



DECLARATION OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN - CRES 2008

Higher education is a social public good, a universal human right, and a responsibility of States.

This is the conviction and the basis for the strategic role that it should play in the processes of sustainable development of the countries of the region. More than 3,500 members of the regional academic community – rectors, high administrators, teachers, researchers, students, administrative personnel, representatives of governments and of national, regional, and international agencies, of associations and networks, and others interested in higher education, were present and participated in the Regional Conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CRES), from June 04-06, 2008 in the city of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, under the auspices of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-IESALC) and the Ministry of National Education of Colombia, with the collaboration of the governments of Brazil, Spain, Mexico, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. CRES 2008 was also transmitted via the Internet in four languages to all of the countries of LAC and the world through the portals of CRES, UNESCO-Paris, the Ministry of National Education of Colombia, the Ministry of Education of Brazil, and other media such as radio and television. This conference has contributed to identifying the major issues of Latin America and the Caribbean, looking toward the World Conference on Higher Education, to be held in 2009, as well as to key ideas for the consolidation, expansion, and growing quality of higher education in the region.

The conference was held 10 years after the World Conference on Higher Education (1998), 12 years after the Regional Conference of Havana (1996) and 90 years after the Cordoba Reform, the principles of which are today fundamental guidelines in terms of university autonomy, co-government, universal access, and social commitment.

The broad preparatory process for this event included the active participation of the academic communities of the region, including that of students through the Latin American and Caribbean Continental Student Organization (OCLAE). This participation included a multitude of forums and meetings, both national, sub-regional, and regional, the conclusions of which nourished the event. In addition, the studies coordinated by IESALC led to the development of widely disseminated documents that served as a basis for discussion at this conference.

The stocktaking carried out visualizes in prospective terms the challenges and

opportunities faced by higher education in the region in the light of regional integration and of changes in the global context. The objective is to establish a scenario that makes it possible to articulate in a creative and sustainable manner policies that strengthen the social commitment, quality and pertinence of higher education and the autonomy of Universities. These policies should point toward higher education for all, and have as a goal the achievement of greater social coverage with quality, equity, and commitment to our peoples. They should foster the development of alternatives and innovations in educational proposals, in the production and transfer of knowledge and learning, as well as promote the establishment and consolidation of strategic partnerships between governments, the productive sector, civil society, and the institutions of higher education, science, and technology.

These policies should take into account the historical wealth, cultures, literature and art of the Caribbean, and foster the mobilisation of university competencies and values of this part of our region in order to build a diverse, strong, solidarity-based, and perfectly integrated Latin American and Caribbean society.

The Regional Conference on Higher Education 2008 makes an urgent and emphatic call to the members of educational communities, particularly to those responsible for making policy and strategic decisions, to responsible authorities within ministries of education, of higher education, of culture, of science and technology, to international organizations, to UNESCO itself, and to actors and persons involved in educational and university tasks to take into consideration the statements and lines of action that have come out of the extended discussions at this conference regarding the priorities that higher education should adopt, based on a clear awareness regarding the possibilities and contributions that it offers for the development of the region.

The challenges that we must face are of such magnitude that if not met in a timely and efficacious manner, will deepen the differences, inequalities, and contradictions that currently impede the growth of an equitable, just, sustainable, and democratic Latin America and Caribbean for the great majority of countries in the region. This Regional Conference on Higher Education notes that, although there has been progress toward a society that seeks democratic and sustainable changes and referents, there is still a lack of profound changes in the key factors that will provide a dynamic for the development of the region. Of these, one of the most important is Education, and particularly higher education.

Therefore, convinced of the paramount value of higher education for forging a better future for our peoples, we declare:

A- Context

- 1.-** The construction of a more prosperous, just, and solidarity-based society, and of a comprehensive and sustainable human development model, are tasks that should be assumed by all nations of the world and by society as a whole. In this sense, activities leading toward the attainment of the Millennium Objectives should be a fundamental priority.
- 2.-** Our region is markedly pluri-cultural and multilingual. Regional integration and treating the problems faced by our peoples require endogenous approaches that recognize our human and natural diversity as our principle asset.
- 3.-** In a world in which knowledge, science, and technology play a primary role, the development and strengthening of higher education represents an irreplaceable element for social progress, the generation of wealth, the strengthening of cultural

identities, social cohesion, the struggle against poverty and hunger, the prevention of climate change and the energy crisis, as well as for fostering the culture of peace.

