

**“THE SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN  
UNIVERSITIES”**

**DECLARATION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN RECTORS  
UFMG, BELO HORIZONTE, BRAZIL**

**September 16 – 19, 2007**

Meeting in the International Congress of Latin American and Caribbean Rectors, “The Social Commitment of Latin American and Caribbean Universities”, organized by IESALC-UNESCO and the Federal University of Minas Gerais in the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil from September 16-19, 2007, the participants discussed the theme and agreed to issue the following declaration.

In 1998, the World Conference on Higher Education (CMES), convoked by UNESCO, established in an ambitious and positive platform based on a humanist perspective, options for change and a future vision for the design and implementation of development policies of the sector.

The “World Declaration on Higher Education in the XXI Century: Vision and Action” states that “a) *The pertinence of higher education should be judged in function of what society expects of these institutions and what they do. This requires ethical norms, political impartiality, critical capacity, and at the same time, better articulation with the problems of society and of labor, basing long-term orientations on social objectives and needs, including respect for cultures and protection of the environment*”. Moreover, the declaration states that “*higher education should strengthen its function within society, and more specifically its activities aimed at eradicating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation, and illness, principally through an inter-disciplinary and transdisciplinary approach in order to analyze the problems and questions proposed*”.

These principles were once again emphasized in 2003 at the Follow-up Meeting of CMES, Paris + 5, held in Paris, as well as in the six Ibero-American Summits of Public University Rectors held during the last ten years in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The participants at the International Congress of Latin American and Caribbean Rectors added to these principles the specific ability of the universities of the region to

contribute to the process of integration and to preserve the cultural identities of the continent. In light of these principles and the content of the discussions held, they declare:

1. That the universities of Latin America and the Caribbean accept as a social commitment to implement institutional policies that have as a principle education as a human right, a socially-referenced public good in accordance with the values of quality, pertinence, relevance, inclusion, and equity;
2. That they understand “socially-referenced” to refer to the contents of educational processes and of other related activities of Latin American and Caribbean universities as they apply to satisfying the needs of social life both individually and collectively, including preservation of natural ecosystems and the overcoming of all types of ethnic, cultural, economic, gender, physical, and mental prejudice;
3. That they consider that such needs refer above all, but not exclusively, to the reduction of the inequalities characteristic of current social relations in the region – particular to the basic rights of democratic, education, health, and housing.
4. That they understand that the origins of these inequalities are to be found in the colonial, slavery period from which arose the cultural substrate continuing to the present day. These inequalities have been historically reinforced by the asymmetry between center and periphery, by the nature of the insertion of the region within a globalized world, the macroeconomic characteristics, by lack of capacity to foster and develop technical progress, and by insufficient capacity for saving;
5. That they recognize that social inequalities persist and are accentuated within a context of environmental imbalance and fragmentation of the values that sustain life in society, in spite of the efforts developed in the political field, with a notable contribution to the re-establishment of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean;
6. That they consider that overcoming these inequalities is today and in the foreseeable future conditioned on global processes of inter-relations and interdependence between countries and between regions, and based upon the new cultural and technological paradigms that characterize the society of knowledge;;
7. That they affirm that such a situation imposes the need for strategic cultural, territorial, economic, social, political, and geo-political cooperation between countries of the region;

8. That they recognize that a consensus exists that this imperative should lead to the construction of harmony between national university systems, respecting their diversities and differences;
9. That they ratify the relevance and the horizon of ethical-political choice in regard to the social commitment of higher education due to its contribution to sustainable human development, equity, social inclusion, human rights, and to a culture of peace.

In consequence of what has been stated, the participants of the International Congress of Latin American and Caribbean Rectors proposes as a future agenda:

1. To value the development of concepts and proposals related to the commitment and social responsibility of higher education.
2. To reaffirm and strengthen the irreplaceable role of States in guaranteeing the right to education and responsibility for the maintenance of higher education.
3. To declare it essential to preserve, strengthen, and respect unequivocally the principle of autonomy, so that universities, in interaction and open dialogue with society, may exercise their social commitment with freedom and creativity, and without outside pressures that limit, condition, or distort the fulfillment of their fundamental purposes.
4. To reaffirm that it is essential for the exercise of autonomy that institutions of public higher education have assured financing at adequate levels.
5. To foster a qualitative leap in the social commitment of universities, stimulating the production of strategic changes such as:
  - From volunteer effort and philanthropy to ethical commitment to social justice and the exercise of rights.
  - From context-related, dispersed, and episodic action to wide-reaching programmatic lines of action.
  - From the carrying out delegated activities delegated by areas of low hierarchical levels of the institution to the incorporation of these levels into the institution's missions.
  - From isolated, sectorial activities to synergies based on national projects.

- From extension as a transfer service to social encounters, dialogues of knowledge, the construction of pertinent knowledge, and participation in non-exclusionary social projects.
6. To foster the participation of universities in the formulation and implementation of public policies for the educational system as a whole, in relations with the world of employment, in the strengthening of public universities, and in assuring the quality of national systems of higher education.
  7. To strengthen, in fulfillment of the Millennium Objectives of Education for All, the strategic role of universities in the development of the region and the construction of the foundations of just and inclusive societies through the promotion of cultural change and through the profound behavioral changes necessary for sustainable development, avoiding the environmental and social imbalances as well as the degradation of ethical and political values.
  8. To recommend creation of an Observatory for the exercise of the social commitment of universities of the region, assuring the visibility and permanent presence of this essential function of higher education.
  9. To foster areas of exchange and discussion regarding essential and critical themes present in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as: institutional autonomy, social inclusion, equity, pertinence, equality, access, and permanence, in order to construct a common discourse and plan of action, while respecting national and sub-regional specificities.
  10. To confirm and to strengthen the commitment of university institutions in regard to the expansion of the coverage of higher education, assuring quality, respecting the principle of social inclusion, as well as the definitions of territorial development defined by States.
  11. To reciprocally deepen the mutual knowledge and understanding of Latin American and Caribbean university systems through exchange and sharing of information, teacher mobility programs, and the realization of visits by university authorities.
  12. To promote the international solidarity of Latin American and Caribbean higher education through articulation, coordination, and strengthening of the different action initiatives and programs for cooperation and integration that are under way in the region.

13. To express the commitment of universities to disseminate scientific and technological knowledge and to stimulate its appropriation by communities, fostering the pertinence of scientific activities in the region.
14. To request that the governments of the region of Latin America and the Caribbean declare themselves to be against the inclusion of higher education in the GATS agreements fostered by the World Trade Commission.
15. To support the Latin American Network of those Responsible for International Relations in Higher Education (RELARIES) as one of various action mechanisms for fostering the internationalization of solidarity in the region, as a complement to existing networks and organizations.
16. To propose to governments and to regional organizations the creation of programs designed to foster the mobility of students and teachers in order to stimulate integration and the development of Latin American and Caribbean citizenship.
17. To stimulate strategic alliances with high-level Latin American and Caribbean teachers and researchers who work outside of their own countries, in order to obtain their contributions to the development of higher education in the region.
18. To support the efforts of IESALC/UNESCO in carrying out studies, by means of working groups, on themes such as: science and sustainable development, quality, relevance and pertinence, equity, access and permanence, autonomy and governability, integration and internationalization, among others.
19. To institutionalize the periodic holding, under the auspices of IESALC/UNESCO, of the International Congress of Latin American and Caribbean Rectors.
20. To affirm the expectation in regard to this declaration, that it be among the key documents of the Cartagena -2008 Regional Conference and of the World Conference on Higher Education sponsored by UNESCO.

Belo Horizonte, September 19, 2007