



Third Regional Conference on Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean

Declaration

Adopted in Córdoba, Argentina, on June 14th, 2018

To all men and women of the Americas:

The sweeping changes, affecting the region and the world in crisis, call us to fight for a radical change; for a more democratic, more equal, more sustainable, and fairer society.

A century ago, the students of the Cordoba Reform proclaimed that “*The griefs that remain are the liberties we still lack*”. This message cannot be forgotten, because the grief is still here, and it takes many forms; for we still see poverty, inequality, injustice, and social violence in the region.

Just as a century ago, the university today is in favor of science with a humanistic perspective, and in favor of a technology that is fair, and provides for the common good and the rights of all men and women.

The Third Regional Conference on Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean endorses the agreements reached in the Declarations adopted in the Regional Conference held in La Habana (Cuba) in 1996, the World Conference on Higher Education in Paris (France) in 1998, and the Regional Conference on Higher Education held in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) in 2008 while reasserting the principle that considers that Higher Education is a common public good, a universal human right which should be ensured by all States. These principles are based on the deep conviction that the access to, and use and democratization of knowledge is a collective, strategic social asset essential to guarantee the basic human rights and the wellbeing of our peoples, the construction of full citizenship, the social emancipation, and the regional

integration with solidarity of Latin America and the Caribbean.

We hereby reassert the autonomy that allows the universities to play a critical and proactive role in society without the constraints imposed by the governments in office, religious beliefs, the market or special interests. The defense of the university autonomy is an unavoidable contemporary responsibility for the Latin America and Caribbean region, and it entails, at the same time, the defense of the university social commitment.

Education, science, technology and the arts should become the means to freedom and equality, without any distinction based on social status, gender, ethnicity, religion or age. It is important to think that technology and the sciences will solve the current human pressing issues, but this is not enough. If the dialogue of knowledges is to be universal, it should be many-sided and based on an equal footing; only then will the dialogue among cultures be enabled.

The economic, technological and social differences existing between the North and the South, and the internal divide among States are becoming more exacerbated, rather than disappearing. The international system promotes the free exchange of goods, while applying exclusionary migration regulations. The high rate of emigration of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean shows the lack of opportunities and inequalities affecting, above all, the young. Gender inequality manifests itself in the pay gap, in the discrimination in the workplace and in the difference in the access to decision-making positions in the public or private

sector. The worst indicators of poverty and social exclusion are seen among Indigenous and Afro-descendant women.

Science, the arts and technology should become the pillars for cooperation tending towards an equal development of the region with solidarity, based on processes that lead to the consolidation of an independent and politically sovereign block.

The weak regulation of foreign supply has intensified the transnationalization processes and the market-oriented view of higher education; thus, precluding, or in many cases, restraining the actual social right to education. This trend has to be reverted and we urge all the States of Latin America and the Caribbean to establish strict regulatory systems for higher education as well as for other educational levels. Education is not a good to be traded. That is why we ask our States not to sign bilateral or multilateral free trade treaties which consider education as a for-profit service, or that foster the commodification of any level of education. We also request them to increase the resources allotted to education, science and technology.

In the face of the pressure exerted to transform higher education into a for-profit activity, the States have to assume the inalienable commitment to regulate and evaluate public and private institutions and degrees, in all their modalities, to ensure universal access to higher education as well as retention and graduation, while offering quality training that promotes inclusion and local and regional relevance.

Similarly to what happened in 1918, "*rebellion has broken out*" in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in a world where the international financial system is concentrated in powerful minorities that push large majorities into the margins of exclusion, social vulnerability and job insecurity.

In spite of all the great achievements attained in the development of knowledge, research, and academic and popular knowledge and wisdom, a significant sector of the population, both in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the world, does not have access to basic social rights to employment, health, drinking water or education. In this 20th Century, millions of children, youngsters, adults and the elderly are excluded from current social, cultural, economic and technological progress. Furthermore, regional and global inequality is so strong that in many situations and contexts, there are communities which have no access to higher education, because it continues to be a privilege and not a right as the young students of 1918 longed for.

