I CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION:
Integration and Development of the Caribbean

Paramaribo, Suriname
April 11th to 13th, 2010

DECLARATION OF PARAMARIBO
(April 13th, 2010)

PREAMBLE

We, the participants of the First Caribbean Conference on Higher Education, 2010, held from 11 to 13 April 2010 in Paramaribo, Suriname, recognizing the abiding relevance of the outcomes and Communiqué of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE 2009) organized by UNESCO in Paris, France; and taking into account the outcomes and recommendations of the Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES 2008) organized by UNESCO-IESALC and held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia; several meetings for the creation of the Latin America and the Caribbean Area for Higher Education (known as ENLACES in Spanish), that took place in the Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (2008), Panama City in Panama (2009) and Lima, Peru (2009); the various conferences held in the Caribbean, as well as the debates and outcomes of this sub-regional conference "Integration and Development of the Caribbean", adopt the present Communiqué.

The strategic and significant role of Higher Education lies in its ability to contribute to the development of knowledge-based, democratic and equitable-minded societies which promote sustainable social and economic development, social inclusion, peace, stability, justice and decent living standards for all citizens.

Education as a social public good is the responsibility of all stakeholders, especially governments. It plays a strategic role in the processes of sustainable development of the countries of the Caribbean. Moreover, governments must commit to financial support of higher education.

We also believe that in the context of globalization, governments, working in concert with higher education institutions, must articulate policies that foster equitable access to quality higher education that will trigger research, innovation and creativity.

CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
APRIL 11 -13, 2010   PARAMARIBO, SURINAME

Ministry of Education and Community Development of the Republic of Suriname

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

IESALC
International Institute of UNESCO for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

UNESCO Kingston
Cluster Office for the Caribbean

These policies should take into account the rich history, culture, literature and art of the Caribbean; the potential of international university networks and partnerships to enhance mutual understanding and a culture of peace; and the rapid pace of globalization in order to build a diverse, skills-based, inclusive, and perfectly integrated Caribbean and Latin American society.

Furthermore, we support efforts that promote academic cooperation, collaboration, and internationalization between and among Caribbean higher education institutions to benefit students, teachers, researchers and the institutions themselves, with the goal of helping to bridge the development gap by increasing the transfer of knowledge across borders and reducing disparities in the areas of science, technology, and innovation.

Internationalization and academic cooperation should be based on solidarity and mutual respect which must influence all aspects of public and institutional policies, teacher training, undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate offerings and continuing education.

We recognize the importance of and need for greater regional cooperation of the Caribbean with the Latin American region and other regions of the world, particularly South-South and North-South-South cooperation to promote regional approaches to the most pressing problems.

We should not let linguistic barriers impede the potential for cooperation and should take active steps to facilitate and promote policies and programs which support language learning to include the other languages of the Caribbean and Latin America.

Finally, this 2010 Caribbean Conference on Higher Education accords special focus and in solidarity with the people of Haiti for the revitalization of Haiti's Higher Education sector in the wake of the devastating earthquake suffered on January 12, 2010.

I.   TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

1. Higher education as a public good is the responsibility of all stakeholders, especially governments.
2. Faced with the complexity of current and future global challenges, higher education has the social responsibility to advance our understanding of multifaceted issues, which involve social, economic, scientific and cultural dimensions and our ability to respond to them.
3. Cultural diversity and interculturalism should be fostered under equitable and mutually respectful conditions.

4. Higher education institutions, through their core functions (research, teaching and service to the community) carried out in the context of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, should increase their institutional learning capacity, interdisciplinary focus and promote critical thinking and active citizenship.
5. Expanding access and increasing participation rates in higher education have become priorities in the Caribbean States. Governments must take the responsibility for the quality of the higher education delivered within their borders and within the context of their society.
6. Higher Education Institutions should be mindful of the skills that the societies and countries need. Policies and strong regulatory frameworks must be developed to enhance quality and to address the diversification and employment needs of Caribbean economies and to assist in preventing brain drain.

II.   QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION

1. Quality assurance is a vital function in higher education and must involve all stakeholders.
2. Quality requires both establishing quality assurance systems and patterns of evaluation as well as promoting a quality, monitoring and evaluation culture within national tertiary institutions.
3. Both the public and private sectors should provide quality higher education characterized by its quality and relevance but for his to happen, governments must strengthen the national accreditation bodies as mechanisms to ensure transparency, accountability and excellence.
4. In this regard, CARICOM member states should put the necessary mechanisms in place to establish the national accreditation bodies and the regional accreditation framework.
5. Greater regional cooperation between Latin America and the Caribbean is desirable in areas such a recognition of qualifications, quality assurance and harmonization of standards to promote academic and professional mobility.

