

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

UNESCO, Paris, 5 – 9 October 1998

VOLUME V – PLENARY

Bangladesh

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.

Bangladesh

Speech of the Representative of the Delegation of Bangladesh

Mr President,
Honorable Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to address the World Conference on Higher Education on behalf of the Government of Bangladesh – the eighth largest country of the world in terms of population. On the eve of next millennium and great transition, the organization of such a large Conference is certainly a laudable effort by UNESCO's Director-General and his colleagues who deserve our thanks. We believe Bangladesh will benefit from sharing views and experiences with other countries attending the conference.

The Bangladesh Government's programmes in the domain of education are witnessing continued success. UNESCO has also attached importance to their achievement by awarding the International Literacy Prize 1998 to Bangladesh. We value this recognition. We also appreciate Federico Mayor for his steady support to us. Last year in Hamburg during UNESCO sponsored Fifth World Conference on Adult Education, he kindly donated an amount of US \$300,000 to fund educational projects in the presence of Bangladesh's Prime Minister, His Excellency Sheikh Hasina, the only head of government attending the Conference.

Distinguished delegates,

The greatest asset of Bangladesh is its diligent and resilient people. We are convinced that investment in human resources in our country is fundamental to development. Last year, a sum of US \$ 850 million was allocated for education sector which includes universities, colleges and specialized institutions dealing with higher education. We have 700 colleges, 23 universities – the first modern one was established in 1921 – 4 technological institutions in the public and private sectors to provide our tertiary students with general education together with education in science and technology, agriculture and livestock and medical science. To cope with the growing demand for higher education, in addition to universities, distance education by correspondence was also introduced. Distance learning modes include lecture broadcasts on TV. The higher education institutions, especially the universities and private colleges, have been enjoying full academic freedom and autonomy. At the various levels, roughly half a million students are being taught by as many as 27 thousand teachers, among whom five thousand are women. Over the last many years, a large number of students from developing countries have been going abroad for post-graduate studies, research work and higher training. But the country is not fully benefiting from the services to be offered by these scholars, due to the brain drain and departure of skilled human capital. Taking into account this scenario, the conference could prescribe a guideline that may be used as a deterrent against the brain drain.

In Bangladesh in recent years, a number of universities and medical colleges have been set up under private initiatives in collaboration with foreign counterparts. These institutions have got similar curricula which are being followed by their overseas counterparts. Today admission to higher education is based on a nationwide selection and placement examination. In this situation, we would like to reiterate that the recognition of studies in both public and private institutions and diplomas obtained therein should be ratified and implemented.

We also believe, that unrestricted movement of developing countries' students and scholars from their respective countries to the developed part of the world for higher studies and research work would be beneficial. It is therefore imperative that there should be increased international co-operation between higher education institutions, as well as greater student mobility.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The present population growth rate is 1.7% in Bangladesh – a country dominated by its vast secular Muslim population. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities considers this achievement as a positive sign for sustainable development. Though the rate is low vis-a-vis other least developed countries, still our country is struggling to ensure education for its growing population. Primary and secondary education are compulsory. In spite of this, there are school drop-outs because we have to identify those who merit higher education from among hundreds of thousands of young people.

Mr President,

Bangladesh concurs with the emphasis laid down in the draft documents, - The World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century : Vision and Action and the Framework for priority Action for Change and Development of Higher Education.

As the 21st century begins with easy access and equity to the higher education, let this be life long and qualitative. This is indeed a challenge for all of us. Let us resolve to meet this challenge collectively and collaboratively.

Mr President, Mr Director-General, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.