

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

UNESCO, Paris, 5 – 9 October 1998

VOLUME V – PLENARY

Pakistan

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.

Pakistan

**Speech of Dr Safdar Mahmood,
Education Secretary, Government of Pakistan**

Mr President,
Prof. Federico Mayor, Director-General UNESCO,
Distinguished delegates and observers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to start my eight-minute speech by extending, on my behalf and on behalf of my Government, gratitude to the hardworking team of UNESCO which has been toiling day and night to make this conference a success. May Almighty Allah bring fruits to their efforts and bestow upon them His blessings.

Mr President on the threshold of 21st Century, university education is at crossroads in the entire world specially in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Afro-Asian countries this situation is exacerbated by historical factors whereby the old colonial legacy of élitist higher education has left permanent marks on the social fabric. We have used all different kinds of compounds to bleach away these marks in order to gloss over the rich tradition of higher education that existed in the countries of South Asia in the past, but seems like these marks have now become un-removable. The schools established at Tenyolas, monasteries and mosques were quite famous during those days for imparting professional training as well as higher education to students coming from all corners of the world. I take great pride in sharing with the participants of the conference that Takshaschila, known today as Taxila, was the seat of knowledge and wisdom in 6th Century B.C. It is a recorded fact that the first university of the world was established in 6th century B.C. at Jaulian-Taxila, located about 43 kilometres on west from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Some inquisitive mind may ask me after my speech that would it be possible to get admission in this prehistoric university, my answer to them will be 'yes'. This university may not be able to provide you beautiful buildings and gargantuan library but the archaic remains still have the same prehistoric aroma, pristine love, maternal affection, power of knowledge, virtues of collective wisdom and, above all, a non-discriminatory policy on the basis sex, race, age, origin, nationality or religion.

Mr President the South Asia which had been the torch bearer of knowledge and wisdom was left behind by the great medieval universities of the west. These new universities had far-reaching impact on the universities established elsewhere and, therefore, were widely 'exported' to all corners of the world. In some cases these 'exported models' of universities became ivory towers for the importing country because they were completely cut off from the local problems and development issues. The Delors Commission has rightly pointed out that "nowhere is the universities' responsibility for the development of society as a whole is more acute than in developing countries, where research done in institutions of higher learning plays a pivotal role in providing the basis for development programmes, policy formulation and the training of middle and higher-level human resources." If the acceptance of these 'export models' is the only option left to developing countries, then much of the responsibility for building bridges between the developed and the developing countries rests with the universities of the latter.

Mr President, there are a number of networks linking institutions of higher education in the developed countries. These networks have produced enormous scientific and cultural benefits for the developed countries, but have exacerbated the differences between the countries which participate in them and those which are left outside. The twinning of research institutions in industrialized countries with their counterparts in developing countries is required more than ever before. In my opinion, one of the urgent tasks for the university community in the wealthier countries is to devise ways to accelerate cooperation and to help build up research capacity in the less developed countries.

Mr President, although the problems differ from country to country, higher education all over the world is going through a period characterized by the growth of the student population, an increase in unit costs, and the difficulty of gearing courses to the needs of the graduates to find jobs that match their training. The entire world is facing a choice between pure market logic, where universities would compete with each other like business, and the current system dominated by the public university bureaucracy. Besides these general

problems, the countries like Pakistan are facing some peculiar problems, such as, mushroom growth of 'nomad campuses', of brand name foreign universities, of the brain drain, and so on. It is true that these 'nomad campuses', on one hand, have helped us off-load the burden on the public sector, but on the other hand they are becoming centres of higher education only for the elite class, due to their high costs, and the ultimate effect of which will be that the power will continue to be concentrated in this class of society. I am afraid this kind of trend in higher education will have a damaging impact on the infant democracies of the world. As a delegate from a developing country, I would like to request UNESCO and other international organizations to look into this aspect of the problem and come up with some solution to rescue the developing countries from this dilemma.

Now coming to the phenomenon of the 'brain drain', I must confess at the outset that higher education does not seem to count for much in our countries. As a result, there has been a large scale emigration of educated, skilled manpower from the region over the last four decades. According to official estimates, almost 36,000 professionals, including doctors, engineers and teachers, have migrated to other countries in the last two decades. This figure represents only a small proportion of actual migration, since a majority of emigrants do not register. What we really need from this generation of skilled emigrants is not their assets or remittances, but their own human capital. Most skilled emigrants have studied in national educational institutions, where subsidies are often higher than 90%, and the brain drain merely succeeds in transferring the benefits of these subsidies to the industrialized world. One way to compensate South Asian societies for the losses caused by the brain drain would be for developing and industrialized countries to consider a tax policy which will have a two-fold effect; (i) compensation for subsidized education in developing countries, and (ii) deterring further emigration of skilled labour. The easiest way to implement such a policy may be to impose a special income tax on the 'drained' professional manpower in the North, which would be collected by industrialized country governments and eventually handed over to developing countries via the UN system. For those who may be interested to study this proposal further, I would like to take this opportunity to give them a reference to an article written by Bhagwati and Dellalfar in the 70s. The exact reference is: 'Brain Drain and Income Taxation' reported in World Development, 1973; 1:94-101.

Mr President, I wish to draw the attention of this august body to the fact that any plans for strengthening of higher education in isolation cannot be fruitful if we overlook other levels of education. In countries like Pakistan, the universalization of primary education, the reform of secondary education and the upgrading of technical education are *sine qua non* for the improvement of higher education. In Pakistan we have recently launched the new education policy for 1998-2010 which not only addresses the major issues of illiteracy, access to education and qualitative improvement but also suggests departure from the existing practices and policies. In the new education policy, our priority is to develop a management information system at the national level, to promote the role of private sector in higher education, and to establish the centres of advanced studies and research and community colleges.

Mr President and distinguished participants of this conference, before I conclude, let me once again state my deep appreciation to the experts and staff of UNESCO for their dedication and hard work in developing useful programmes at global level.