III.   SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

1. Higher education has a critical role in closing the gaps in science, technology and innovation (STI) through partnerships and regional exchanges using existing scientific networks, associations, academies and knowledge clusters with special emphasis on small states and small island states.
2. Setting an agenda for Science, Technology and Innovation is necessary to be competitive in a globalized economy. This agenda must include mutual capacity-strengthening between Latin America and Caribbean universities to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for our development and the well-being of our peoples within the whole Latin American and Caribbean region.
3. Participants agreed on the priority need to translate relevant and quality research findings into viable policy options. Governments should increase funding for STI with a goal of up to

3% of GNP. Government support for the development of infrastructure and systems is critical to support STIs.

4. Governments and HEI need to promote university/industry partnerships to produce a critical mass of scientists and professionals with the necessary skills for the labor market and in creating the conducive environment for investment from nationals abroad.

5. For the development of scientific, technological, humanistic, and artistic research, a new vision is required. Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in the Caribbean must nurture a culture of indigenous scientific knowledge and innovation, building on the strengths inherent in Caribbean society, to be led by major stakeholders. Based on rigorous quality criteria and guidelines, there is a possibility to promote regional graduate studies using regional clusters of excellence as an important mechanism.

IV. INTERNATIONALIZATION AND ACADEMIC COOPERATION

1. Internationalization and academic cooperation should be encouraged despite the global financial and economic crisis. International cooperation in higher education must be based on solidarity and mutual respect, building on and promoting existing platforms, and in the promotion of humanistic values, active citizenship, academic freedom and intercultural dialogue.

2. Caribbean Institutions of higher education and university networks share a social responsibility, in collaboration with the governments of the region, to help bridge the development gap by increasing the transfer of knowledge across borders, working to find common solutions to foster brain circulation and alleviate the negative impact of brain drain.

3. Higher Education should reflect the international, regional, and national dimensions in both teaching and research. Greater regional cooperation is desirable in areas such as the recognition of qualifications, quality assurance and accreditation, governance, and research and innovation.

4. We call for partnerships and concerted action at national, regional, and international levels to assure the quality and sustainability of higher education systems. This should also include South-South and North-South-South cooperation.

5. Therefore, we call upon all Caribbean and Latin American higher education institutions to actively pursue opportunities for cooperation with each other, building on existing strengths, in regional networks and with regional and international organizations. All these are essential mechanisms for regional integration and internationalization, and must be a part of the agenda of the region's governments, multilateral agencies, and public and private academic institutions

6. Finally, provision of cross-border higher education can create opportunities as well as posing challenges. Governments must build in regulatory frameworks to monitor and ensure quality education of those cross border providers.

V. REVITALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN HAITI

1. As a result of the earthquake a number of Haiti's higher education institutions were damaged or completely destroyed. A large segment of Haiti's skilled professionals and students were killed and a number of others have left Haiti. This presents an altogether different type and level of challenge to higher education in the Caribbean in its XXIst century roe of contributing to economic and social development. We, the participants, are committed to a medium and long-term strategy to assist Haiti in its recovery and reconstruction.
2. The development of a quality Haitian higher education and research area will be stimulated through institutional, national, regional and international collaboration. There is, therefore, the need for a strategic orientation towards the establishment/strengthening of such collaboration.
3. Latin American and Caribbean countries, and in particular, their higher education institutions, should work with Haitian academic institutions and the Haitian Government through student, teacher and researcher mobility, as well as science and technology support, for revitalizing the education system. We call upon the inter-governmental organizations in the region, donor and international organizations to facilitate coordination between the Caribbean institutions and Haitian tertiary and Higher Education institutions and the Haitian Government.