B Higher education as a human right and social public good

1.- Higher education is a human right and a social public good. States have the fundamental duty to guarantee this right. States, national societies, and academic communities should define the basic principles upon which citizen training is based, and assure that it is pertinent and of quality.

2.- Higher education as a social public good is reaffirmed in the measure that access to it is a true right of all citizens. National education policies are the necessary condition for fostering access to quality higher education through appropriate strategies and actions.

3.- Considering the immense task faced by countries of Latin America and the Caribbean of expanding coverage, both the public and private sectors are obliged to provide quality and pertinent higher education. Therefore, government should strengthen accreditation mechanisms that guarantee the transparency and condition of public service.

4.- Particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a need for education that effectively contributes to democratic relations, to tolerance, and to creating a spirit of solidarity and cooperation that makes up a continental identity, that creates opportunities for those who today do not have them, and that contributes, with the creation of knowledge, to the social and economic transformation of our societies. In a continent with countries that are emerging from the terrible democratic crisis provoked by dictatorships, and that, most unfortunately, exhibits the greatest inequalities on the planet, human resources and knowledge will be the major wealth of all.

5.- The responses of higher education to society's demands must be based on the university community's critical and rigorous intellectual ability in defining its objectives and assuming its commitments. Academic freedom is of paramount importance in setting priorities and taking decisions on the basis of public values that lie at the foundation of science and social well being. Autonomy is a right and a necessary condition for unfettered academic work, while also being an enormous responsibility in the fulfilling of its mission with quality, pertinence, efficiency and transparency in the face of society's challenges. This also includes social accountability. Autonomy involves social commitment, and both must go hand in hand. The involvement of academic communities in their own management, and particularly, student participation, are indispensable.

6.- Higher education as a social public good faces currents that foster its commercialization and privatization, as well as the reduction of financial support from States. This trend must be reversed, and the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean must guarantee that public institutions of higher education be appropriately financed and that they respond with transparent management. Under no circumstances can education be guided by regulations and institutions intended for commerce, nor by the logic of the market. The move from that which is national and regional toward that which is global (global public good) has as a consequence the strengthening of existing hegemonies.

7.- Education offered by trans-national providers, exempt from the control and guidance of national States, favours education that is de-contextualized and in which the principles of pertinence and equity are displaced. This increases social exclusion, fosters inequality, and consolidates underdevelopment. We must foster in our countries laws and mechanisms necessary for regulating academic offerings, and especially trans-national offerings, in all of the key aspects of quality higher education.

8.- The incorporation of education as a commercial service within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO) has resulted in a generalized rejection by a

large variety of organizations directly related to higher education. Such incorporation represents a strong threat to the construction of pertinent higher education in the countries that accept the commitments demanded by the General Agreement on Trade and Services, and its acceptance involves serious injury to the humanitarian proposals of comprehensive education and to national sovereignty. For this reason, we, the participants in CRES 2008, warn the States of Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the dangers involved in accepting the WTO agreements, and to then be obliged by them, among other negative impacts, to direct public funds toward foreign private enterprises established in their territories in fulfilment of the principle of “national treatment” established by these agreements. We further declare our intention to see to it that education in general and higher education in particular not be considered commercial services. Consequently, these elements should be eliminated from WTO negotiations.

C- Coverage and educational and institutional models

1. -In order to assure significant growth of the national coverage required in the coming decades, it is essential that higher education generates institutional structures and academic proposals that guarantee the right to it and the training of the greatest possible number of competent individuals, destined to substantially improve the socio-cultural, technical, scientific, and artistic support required by the countries of the region.

2.- Given the complexity of society’s demands toward higher education, institutions should grow in their diversity, flexibility, and articulation. This is particularly important in order to guarantee access and permanence under equitable conditions and with quality for all, and essential for the integration into higher education of social sectors such as workers, the poor, those living in places far from major urban centres, indigenous populations and persons of African descent, people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, those deprived of their freedom, and other needy or vulnerable populations.

3.- Cultural diversity and interculturalism should be fostered under equitable and mutually respectful conditions. The goal is not only to include indigenous peoples, those of African descent, and others culturally differentiated in institutions as they currently exist; but rather to transform these institutions in order that they be more pertinent to cultural diversity. It is necessary to incorporate the dialogue of the different forms of knowledge and the recognition of the diversity of values and ways of learning as central elements in the sector’s plans and programmes.

