

# **WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century**

### **Vision and Action**

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#### **Republic of Korea**

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

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Republic of Korea

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**Speech of his H.E. Mr YANG Dong-chil  
Ambassador and Head of the Republic of Korea Delegation  
to the World Conference on Higher Education**

Mr President,

Half a century ago, chastened by two World Wars and a great depression, the world was reborn with the United Nations System. The Security Council was established to ensure world political security and the Bretton Woods system for the world's economic security. UNESCO itself was born equally under the conviction that without educating our future generations healthily in mind and body, the world would be doomed again to failure.

In the meantime, the economic stagnation of the 1970s the resurgence of Asia as an economic model and finally the collapse of communism, revived an almost credulous faith in pure market economics and an urge to spread them worldwide.

Until last year, Asians were upbeat and triumphant with their smooth running global capitalism. But globalism is falling from grace. The world has abruptly entered another phase of global capitalism in retreat. Emerging markets are sinking, uncertainties are unpredictable in length. Everything is changing radically, rapidly and sweepingly.

On the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the following lines of Alfred Lord Tennyson come to mind : "The year is dying in the night : Ring out the old, ring in the new."

At this historic juncture, we are assembled here at the World conference on Higher Education, to exchange our thoughts and preoccupations, our successes and failures, in order to map out what relevant strategies are required to cope effectively with those challenges and tasks facing higher education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Mr President,

I think that, first of all, higher education must come to terms with the effects and consequences of globalization and the internationalization of societies. Higher education must be responsive to employability, occupational skills and career-change retraining. That is why we have to approach the question of education and higher education in particular as if educational institutions were economic entities.

**Missions of higher education**

The task of higher education is to educate responsible, enlightened and active citizens and highly qualified specialists, ensuring all-round education as well as individual development. The updating improvement of knowledge and skills and the further education or career-change retraining also belong to the higher education mission. Furthermore, one of the most important missions of higher education in our society is its cultural and ethical mission.

Therefore, my delegation wishes to propose that UNESCO step up its ethical and philosophical mission and activities so as to play a driving force in philosophy and ethics education worldwide.

It is higher education that trains specialists, required in ever increasing numbers without whom neither the economy nor society, both more and more complex, could function in this 20<sup>th</sup> century, let alone the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As we are living in an era of globalization, the variety of new jobs being created is on the increase as more conventional jobs become redundant through rapid advances in technology.

In this context, higher education will be the most important means of fostering an individual's competence and ability to adapt to the changes in the job market. Accordingly higher education must comprise lifelong vocational education, diversification and flexibility.

Most of the developed countries have already begun to reorganize their public education and training structures, particularly to reform their vocational education system.

## **Vocational Education**

In the Republic of Korea, the main objective of this vocational education reform is to establish a "Lifelong Vocational Education System" to realize a "Lifelong open learning society". It will ultimately lead to nurturing high-quality human resources through updating or refreshing their knowledge and skills, reflecting the needs of the labour market.

Despite the large number of highly educated individuals in their 20s and 30s, the overall educational standard or ordinary citizens is relatively low compared to their counterparts in developed nations. Currently, with respect to educational attainment the Korean workforce is as follows:

36 percent with less than a high school education, 45 percent high school graduates, 6 percent junior college graduates and 13 percent university graduates. If the current trend continues, the ratio will be 26 percent, 50 percent, 9 percent and 15 percent respectively by the year 2000.

In Korea the following three main objectives are to be accomplished by the year 2000.

1. Those who do not plan to enter college or university will be given the opportunity to receive proper vocational training in their high school curricula;
2. Vocational training will be available at junior level;
3. Workers wishing to improve their professional skills will be given the chance of vocational education or training.

## **Invitation to the Seoul Congress**

Mr President,

Next year in Seoul, my Government as a host country and UNESCO as an organizer, will jointly hold the Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education. All member states of UNESCO will be cordially invited to the Seoul Congress.

South Korea was in the vortex of the financial crisis that recently devastated Asia, but the Republic of Korea state-ship managed to rough sail, because the hatches were battened down as the storm grew fiercer. Education will be the main source of energy in overcoming this crisis.

Mr President,

I understand that higher education is also designed to promote democracy and human rights. My delegation wishes to state that the Republic of Korea will fully commit itself to promoting democracy and human rights wherever necessary by participating actively in the solving of major global, regional and local problems, such as poverty, hunger, illiteracy and social exclusion. We Koreans will endeavour to promote a culture of peace instead of violence, fraternity instead of hatred.

As higher education is required to preserve and assert cultural identity, promote the propagation and creation of cultural values, the Government of the Republic of Korea will not spare its efforts to preserve and enhance the entire Korean cultural and natural heritage regardless of its locality.

## **Cooperative relationship between the two Koreas**

I think promoting a cooperative relationship between the higher education institutions of South and North Korean would be worth doing. Exchange of academics, students and curricula between the two Koreas would be relevant missions of higher education. Promotion of intellectual and moral solidarity and identification of a common culture, common language and common history between two long separated peoples, like North and South Korea, deserve to be encouraged by this world forum.

Finally, we hope that this World Conference on Higher Education will bring to the bleak horizons of 1998, a glimmer of hope and expectation. Thank you.