



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# Executive Board

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## UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY: REPORT BY THE COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S COMMENTS THEREON

### SUMMARY

In accordance with 129 EX/Decision 5.2.1, the Director-General submits to the Executive Board a report by the Council of the United Nations University (UNU) on UNU's activities in 2008-2009. She also presents her observations on the work of UNU as well as on cooperation between UNESCO and UNU during that period.

The financial or administrative implications of the reported activities fall within the parameters of the current C/5.

Action expected of the Executive Board: decision in paragraph 21.

1. Established in 1973, the United Nations University (UNU) is an international community of scholars that generates and shares knowledge and strengthens capacities relevant to promoting human security and development. As an academic institution within the United Nations system, it contributes directly to the advancement of knowledge relevant to the role and work of the United Nations as well as to its application in the formulation of sound principles, policies, strategies and programmes for action. With intellectual independence, in particular in the selection of topics and the dissemination of results, guaranteed through its Charter, the University can make these contributions with objectivity and integrity.
2. UNU has grown to encompass a worldwide network of institutes, presently located in 12 countries and coordinated by the UNU Centre in Tokyo. The Institute for Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP) is the most recent institute. Launched in January 2009, it is located in Tokyo and takes an innovative and integrated approach to sustainability – one that encompasses global change, development, peace and security. In December 2009, the UNU Council agreed, with the support of the Spanish authorities, to create the International Institute of the UNU on the Alliance of Civilizations (UNU-IIAC), in Barcelona. Additionally, two liaison offices, located respectively in Paris and New York, and centred on UNESCO and the United Nations system, actively support the UNU Centre.
3. In carrying out its mission, UNU works in close collaboration with other United Nations partners as well as with leading universities and research institutes throughout the world.

## Major themes and programmes in 2008 and 2009

4. UNU works systematically towards implementing its vision by setting goals and taking specific measures to achieve them. These goals are organized into the following three categories:

(A) Enhancing core activities, including research, teaching and capacity development, and dissemination and sharing of knowledge

5. Within this first category, the strengthening of UNU's **presence in developing and transitional countries** is an important goal. UNU will intensify its presence and outreach in developing countries through the concept of "**twin institutes**". Each UNU institute in a developed country will be linked to a twin partner in a developing country. In October 2009, the Rector of UNU and the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Senegal signed an agreement for the establishment of a UNU Institute in Senegal. This new institute, which will be the formal twinning structure for collaborative activities between UNU-MERIT and the *Consortium pour la Recherche Economique et Sociale* (CRES), Dakar, will undertake economic research activities related to innovation and accelerated and sustainable development. It will also provide a doctoral programme as well as policy-oriented modules for officials from both African and international administrations. In addition, the UNU Programme on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) signed a memorandum of understanding with the School of Humanity and Social Sciences of Tsinghua University in the People's Republic of China in November 2009 to support the establishment of an Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies at Tsinghua University, which is to become a twin partner of UNU-CRIS.

6. To **make available classroom teaching** to people without easy access to education, the UNU Media Studio, in cooperation with UNU-IIST, UNU-INWEH, and UNU-MERIT, officially launched in February 2008 the UNU Open Courseware portal, which provides open access to materials used for 15 courses. UNU also supports M.Sc. and Ph.D. degree-oriented study programmes primarily for scholars from developing countries.

(B) Strengthening communications and outreach

7. One of the priorities of this second category is to enhance UNU's connection and contributions to its stakeholders. UNU has therefore strengthened its **collaboration with other United Nations organizations**. The UNU Office in Paris is working on a joint assessment with UNESCO to analyze the functioning of the UNITWIN-UNESCO Chairs Programme.

(C) Renewing structures and improving quality

8. Within this third category, one of the key objectives is to award **UNU graduate degrees**. This has now become possible following the **adoption by the 64th session of the United Nations General Assembly of a resolution** amending the UNU Charter so as to give UNU the right to "grant and confer **master's degrees and doctorates**, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions under conditions laid down for that purpose in the statutes by the Council". This is an historic event in UNU's admittedly short life as a university. It is the first time that the General Assembly has amended the UNU Charter since its adoption more than 36 years ago.