4. Satisfying increasing social demands for higher education requires increasing equity-based policies for entry, and creating new public support mechanisms for students (scholarships, student residencies, health and meal services, as well as academic guidance) designed to make possible their permanence and good performance in the systems.

5.- It is essential to produce changes in educational models in order to counter low levels of student performance, delayed progress, and failure. This requires training a greater number of teachers able to use sets of in-class or virtual teaching methods appropriate to the heterogeneous needs of students, and who also know how to perform effectively in educational venues in which there are persons of different social and cultural backgrounds.

6.- Moving toward the goal of generalized, life-long higher education requires demanding and providing new content to principles of active teaching, according to which learners are individually and collectively the principal protagonists. Active, permanent, and high-level teaching is only possible if it is closely and innovatively linked to the exercise of citizenship, active performance within the work place, and access to the diversity of cultures.

7.- Offering greater options to students within systems through flexible curricula that facilitate their ready transit through their structures will make it possible to efficiently serve particular student interests and vocations, allowing them access to new kinds of more flexible and varied degree training, according to the changing demands of the labour market. All of this requires improving the interface between different levels of training, formal and non-formal educational mechanisms, as well as demanding programmes that are reconcilable with employment. By overcoming segmentation and the lack of articulation between courses and institutions, and by moving toward higher education systems based on diversity, it will be possible to attain democratization, pluralism, originality, and academic and institutional innovation firmly based on university autonomy. In addition, the de-concentration and regionalization of educational offerings are essential in order to seek territorial equality and to facilitate the incorporation of local actors into higher education.

8.- Information and communication technologies should have qualified personnel, validated experiences and strict systems of quality control in order to be positive instruments of geographic and defined expansion of the teaching-learning process.

9.- Given that the computerization of educational media and its intensive use in teaching and learning processes will tend to grow at a high rate, the role of higher education in the training of persons with critical judgement and thought structures able to transform information into knowledge for the good exercise of their professions and leadership in public and private sectors is enormously important.

10.- Higher education must make effective the development of policies for interfacing with the entire educational system, collaborating in the development of solid cognitive bases and of learning in preceding levels in order that students who enter higher education will possess the values, skills, and abilities that allow them to acquire, construct, and transfer knowledge for the benefit of society. Higher education has an undoubted responsibility in the training of teachers for the entire system of education, as well as in the consolidation of pedagogical research, and the production of educational content. States must fully assume the priority of guaranteeing quality education for all, from initial to higher education. In this sense, policies of access to higher education should consider the need for the implementation of programs of graduate teaching and research.

11.- Teachers must be recognized as key actors in education systems. They must be guaranteed appropriate initial and on-going training, working conditions and hours, salaries, and career paths in order to make effective the quality of teaching and research.

12.- It is essential that the universalization of secondary education be guaranteed. Moreover, the incorporation of the entire population into the dynamics of knowledge requires the development of educational alternatives and paths leading to certification for employment, digital literacy, and the recognition by institutions of higher education of experiences and knowledge acquired outside formal systems. In this sense, among other experiences, the “peoples’ universities” which occurred at the beginning of university reforms should be revisited.

13. The institutions of higher education of the region need and deserve better forms of government able to respond to the transformations demanded by internal and external contexts. This requires the professionalization of management and a clear linkage between the institutional mission and proposals and the instruments of management.

D- Social and human values of higher education

1.- Profound changes must be made in how knowledge is accessed, produced, transmitted, distributed, and used. As UNESCO has stated on other opportunities, institutions of higher education and particularly universities have a responsibility of carrying out the revolution in thought; this is essential in order to accompany the rest

of the changes.

2.- We emphasize and defend the humanistic character of higher education. It should therefore be oriented toward the comprehensive training of persons, citizens, and professionals able to approach with ethical, social, and environmental responsibility the multiple challenges involved in endogenous development and in the integration of our countries, and who can actively, critically, and constructively participate in society.

3.- It is necessary to foster respect for and defence of human rights, including the struggle against all forms of discrimination, oppression, and domination; the striving for equality and social justice, and gender equality; the defence and enrichment of our cultural and environmental heritage; food security and sovereignty; the eradication of hunger and poverty, inter-cultural dialogue with full respect for identities; the fostering of a culture of peace, as well as Latin American and Caribbean unity, and cooperation with the peoples of the world. These are part of the vital commitments of higher education, and must be expressed in all educational programs, as well as in the priorities of research, extension, and inter-institutional cooperation.

4.- In all of its endeavours, higher education must reassert and strengthen the multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual character of our countries and region.

