

DG/2002/111
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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to the World Forum of UNESCO Chairs

UNESCO, 13 November 2002

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to UNESCO House! It is a great pleasure for me to address the World Forum of UNESCO Chairs, which has brought together nearly one thousand participants representing over five hundred UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks, National Commissions for UNESCO and other national authorities, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are active in higher education, as well as many individual academics and experts who have been associated in various ways with the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme. I would like to warmly welcome the representatives of public and private companies and foundations, whose collaboration and support we would like to increasingly enlist to help the Programme to fully attain its goals. Last but not least, I am happy to greet the students present here; though relatively small in number at this event, students are ultimately the focus of all our work.

This broad participation is one measure of the success of this innovative undertaking in the field of higher education that UNESCO launched ten years ago. We attach high importance to this Programme, whose success would have been impossible without your imagination, support, commitment and participation. Each and all of you deserve our sincere thanks.

The achievements and experience acquired thus far by UNITWIN are a source of real satisfaction and, at the same time, a springboard for future developments. The Programme's growth has been impressive. With over 400 UNESCO Chairs and some 80 UNITWIN Networks, established in 113 Member States in all Regions, and involving over a thousand higher education institutions and several thousand university teachers, researchers and students, the Programme has become one of UNESCO's most successful grassroots activities and a major thrust of action in the field of higher education.

The Programme's activities are numerous and wide in scope, covering almost all major fields of knowledge as well as all areas within UNESCO's competence, ranging from education to basic sciences, engineering and the environment, from the ethics of science and technology to human rights, democracy, cultural development and the complex issues posed by the emerging information and knowledge societies. A strong feature of the Programme resides in the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary aspect of its activities, which matches UNESCO's own intersectoral approach to action.

UNESCO has convened the World Forum in order to facilitate a broad exchange of experience and good practices acquired thus far by the UNESCO

Chairs and the UNITWIN networks. On that basis, we are inviting the participants to outline what should be the future development of the Programme. Since it is your Programme, which should meet your needs, then your views and concerns should shape its progress. However, the Programme is also one of UNESCO's major activities in the field of higher education and we therefore have our own reasons for wishing to see it grow further, particularly to meet the current and emerging challenges facing higher education and society in general. The Forum, therefore, is an opportunity for open and constructive dialogue on the question: 'Where do we go from here?'

My main purpose today is to explain why UNESCO will continue to attach considerable importance to higher education and to the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme in particular. I will then identify several priority areas vital for the future development of the Programme and consider how these priorities might best be achieved. My remarks will take as their reference point the conclusions reached through the internal and external evaluations of the Programme, the relevant decisions and recommendations made by the World Conference on Higher Education (1998) and the deliberations of UNESCO's Executive Board when it discussed UNITWIN at its 165th session in 2001.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The spirit and essence of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme stems from the mission of the Organization, as stated in its Constitution, namely, that of "advancing, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of humankind". In the present era of rapid globalization, that mission has acquired new significance for UNESCO, requiring the Organization to link its mandate and role with the need to humanize globalization, which has been chosen as the unifying theme of our current Medium-Term Strategy (2002-2007).

Globalization has opened up great opportunities for improving everyone's life. However, its benefits continue to be unevenly distributed and the ensuing inequalities are increasingly seen as the source of dangers to peace, human security and sustainable development. The traditional socio-economic divide between the "haves" and the "have nots" continues to blight our world: an estimated 1.2 billion people are condemned by poverty to live on one US dollar per day or less. This divide, however, is being deepened by the addition of new inequalities both within and between different societies. We now talk of the "info rich" and the "info poor". It is estimated that over 400 million people use the Internet but this represents just 7% of the world's population and access

varies widely: Internet density is over 53 per cent in the USA and Canada while it is a mere 1 per cent in the Middle East and 0.4 per cent in Africa. While the digital divide manifests itself in unequal access to information, knowledge and their technological applications, its roots are to be found in cultural and educational as well as socio-economic disparities.