## Cooperation between UNESCO and UNU

9. The joint activities undertaken by UNESCO and UNU during the period 2008-2009 cover the following areas:

10. **Education.** UNU participated in the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education held at UNESCO in July 2009, during which the Rector introduced the theme of Internationalization, Regionalization and Globalization. An assessment of the UNITWIN/UNESCO/UNU Chairs is currently being conducted. The UNESCO/UNU partnership on the Asia-Africa University Dialogue for the Development of Basic Education in Africa Education for Sustainable Development in Africa,

seed-funded by the Government of Japan, is another key area of cooperation (see document 184 EX/5). Other areas of collaboration include quality assurance for education and innovation for higher education.

11. **Human and social sciences.** A project to produce policy briefs as an aid for decision-makers was initiated in collaboration with the Social and Human Sciences Sector; it is hoped to extend it to other sectors. Since 2009, UNU-CRIS, in cooperation with UNESCO, has also been working on a research project on the free movement of people within regional organizations, aimed at addressing the role of human mobility within regional integration processes throughout the world as well as cooperation on inclusive and sustainable cities. The Director of the UNU Office at UNESCO served as Rapporteur for the Social Sciences Commission of the General Conference.

12. **Natural sciences.** Joint activities have focused on disaster reduction, water sustainability, the World Atlas of Mangroves, policy guidelines for the management of mangrove forests, the International Programme on Ecosystem Change and Society (PECS), marine governance and biodiversity, and the sustainable management of marginal drylands. The two organizations hope to undertake joint activities related to the follow-up of the recent Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change (COP15).

13. **Culture.** The areas of cooperation with this Sector include the protection and promotion of cultural diversity, fostering cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and strengthening links between culture and development. Collaboration is expected to intensify as a result of the forthcoming creation of the UNU Institute on the Alliance of Civilizations, in Barcelona, Spain.

14. **Communication and information.** Cooperation with this Sector includes the Power of Peace Network, an interactive platform to promote peace among youths and the development of peace initiatives. Also being developed is the Freedom of Expression Toolkit, a guidebook on freedom of expression concepts and issues targeted at high school students.

15. **The UNU/UNESCO International Conferences on Globalization (held annually in Tokyo since 2003).** In 2008, the theme was “Globalization and language: building on our rich heritage”, and in 2009, the conference entitled “Africa and globalization: learning from the past, building a better future” featured a vast array of expertise with representatives from academia, policy-making and civil society. The conference participants presented their views and analysis in a lively format, with dialogue being fostered between five former presidents and experts.

### **Comments by the Director-General**

16. The Director-General takes note with satisfaction of the activities carried out by UNU during the 2008-2009 biennium, particularly in view of building a knowledge society based on international cooperation and solidarity.

17. Recognizing the wide contribution of UNU’s institutes and research and training centres, the Director-General welcomes the initiatives of the Rector of UNU to ensure that they are more equitably distributed, in particular through the concept of “twin institutes”.

18. The Director-General particularly appreciates the cooperation between UNU and UNESCO described in the report. She notes that the establishment of joint Chairs has provided an excellent opportunity for UNESCO to expand the reach of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs programme in key areas pertaining to the mission and goals of the United Nations, particularly in the field of sustainable development.

19. The Director-General takes note with interest of the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of a resolution granting UNU the right to confer masters degrees and doctorates, diplomas and academic distinctions.

20. The Director-General looks forward to reinforced cooperation over the next biennium, particularly as part of the follow-up to the world conferences organized by UNESCO on higher education, science and sustainable development.

### **Action expected of the Executive Board**

21. In view of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 184 EX/9,
2. Recognizing the key role of the United Nations University (UNU) as a bridge between the international academic community and the United Nations,
3. Further recognizing the excellent quality of the relationship that has been developed between UNU and UNESCO over the years,
4. Expresses its satisfaction at the development of the programme and activities of the United University;
5. Expresses its appreciation of the increased active participation of the United Nations University in the programmes and activities of UNESCO, particularly the UNESCO-UNU Chairs and UNITWIN programme and the world conferences on higher education, science and sustainable development;
6. Stresses the need for continued collaboration between UNESCO and UNU on areas of joint expertise and capacity;
7. Invites UNU to pursue the implementation of the concept of “twin institutes”, in particular in Africa;
8. Further invites the Director-General to communicate to the Chair of the Council of UNU the terms of its decision.