5.- Institutions of higher education must move forward in establishing a more active relationship with their different environments. Quality is linked to both pertinence, and responsibility toward sustainable development. This means fostering an academic model marked by the examination of problems within their contexts; the production and transfer of the social value of knowledge; joint work with communities; scientific, technological, humanistic, and artistic research based on an explicit definition of the problems being addressed, of fundamental interest for national or regional development, and the well-being of the population; an active dissemination effort aimed at educating for citizenship, rooted in respect for human rights and cultural diversity; extension activities that enrich education, helping to detect problems for the agenda of research, and that create areas for joint action involving diverse segments of society, especially the most neglected.

6.- Mechanisms must be fostered that, while respecting autonomy, make possible the participation of diverse segments of society in defining education priorities and policies, as well as their assessment.

E- Scientific, humanistic, and artistic education and comprehensive sustainable development

1.- Higher education has an indispensable role to play in closing the gaps in science and technology with the currently most developed countries and within the region. The existence of such gaps threatens to perpetuate conditions of subordination and poverty in our countries. More must be done to increase public investment in science, technology and innovation and devise public policies to stimulate the growth of investment by companies. Such investments should be directed at strengthening national and regional capacities in order to create, transform and use knowledge, including training, access to information, the availability of necessary equipment, and the establishment of teams and scientific communities integrated through networks.

2.- National, regional and institutional policies must be aimed fundamentally to achieve a transformation of the types of relationships connecting groups of academic researchers and the users of knowledge - whether companies, public services or communities - so that social needs and economic requirements are in line with academic capacity, setting the lines of priority research.

3.- The development of scientific, technological, humanistic and artistic abilities with clear and rigorous quality should be linked to a perspective of sustainability. The exhaustion of the predominant development model is evident in the clash between human needs, consumption models, and the maintenance of an inhabitable planet.

This involves ensuring an emphasis on addressing social, economic, and environmental problems, alleviating hunger, poverty and inequity, while maintaining biodiversity and the life support systems of the planet. Education is crucial for transforming values that today stimulate an unsustainable consumption. Knowledge institutions have a key role to play in guiding new technologies and innovation toward consumption/production systems that do not make improvements in well-being dependent upon the growing consumption of energy and materials.

4.- New converging technologies are part of the current dynamic of scientific and technical development that will transform societies over the coming decades. Our countries must overcome new and difficult challenges if they are to create and use this kind of knowledge, apply it, and adapt it to social and economic goals. Special attention must be paid to overcoming obstacles, and to laying a strong foundation for endogenous science and technology.

5.- The process of setting an agenda for Science, Technology and Innovation that can be shared by Latin American and Caribbean universities must seek to produce the knowledge that our development and the well-being of our peoples demand. It should also foster scientific work based on social needs and a growing understanding of science as a public matter that concerns society as a whole.

6.- Scientific and cultural knowledge should be disseminated throughout society, providing citizens with the opportunity to take part in decisions relating to scientific and technological matters that may directly or indirectly affect them, seeking to turn citizens into thoughtful supporters of those decisions, while at the same time opening the scientific system to social criticism.

7.- Just as important as the generation and socialization of knowledge in the fields of the exact and natural sciences and production technologies are humanistic, social, and artistic studies in order to strengthen individual perspectives for approaching our problems, responding to challenges in the fields of human, economic, social and cultural rights; equity, distribution of wealth, inter-cultural integration, participation, building democracy, and international balance, as well as enriching our cultural heritage. It is vital to shorten the distances separating the scientific, technical, humanistic, social, and artistic fields, while understanding the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of problems and promoting cross-cutting views, interdisciplinary work and comprehensive training.

8.- Graduate education is indispensable for the development of scientific, technological, humanistic, and artistic research based on rigorous quality criteria. Graduate education must be based on active lines of research and intellectual creation in order to ensure that they are studies that promote the highest professional/vocational qualifications and on-going training, contributing effectively to the creation, transformation, and socialization of knowledge.

F- Academic networks

1.- The history and the progress made through cooperation has made our institutions of higher education actors that have a vocation for regional integration. It is through network-building that the region's institutions of higher education can unite and share the scientific and cultural potential they possess for analyzing and proposing solutions for strategic problems. Such problems know no borders, and their solution depends on the collective efforts of institutions of higher education and States.