There are no easy or quick solutions to the challenges posed by the adverse effects of globalization. What is increasingly clear is that mastering globalization calls for global solutions. It is necessary to build up a large movement to humanize globalization, based on solidarity, on the spirit of caring for and sharing with others. This is a real challenge for humanity at present.

I believe it is vital for the world academic community to contribute to strengthening this movement. In the present competitive environment, where market models largely hold sway over how globalization is defined and put into practice, we must seek to ensure that the benefits of global developments in science, technology and education become more equitably distributed. Thanks to its core values, the universality of its quest for knowledge and its commitment to share the fruits of learning, higher education has the potential to show how globalization may be 'humanized'.

For UNESCO, the goal of humanizing globalization is inseparable from the building of knowledge societies. Higher education has a major role to play in both. As the World Conference on Higher Education recognized, we are living at a time of unprecedented demand for higher education and research and of increased awareness of its key role for social, cultural and economic development. A viable system of higher education is essential for the effective creation, dissemination and application of knowledge as well as for building up high-level human resources. Higher education is an important factor in a country's ability to increase integration into the global economy, achieve economic growth, and build institutional capacities. At the same time, higher education must also help to reduce poverty, increase social cohesion, enhance democratic governance and build viable civil societies. This is true for all nations, but especially for developing countries.

The ability of higher education to perform its functions in society depends on its quality, relevance and efficiency. These, in turn, depend increasingly on solid international links and cooperation. Indeed, internationalization has become indispensable for the fulfilment of higher education's role and mission; it is an integral part of its search for quality and relevance in teaching, training, research and service to society.

The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme has been conceived to foster international cooperation in higher education by giving it a clear goal and sense of direction, namely, that of raising the quality of higher education in the developing countries, especially in the least developed ones. That goal remains fully valid and should guide the future development of the Programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now consider the steps that are needed in order to assure the future development of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme and how best they could be implemented. I see this mainly in terms of seven areas of priority action for which we need to identify realistic operational strategies.

The first clear priority for the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme is that of *bridging the knowledge gap*. Restricted access to knowledge and its use by the developing and transition countries is one of the major inequities of our times. Consequently, building the capacity to share knowledge and developing suitable mechanisms and instruments to transfer it are vital tasks, which were part of the rationale for establishing the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme ten years ago.

The transfer of knowledge should therefore remain a high priority for UNITWIN. Successful UNITWIN networks should continue and, indeed, expand. We also need to set up new networks and to diversify inter-university linking arrangements so as to improve knowledge transfer and raise the quality of teaching and research of higher education institutions in the developing and transition countries. UNITWIN was also meant to set up new programmes of study in priority areas and to help establish centres of excellence in order to foster regional and sub-regional cooperation and capacity-building in the developing countries. These tasks should be pursued systematically, with due attention to securing support from national authorities and from a wide range of potential donors and stakeholders.

The second main priority is the promotion of *the free flow of ideas*, which lies at the heart of academic freedom, the very life-blood of academic institutions and of academic work in general. UNESCO's efforts to promote the free flow of ideas and universal access to information are very much in line with the aspirations and practices of higher education institutions. I do hope, therefore, that we can work closely together to turn these objectives into realities for all.

In this regard, UNESCO attaches great importance to the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, December 2003). We are seeking to influence the Summit's agenda so that more than technological and infrastructural aspects of the information society are addressed. We are urging that the Summit embraces a larger policy agenda relating to knowledge societies and how they are to be constructed. We believe that certain principles, especially those relating to equal access to education, freedom of expression, the public domain of information, and cultural diversity, should be incorporated into the Summit's overall vision.

These principles, on which the free flow of ideas very much depends, should figure strongly in the global policy debate regarding knowledge societies. We look to higher education institutions for support of our efforts, including through UNITWIN. It is encouraging to note that several highly successful projects within UNITWIN are in this area: the ORBICOM network and the UNESCO Chairs in the field of communication. But the needs are enormous and your further assistance would be most welcome.