VI. CALL FOR ACTION: THE CARIBBEAN GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

1. The Ministers of Education of the Caribbean should meet once a year through the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) on the subject of the Development of Higher Education in the Caribbean.
2. The Caribbean strategy to reach at least a 40% enrollment rate in tertiary education should be a regular item on the agenda.
3. The mechanism of "Meetings of Ministers of Education of the OAS" should be used to support an effective partnership between Latin America and the Caribbean and advocate for the full participation of Ministers of Education in the Region.
4. At the next Meeting of Ministers of Education of the OAS, the Ministers of this CCHE should put forward the suggestion that the articles of declaration of commitment regarding tertiary education made by the Presidents of this Hemisphere at the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain be addressed.

5. Small Caribbean States and other investors have expressed their desire to support the Higher Education System in Haiti within their means. A mechanism should be developed which will allow this to happen.

6. Strategies must be developed to enhance regional cooperation between Latin America and the Caribbean States to:
    a. Promote Science, Technology and Innovation
    b. Promote the exchange of faculties and students
    c. Promote skills for national and regional development
    d. Develop and coordinate Accreditation and Quality Enhancement in higher education.
    e. Conduct a study on student enrollment in the Caribbean States and identify what strategies are needed to enhance greater participation and higher enrollment in higher education
    f. Develop new strategies for financing higher education involving new partnerships with business/government/civil society
    g. Set up a regional science research agenda on issues that elevate Higher Education to a new level
    h. Develop a sustainable action plan for the recovery of higher education in Haiti
    i. Facilitate the inclusion of UNICA

VII.   CALL FOR ACTION: THE CARIBBEAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1. The goals of the Caribbean Conference on Higher Education should be to foster development for sustainability and endogenous growth towards self-directed transformation and management of own destiny; to improve communication and intercultural understanding and acceptance; and to build and strengthen human and institutional capacity.

2. The strategies to be used should be:
    a. Contextualized construction, analysis (SWOT) and distribution of data through accessible and transparent templates
    b. Multilevel and multisectorial networking
    c. Effective use of modern technologies
    d. Effective coordination of initiatives
    e. Academic exchange and mobility (faculty, students, staff and leadership)
    f. Combine different modes of collaboration: bilateral, multilateral …
    g. Simultaneous, dynamic, and emerging (non-linear) application of strategies

3. The focus should be on:
    a. Functional capacity-building including leadership
    b. Removal of language barriers
    c. Relevance of actions
    d. Integrate research-based knowledge on Caribbean identity and diversity in education

programs and action plans

    e. Financial sustainability

4. Consideration should be given to the implementation of the following projects:

    a. Exploration of a possible [joint] Caribbean Ph.D. Program

    b. Publication and implementation in curricula of research on identity and diversity

    c. Design of a model program for effective preparation for Higher Education in the Caribbean, including student motivation

    d. Establishment of the Caribbean region as a knowledge center and destination for Higher Education

    e. A regional accreditation system towards harmonization

    f. A Caribbean academic leadership program

    g. A program on disaster and risk management, building on concrete existing projects

    h. Projects to learn the languages of the Caribbean, including the exchange modality, building on existing projects

5. A call for proposals for specific projects should be made within 6 months

VIII.   CALL FOR ACTION: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS/AGENCIES

1. The participants of the international institutions - CARICOM, UNESCO, CXC, IICA, OAS, UNESCO-IESALC & UNESCO Kingston - have agreed to focus on strengthening of Quality Assurance, Accreditation, and Qualifications Frameworks, and support for academic cooperation and exchanges among higher education institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean and have proposed the following actions:

    a. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Tertiary and higher education institutions in the Caribbean to plan for a better system.

    b. Mapping and creation of a database on Tertiary and higher education institutions.

    c. Creation of a repository of research studies with implications for higher education.

    d. Support to Science and Technology and Innovation, policy development and promotion of science education.

    e. Tap into existing institutional mechanisms and resources to facilitate and enhance cooperation (e.g. South-South Cooperation framework).

    f. Hold a bi-annual conference on higher education for the Caribbean as a follow-up to the Paramaribo Conference to include representatives of networks from Latin America (Proposed theme : Financing of Higher Education).

    g. Support for the reconstruction and rebuilding of Haiti Tertiary and higher education Institutions.

    h. Establishment of a Technical Committee to follow-up the Recommendations and Actions of the Caribbean Conference on Higher Education.

IX. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The participants in this meeting recognize the dedicated work carried out by the Ministry of Education and Community Development of the Republic of Suriname, the UNESCO International Institute of Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO IESALC), the UNESCO Kingston (Cluster Office for the Caribbean) and the Organization of the American States (OAS).

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

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