2. Academic networks at national and regional levels are the appropriate strategic interlocutors with governments. Moreover, they are the appropriate protagonists for meaningfully articulating local and regional cultural identities, and to work actively to overcome the strong asymmetries prevailing in the region and the world in the face of the global phenomenon of the internationalization of higher education.

G- Emigration of highly skilled persons

1.- A matter requiring the greatest attention is the prevention of highly qualified persons being lost through emigration. The existence of explicit policies of industrialized countries aimed at attracting such personnel from countries of the South often means for the latter the loss of indispensable professional skills. It is essential that public policies address the dimensions of the problem in all its complexity, safeguarding our countries' intellectual, scientific, cultural, and artistic heritage.

2.- Emigration is rapidly increasing due to the recruitment by central countries of young professionals in order to compensate for reductions in the numbers of their university student populations. This problem can be addressed through creating local work environments according to their abilities, and by making use, through mechanisms that minimize the impacts of such losses, of the strategic advantages that can result from the emigration of skilled talent to other regions when their home countries cannot absorb them directly.

H- Regional Integration and internationalization

1.- The creation of a Latin American and Caribbean Research and higher education Area (ENLACES in Spanish) is essential, and must be part of the agenda of the region's governments and multilateral agencies. This is key to reaching higher levels of regional integration in its fundamental aspects: greater depth in its cultural dimension; the development of academic strengths that will promote regional approaches to the world's most pressing problems; the use of human resources to create synergies on a regional scale; the bridging of gaps in the availability of professional and technical knowledge and capacities; the consideration of knowledge from the viewpoint of collective well-being; and the creation of competencies for the organic link between academic knowledge, production, employment, and social life, instilled with a humanistic attitude and intellectual responsibility.

2.- Within the framework of an emerging Latin American and Caribbean Research and Higher Education Area, it is necessary to undertake:

a. renewal of the education systems of the region in order to achieve better and greater compatibility between programmes, institutions, modalities and systems, integrating and articulating our cultural and institutional diversity;

b. articulation of national information systems regarding Higher Education in the region in order to foster, through the Map of Higher Education in LAC (MESALC), mutual knowledge between systems as a basis for academic mobility and as an input for appropriate public and institutional policies;

c. strengthening of the process of convergence of national and sub-regional assessment and accreditation systems, with a view to having available regional standards and procedures of quality assurance of both higher education and research in order to enhance its social and public function. Regional accreditation processes should be legitimated through the participation of academic communities, with the contribution of all segments of society, and should defend the principle that quality is a concept inseparable from equity and pertinence;

d. mutual recognition of studies, titles, and diplomas founded on quality assurance as well as the establishment of common academic credit systems accepted throughout the region. Agreements pertaining to the legibility, transparency, and recognition of titles and diplomas are indispensable, as are the assessment of skills and abilities of graduates and the certification of partial studies. Moreover, it is necessary to move forward with the process of reciprocal recognition of national systems of graduate study with emphasis on clarity as a

requisite for the recognition of titles and credits granted in each of the countries of the region;

e. fostering the intra-regional mobility of students, researchers, faculty, and administrative staff, including through the implementation of specific funds;

f. joint research projects, and the creation of multi-university and multi-disciplinary teaching and research networks;

g. establishment of communication instruments in order to foster the circulation of information and learning;

h. fostering of shared distance education programmes, as well as support for the creation of regional institutions that combine classroom with distance learning;

i. strengthening of the learning of languages of the region in order to foster the kind of regional integration that incorporates cultural diversity and multilingualism, as a source of wealth.

3. On the international plane, it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation of LAC with other regions of the world, particularly South-South cooperation, and within this framework, with African countries.

The conference requests that IESALC designate a commission charged with presenting in the near future a roadmap for the progressive integration of institutions of higher education of the region.

The participants in this meeting recognise the dedicated work carried out by the UNESCO International Institute of Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-IESALC) in preparing and carrying out this event, which has made it possible to bring together the opinions of the regional academic community with a view to the World Conference on Higher Education, Paris, 2009.

Latin American and Caribbean academic integration is necessary in order to create the future of the continent, and cannot be delayed. The Cartagena meeting cannot conclude without committing itself to assuring this task. We have the obligation and the responsibility to create our own future.

We say, together with Gabriel Garcia Marquez from his beloved Colombia, that we are called upon to move toward “a new and overwhelming utopia of life, in which no one can decide anything for others - even the way they die; where love is certain, and happiness is possible; where races condemned to a hundred years of solitude have finally and forevermore, a second opportunity on the earth”.