers and institutions of higher education have been put in place in order to make education relevant and applicable.

Mr. Chairman, we have not been entirely successful. There is still a mismatch between the rapidly changing technology in industry and what is taught in our institutions of higher learning. To address this limitation, the implementation of the University Industry Partnership (UNISPAR) project by the stakeholders has been put in place.

While access and equity to higher education is an urgent concern for the Government, major constraints and challenges face us in this endeavour. Top in the list is the financing of higher education. Due to prevailing economic constraints coupled with effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) and greater demand for admission into the few institutions of higher learning, the Government's ability to provide funding has been stretched to the limit. Because of this constraint students are now expected to meet a sizeable proportion of their tuition and accommodation costs. The Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) to provide loans, bursaries and scholarships to needy students has been established as the financing agency.

Mr. Chairman, the majority of the institutions lack physical facilities and equipment to meet the current technological demands. In response to this shortage of facilities and places in public universities new institutions have been initiated by private sector and religious organizations. To date there are 15 private institutions of higher learning providing university education to a large student population who otherwise would have not gained admission in public universities.

Another challenge facing our institutions of higher education in the millennium is that of quality and relevance. Decline in financial resources coupled with rapid quantitative growth has at times compromised the relevance and quality of our higher education. In recognition to this fact, Kenya Government has set up the Commission for Higher Education (CHE), whose responsibilities include the harmonization of curricular, certification, inspection and accreditation of institutions of higher education.

In developing countries, the provision of quality higher education suffers from the brain drain and Kenya is not an exception. In order for our institutions of higher education to minimise this trend we have come up with viable income generating activities to generate additional income to pay better salaries to attract and retain staff.

The Kenya government believes in equal access to higher education for all citizens irrespective of gender, race or creed. Deliberate efforts have therefore been made to ensure equity in admission into public universities. Female candidates are accorded special consideration in science and technical

oriented courses. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development has also established a gender desk, which is working in collaboration with other organizations such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) for the promotion of the education of the girl child.

The use of satellite and digital communication in distance learning in Kenya is still in its infant stage of development due to the high cost involved. The concept of African Virtual University (AVU) in learning in Kenya was recently introduced at Kenyatta University with the assistance of the World Bank. We expect that this facility will lead to greater net-working in education and technology transfer within Kenya and the East African Region. Maseno University is in the process of establishing a virtual library. Along with this, there is now an urgent need to evolve ways and means of co-operating in educational endeavours within Africa and internationally. We count on international organizations such as UNESCO and other institutions to continue assisting us.

Mr. Chairman, my Government realizes that in order to achieve greater heights of development in education, management of all resources including finances in institutions of higher education will have to be given serious consideration. Along with this, all staff will have to be provided with opportunities to acquire new skills in managing change. In future, programmes to train managers of higher education institutions in leadership skills will be put in place and the Commission for Higher Education has been empowered to monitor and evaluate all aspects of higher education. We, therefore, urge that there should be concerted efforts to initiate and support exchange programmes through International Co-operation, between institutions of higher learning in Africa and internationally. This will avail an opportunity to staff, both administrative and academic, to share knowledge for posterity. As new skills are gained, the main objective should be to make institutions of higher education relevant and accountable to all stakeholders.

With these few remarks and observations it is my hope that we as Member States can join hands to put forward a Framework of Action that will reform the institutions of Higher Education for the 21st Century.

Thank you.