

UNESCO WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION WCHE 2009

NEW DYNAMICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
FOR SOCIETAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

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STAKEHOLDERS' PANEL: MINISTERS, INSTITUTIONS, CIVIL
SOCIETY & THE PRIVATE SECTORS

PROF. JUAN RAMÓN DE LA FUENTE

President, International Association of Universities,
Simón Bolívar Professor and Chair,
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Durante su participación en la sesión inaugural de la Segunda Conferencia Mundial de Educación Superior, realizada en la sede de la UNESCO en París, Francia, el 5 de julio de 2009, el doctor Juan Ramón de la Fuente, Presidente en funciones de la Asociación Internacional de Universidades, en breves palabras señaló su convencimiento de que nada puede abordarse a profundidad, a pesar de los graves escenarios y las calamidades por las que atraviesa la humanidad, si se desconoce el papel que el conocimiento, las capacidades y, en general, las contribuciones que las instituciones de educación superior -que trabajan articuladas en el ámbito internacional- ofrecen.

Frente a su diagnóstico de la situación mundial y el pronóstico de una recuperación económica que será más lenta y en la que las restricciones financieras permanecerán por más largo tiempo del que hubiésemos deseado, se pronunció por una respuesta valerosa,

trabajando juntos a favor del bienestar público, siendo mejores en lo que hacemos y más útiles a la sociedad en el inmenso ámbito de servicios que prestamos. Es así que se preguntó por un lado: ¿cómo se han comportado las instituciones de educación superior? ¿Cómo han respondido a los cambios sociales y económicos? Y por otro: ¿qué cambios han tenido lugar en cuanto a políticas, prioridades, prácticas, principios y valores que movilicen y motiven a las instituciones de educación superior?

Si no intentamos encargarnos de estos cuestionamientos constantemente, habremos fallado y negado nuestro rol y significado en estas cuestiones críticas. Las instituciones sirven al interés público y es por eso que la educación debe mantenerse como un bien público, nos recuerda y nos exige, a todos los universitarios, uno de sus miembros más distinguidos a nivel mundial: Juan Ramón de la Fuente.

As this is the 2nd World Conference organized by UNESCO on Higher Education, it reminds me of a story told by Frank Rhodes, former President of Cornell University. It is between Winston Churchill and his somewhat rival friend, the play-writer **George Bernard Shaw**.

Shaw sends a note: Dear Churchill, enclosed two tickets for the opening night of my new play. Hope you come and bring a friend... if you find one.

Churchill replies: Dear Shaw, regret not able to attend the opening of the play, but plan to come for the second night... if there is one.

So it is good news that we have a 2nd World Conference on Higher Education. That is why we are all here. But it has been a long time since the 1st Conference, so it is imperative we ask ourselves how we have been doing in the first decade of the new Millennium, a decade of change; of profound changes must be said.

Most of those changes have made us all less secure: terrorism and organized crime have become global issues; food shortages have increased in several areas; the economic collapse has brought great hardship to many people in every country; the AIDS epidemic has devastated the populations of many regions; ethnic and religious violence still cause thousands of deaths and growing numbers of refugees.

So we face a daunting scope of social challenges, ranging from climate change to water management; from soil depletion to new pandemics such as the A/H1N1 virus; from recession to deforestation, from spikes of energy prices to a growing need for alternative energy sources.

However serious each one of them is, and however complex they are collectively because of their interconnections, I am still convinced that none can be thoroughly addressed without the knowledge, the skills and the overall contributions of Higher Education Institutions working together world wide.

So how then, have these institutions fared? How have they performed? How have they responded to societal and economic changes? And on the other hand, what changes have taken place in policies, priorities, par-

tnerships, practices, principles and values that mobilize and motivate Higher Education Institutions?



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Rafael Cordera Campos, Secretario General de la IAU
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Of course, I do not pretend to give answers to these large and difficult questions in the short time I have to deliver my statement, but as President of a global association of universities, the International Association of Universities, I must say that failing to seek to address them continuously, would be to deny our role or significance on the very critical issues mentioned above.

Globalization is having a profound effect on higher education. We live in a knowledge-driven society, where educated people and ideas are the wealth of nations. But we must acknowledge that many issues discussed in 1998 remain in our agendas: accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability and above all, social responsibility. So although things have changed, many challenges remain. Perhaps it is time to review an update the social contract of Higher Education Institutions, as the IAU called for in 1997 in Thailand, at its Conference on the Social Responsibility of Higher Education.

Higher Education Institutions do not exist in isolation from society, nor from the communities in which they are located. They serve the public interest, and that is why education must remain as a public good. Free dissemination of knowledge is now feasible due to technology. We must take advantage of it.

As we face the coming decade allow me to consider another relevant question: Is Higher Education really the engine of growth? Or is it part of the much broader eco-system that is formed by partnering with stakeholders – which is the theme of this Panel – that is required to contribute to growth with equity, growth with tolerance, growth with justice, growth with opportunities and ultimately, growth that is sustainable. That notion of partnership and these basic principles have been also core components of the agenda of IAU.

It seems increasingly probable that real economic recovery will be slow, and that real financial constraints may last longer than we would have wished. However, I believe this is no time only to share the grief or to spread the pain of unemployment or hiring freezes. It is time to respond courageously, working together for the sake of public good, becoming better at what we do and being more useful to society in the vast range of services we provide.



Vista del edificio de la UDUAL



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