The third key area of emphasis is *the use of ICTs*. New ICTs in particular have opened up enormous possibilities for inter-university cooperation, which has assumed new forms and acquired new dimensions. But, of late, ICTs have been used primarily to provide higher education transnationally on a commercial basis. That is why the initiative taken by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with the financial support of private foundations, to put its courseware materials freely on the web is a most welcome development. UNESCO hosted a meeting in July this year, where representatives of MIT, several other academic institutions and interested private companies and foundations emphasized both the need to make educational materials freely available on the web and the real possibilities to do so. They agreed that UNESCO is the proper place to rally international support behind this idea. As a result, the Open Educational Resources (OER) initiative has been launched as a cooperation mechanism for the open, non-commercial use of educational resources.

The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme should increase its capacity to use ICTs not only for its own activities but also as a means to facilitate the application of ICTs and Open/Distance Education within inter-university cooperation in general. By promoting the proper use of ICTs, the Programme can help to increase access, raise quality and reduce the costs of higher education in developing countries, while preserving diversity in world higher education. The recent agreement I signed with the Open University of Catalunya, Spain, provides for free access to its programmes and resources by the institutions associated with the UNITWIN network it has helped to set up. It

is a good example of how UNITWIN could promote and provide assistance to the Open Educational Resources (OER) initiative.

The fourth priority is that of *the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity*. The adoption last year of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity by UNESCO's General Conference has opened up new possibilities for UNITWIN to involve higher education institutions more actively in UNESCO's efforts to safeguard cultural diversity and encourage dialogue among cultures and civilizations. These are traditional functions of universities, to which UNESCO will increasingly turn for support, collaboration and partnership.

Over recent decades, cultural diversity has often been put at risk by processes of development, but this need not be the case. UNESCO, therefore, also seeks your cooperation and support in its efforts to enhance the linkages between culture and development through capacity-building and sharing of knowledge. A good example in this respect is the proposal of the University of Paris I (Sorbonne) to establish a UNITWIN network on cultural tourism, involving institutions in 17 countries in all regions. I am happy to announce that the signing ceremony to confirm the establishment of this network will be held tomorrow.

Let me now turn to the fifth area of priority of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme, namely, *sustainable development*. This priority particularly lends itself to interdisciplinary approaches, which are already evident in the networks and UNESCO Chairs devoted to environmental issues. The UNESCO/Cousteau Network of Chairs on Ecotechnie and the Chairs devoted to water resources management are good examples in this respect.

At the Johannesburg Summit, I reiterated the strong commitment of UNESCO to reinforcing its contribution to sustainable development. There is increased international consensus that we need to foster – through education – the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future. UNITWIN should expand, on a larger scale, its university networking and linking arrangements pertaining to sustainable development. It could also extend support to the Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership, launched by UNESCO together with the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the major regional and international associations of higher education.

The sixth main area of emphasis for the Programme is that of *teacher education and training*. As you know, UNESCO's principal priority in education is to secure quality basic education for all (EFA). But its

implementation requires a broader vision, in which higher education is called upon to play an increasingly active role, especially in regard to teacher training. Estimates of the number of additional teachers needed world-wide to achieve universal primary education (UPE) by 2015 vary widely, ranging between 15 and 35 million! Engaging more young people in the teaching profession, providing them with proper training and at costs that are sustainable to Member States and local communities will necessarily require the vast use of information technologies and modalities of distance education.

UNITWIN includes at present a number of Chairs and networks devoted to initial teacher training and to education in general. Some of them are located in Africa and in other regions and countries where the challenges of EFA are enormous. I urge that they be further developed and their activities reinforced. In addition, new projects should be launched aimed at increasing the contribution of higher education to improving educational capacities at the primary and secondary levels, especially through flexible forms of in-service teacher training which combine effective outreach with sound quality.

