

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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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.

Republic of the Philippines

**Speech of the Honorable Angel C. Alcala,
Chairman, Commission on Higher Education,
Head of the Delegation of the Republic of the Philippines,**

Mr President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Philippine Delegation, I am honored to extend to you the greetings of the President of the Republic of the Philippines, His Excellency Joseph Ejercito Estrada and of the Filipino people. The Philippine Government is pleased to congratulate the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), under the leadership of Director General Federico Mayor, for convening this first UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in view of the crucial role that higher education has in society and while seeking to ensure that it will be able to respond effectively to the changing needs and demands of the 21st Century.

We are likewise pleased to endorse in principle the proposed *World Declaration on Higher Education and the Framework for Priority Action*. May I also thank the Executive Committee and the Secretariat for their kind citation of the contributions of the *World Congress on Higher Education and Human Resource Development* hosted by the Philippines on June 23 - 25, 1997 in the City of Manila.

Higher education is the cornerstone of any economy and way of life. We have tremendous faith that higher education is the reservoir from which all our countries and peoples shall draw impetus and energy. We hold the fundamental conviction that higher education institutions perform pivotal roles and are strategic bridges to sustainable economic development, cultural enrichment, human resource mobilization and institutional capacity building. Underlying all these is the concept of the culture of peace which is enshrined in the Constitution of UNESCO and is an ultimate goal of the Organization.

The Philippines articulates its Visions and Directions for the 21st Century Vision in the Philippine National Development Plan. In 2025, it is envisioned that all Filipinos shall have access to education that is geared towards the realization of their full potentials as individuals and as members of the family, community, society and the global village.

Besides developing economic, ecological, political, cultural and scientific literacy and competence, education shall promote well-being, develop emotional and mental intelligence as well as the moral and spiritual potentials of all Filipinos. Filipinos shall also be imbued with a strong sense of history, a deep understanding of their cultural heritage and a profound appreciation for artistic innovation.

Our country holds the fundamental belief that the solution to the major problems and the challenges we confront require not only the enhancement of quality and relevance with due consideration of the equity dimension, but more so on the strong involvement of every government, higher education institutions and other stakeholders such as the students, their families, teaching personnel and researchers, the professional organizations, business and industry, legislators, the media, and the society as a whole.

Taking all of the sectoral concerns into account, the Philippines, through legislation, made a strong resolve to address these concerns on higher education and passed into law on May 18, 1994 Republic Act 7722 thereby establishing the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), a separate and independent but co-equal agency with the Philippines' Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS). The CHED was established in order to give equal focus to the concerns of higher education and to allow the DECS to truly focus on the issues and concerns at the basic education level.

Our government also put in place the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) which has the responsibility for developing the middle-level manpower resource base of the Philippines. In 1997, the Higher Education Modernization Act of 1997 was passed by the Legislature. This law advances and enhances the autonomy and accountability of chartered state universities and colleges, as well as empowered their governing boards to implement innovative strategies.

In line with these developments, the Philippines' House of Representatives has formed the Standing Committee on Higher Education in addition to the Committee on Basic Education so that the legislative focus shall complement and be aligned with the reorganized structure.

Corollary to these, a Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF) is made available to the identified Centres of Excellence (COEs) in the various disciplines such as Teacher Education, Business and Entrepreneurship, Medical and Health Professions Education, Engineering, Mathematics and the Sciences, Agriculture and the Humanities and Arts.

We are fully aware of and shall correspondingly adapt to the changes taking place in the regional and global arenas while we proceed along path of creating the higher education infrastructure and systems which shall make the Philippines globally-competitive in the 21st Century and where higher education institutions will have to redefine their traditional and collective values by considering the market forces.

Higher education institutions have to look into the new demands and needs of students and learners of all types, backgrounds and circumstances. Institutions of higher learning and the systems governance mechanisms must also consider the different modes of delivering education to where learning is needed. Higher education must keep track of new knowledge and respond to societal demands with accountability. Institutions of higher learning must also forge alliances with other sectors which also contribute to the development of learning capacities. It is also necessary for these institutions to expand their scholarship and student financial assistance programs in order to provide wider access to deserving students.

In the Philippines, the initiatives taken on higher education translate to a reevaluation of the processes and activities taking place. The fundamental blocks of the higher education system are the academic departments. These are the units which must be intimately concerned with paradigm shifts in instruction, research and extension. Higher education institutions and systems should find and strike the right balance or mix of specialist education with liberal education and empower learners, as well as themselves, to respond to the global trends in information technology and computer applications.

Higher education institutions also have the special responsibility of raising to higher planes the pursuit of the furtherance of the participation of women and students in the new paradigms of learning and societal transformation. Education also must empower women to assume and carry out their roles from strategic leadership vantage points.

It is imperative for institutions of higher learning to gain more autonomy and flexibility while being ever vigilant on maintaining standards through the continual development of internationally comparable quality assurance systems applied internally and externally. The Higher Education Modernization Act earlier stated encompasses this concern.

Finally, higher education must qualitatively develop and expand its capacities to address societal needs through focused internationalization, networking and collaboration on mutually-shared aspirations and specific objectives. This UNESCO World Conference is a perfect occasion to open new windows for international cooperation. One of these windows is that which opens to the mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees across borders. In the Philippines, the ratification process for the *UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Degrees and Diplomas in the Asia-Pacific* will very soon be completed.

With the World Declaration on Higher Education and the Framework for Priority Action as our guiding documents, we have the historic opportunity to define the higher education directions of our countries and profoundly influence the future of our peoples.

The Philippines is resolved to work in solidarity with you, our kindred spirits. With unity and solidarity, we shall walk together and confidently forge ahead into the Third Millennium inspired by cohesive action and collaborative efforts towards relevant and dynamic higher education.

Thank you and Mabuhay!