

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

UNESCO, Paris, 5 – 9 October 1998

VOLUME V – PLENARY

Rwanda

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.

Rwanda

**Speech of the Honourable Colonel Dr. Joseph Karemera
Minister of Education
Republic of Rwanda**

Your Excellency, the President of the General Conference,
Your Excellency, the President of the Executive Board,
Honourable Director-General of UNESCO,
Distinguished Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President, I would like to begin by thanking UNESCO for inviting me to this conference «Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action», and giving me the opportunity to address the delegates. Before I continue, I would like to congratulate UNESCO for addressing higher education as it is one sector of education that has been rather neglected and regarded as a luxury rather than an essential asset for a developing country's socio-economic growth.

As you are all aware, Rwanda is just emerging from one of the most horrific human perpetrated atrocities that the world has ever witnessed. Unquestionably, one of the most significant reasons for what happened in Rwanda was the lack of education, lack of awareness and the lack of equity that is nurtured through all levels of education.

Mr. President, within the UN Declaration of Human Rights it is clearly and emphatically stated that «higher education shall be... accessible to all on the basis of merit» and «... everyone has the right to education». I have pondered over these statements and it is in this regard that I am deeply appalled by the education statistics in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, Rwanda has one of the lowest literacy rates, standing at a little less than 53%, women are greatly affected.

Mr. President, my point is that despite the unwavering commitment of the Rwandan government and its continued reaffirmation of the importance of education, the reality is that Rwanda has a huge vacuum, in terms of educated and skilled personnel, and the infrastructure to provide the country with such personnel. This vacuum encompasses all levels of education: primary, secondary, and tertiary, which signifies serious challenges ahead.

The difficulties that Rwanda faces today include: lack of appropriate human resources, which was aggravated by the 1994 genocide, to an extent that only 3% of the current civil services have tertiary level qualifications.

Secondly, the financial constraints do not allow Rwanda to bridge this gap. It is therefore inconceivable how Rwanda can forge ahead into the 21st century with reconstruction, reconciliation and sustainable economic development with such a human resource deficiency.

It is in this regard that an Institute of Science, Technology and Management has been set up in Kigali to respond to the much needed appropriate skills in technology and management.

An Institute of Teacher Training has been established in Kigali to cater for the massive need of teachers. This, we believe is going to enhance the quality of education in Rwanda.

Our National University curriculum and programmes are being reviewed in order to produce graduates/postgraduates that are relevant to the country's development needs of the 21st century.

Mr. President, given our turbulent recent past, human rights issues, tolerance and justice have had to be major elements included in our education curriculum reforms at all levels. I therefore call upon the international community, the UN bodies and agencies and UNESCO in particular to provide generous support to this noble effort. We believe that this is the only viable way these values can be engrained into our youth and hence our future. In short, Mr. President, reconciliation, tolerance and development can only be achieved through education.

In conclusion Mr. President, Rwanda Government recognizes that relevant higher education is a precondition for sustainable development and that adequate resources need to be mobilized towards this goal in order to create access to higher education for both rich and poor.

A stable social and political environment must be established, needless to say this will require serious and judicious socio-political commitments by both regional and international communities.

Thank you.