The seventh area of priority for the Programme is the urgent need to help **stem the brain drain** and, indeed, to strengthen processes of brain gain for the benefit of developing countries. We need to ensure that this priority receives more visible attention and has a more measurable impact throughout the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme. In an age when high-level manpower is increasingly mobile, it is vital that developing and transition countries benefit from more opportunities to retain and retrieve their best talents.

I believe that this is an integral part of the rationale of the Programme and one which requires practical and innovative forms of academic solidarity. There is a need to improve capacities and conditions in the higher education institutions in the developing countries, so as to allow them to provide advanced quality training at home and reduce the need for long studies abroad. At the same time, there is a need to encourage the return of expatriate academics – either permanent or temporary – to teach and do research at higher education institutions in their countries of origin. This could be a useful dimension of the proposed “Academics across Borders” (AAB) initiative, and its concept of “university volunteers”, that may be developed in association with UNITWIN.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Earlier, I stressed the idea that UNITWIN is and should remain your Programme, meant to meet your needs, to which UNESCO contributes within the limits of its capacities and means. At the same time, as the foregoing

discussion of priority areas makes clear, I would like UNITWIN to play a much more important role in supporting UNESCO's action not only in the field of higher education but also in regard to UNESCO's entire programme.

UNESCO has undergone a thorough reform of its programme and structure over the last three years with a view to increasing efficiency, accountability and effectiveness. The Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007, adopted by the General Conference last year, provides a strategic framework for the Organization's programme, to which all sectors of UNESCO contribute. I urge you, when discussing the future reorientation of UNITWIN, to bring it closer in line with the strategic objectives and principal priorities of the Organization. In the period ahead, it will be increasingly important for UNITWIN to be not merely consistent with UNESCO's goals but to actively support and complement its programmatic work, thereby deepening the bonds of partnership.

When UNESCO launched the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme, it was fully aware that its resources alone would not suffice to turn it into a successful programme of international cooperation in higher education. That is why, from the outset, it was foreseen that a broad base of cooperation would be needed, drawing upon a wide range of partners. Efforts in this direction, however, have had only limited success. The further development of UNITWIN, therefore, requires a strategy to generate new partnerships and alliances within the academic community and with society at large. UNESCO, in close contact with Member States, will seek to build up links between UNITWIN and relevant programmes undertaken by other agencies and organizations in the UN system and by other IGOs, foundations and development aid agencies, both national and international. Inter-agency cooperation and coordination will be pursued systematically – both for the Programme as a whole and for individual UNESCO Chairs and networks - as a means to pool resources, reduce overlapping and increase the impact of action.

With regard to resources, I am very well aware of the financial constraints under which the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme has functioned. I receive requests for funding new projects practically every day. Many of you have understood that UNESCO, which is not a funding organization, cannot secure alone the funding of such an ambitious undertaking. You have started, and often with remarkable success, to seek funds elsewhere. Unfortunately, UNESCO today is not in a position to considerably increase funding for UNITWIN. I do assure you, however, that funding from both the Regular and Participation Programmes will be continued.

We recognize that the further development of UNITWIN needs a sound funding strategy, based on seeking financial and other types of assistance from the widest range of potential contributors. UNESCO will do all it can to help you to convince intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, national authorities, foundations and agencies as well as the private and public sectors to assist UNITWIN projects financially.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I addressed UNESCO's Executive Board last month, I presented a vision of UNESCO as a networking organization, one which should operate around the world not only through its field offices but also through broad partnerships with a large range of institutions, organizations and individuals. Among the key institutions that have clear UNESCO links are the UNITWIN networks and UNESCO Chairs, which I see as active outposts and antennas of UNESCO's action in all its fields of competence. You are an integral part of the UNESCO family and we are stronger for your presence.

Let us, therefore, extend and strengthen this partnership through international cooperation and joint action. Let us work together and deepen our collaboration. Let us, with innovation and enterprise, take our network into new areas of collaboration. And let us do this in open acknowledgement of our interdependence, which is the ultimate foundation of our common humanity and our shared future.

Thank you.