In the Centennial of the Reform, we cannot remain oblivious to human suffering or our historical mandate. We cannot continue to be indifferent to the collective future, to the fight for the heroic truth, and to the transcendental desire for human freedom. Higher Education should be forged by the local, state, national and international leadership, as they are fully represented here.

If we bear this in mind, it will be possible to begin a new and historical transformation of higher education with social commitment and responsibility to guarantee the full exercise of

the right to free, public higher education, with wide access.

In agreement with the fourth Sustainable Development Goal of the Agenda 2030 adopted by UNESCO, we urge the States to promote a strong policy to widen the provision of higher education, to carry out an in-depth review of the procedures for access to the system, and to develop affirmative action policies making no distinctions based on gender, ethnicity, social class and/or disability; to ensure universal access to, retention and graduation from higher education.

In this context, higher education institutions should accept all colors, and recognize the interculturality of our countries and communities so that higher education becomes a means for equal access and social promotion, and not a sphere where privileges continue to exist. We cannot remain silent in the face of the deprivation and pain suffered by men and women, as stated relentlessly by Mario Benedetti, "there is nothing more deafening than silence".

A century ago, the students of the Cordoba Reform strongly denounced that in Cordoba and in an unfair and tyrannical world, the universities had become "*the faithful reflection of our decadent societies, which continue to exhibit a dismal parade of senile immobility*". Many years have gone by, and this message for the future is challenging us and piercing us like an ethical arrow that questions our practices. How do we contribute to the creation of a fair order, to social equality, to harmony among nations and to human emancipation?; how do we contribute to the overcoming of the scientific and technological gap of our

production structures?; what is our contribution to the forging of the identity of the peoples, human integrity, gender equality and free discussion of ideas so as to guarantee the strength of our local, national and regional cultures?

That is why we truly believe that our institutions should be actively engaged in the much-needed social, cultural, political, artistic, economic and technological transformation which is essential today. We have to educate the leaders of tomorrow on the value of social awareness and the desire to promote Latin American bonds. Let us forge working communities willing to learn and build a critical knowledge where the dialogue among students and professors is the rule. Let us build democratic learning environments where the vital manifestation of the personality develops, and where artistic, scientific and technological creations are expressed without any boundaries.

The higher education to be created should fulfill its cultural and ethical calling with full autonomy and freedom; thus, contributing to practical, political definitions which shall influence the changes needed and desired by our communities. Higher education should be the emblematic institution symbol of the national critical awareness of our American continent.

The institutions of higher learning are called upon to fulfill a crucial role in the promotion and strengthening of the Latin American democracies, rejecting all dictatorships and any violation of public freedoms, human rights and all forms of authoritarianism in the region. We feel our solidarity with all young people from America and the world, whose

life we celebrate, and we also recognize in their fights and dreams, our own aspirations in favor of the social, political and cultural transformation.

The task that falls upon us is not simple, but great is the cause that is lit by the brightness of its truth. It is, as anticipated in the Liminal Manifesto, a desire to *“become a glorious omen or it may have the virtue of a call to the supreme fight for liberty”*.

We call upon all men and women of this Continent to look into the future and work relentlessly for a permanent educational reform, and for the rebirth of the culture and the life of our societies and peoples.

MAJOR THEMES

This section includes a brief summary of each one of the seven major themes around which the Third Regional Conference on Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean was organized. They were developed on the basis of the work carried out by the coordinators of each theme, the team of advisors and the contributions made at each one of the symposiums held during the event.

Strategic role of higher education in fostering sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Sustainable development should “ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Higher education plays a strategic role for the achievement of the sustainable development goals, since it is in a position to interpret the

demands of the peoples from Latin America and the Caribbean.

This requires the coordination of guidelines so that higher education is transformed and the responsibility of contributing to this commitment is shared with other social actors.

Likewise, it is essential for all governmental and economic systems, and all processes tending to the design and implementation of public and institutional policies on higher education to be tailored in accordance with these new purposes.

The strategic role of higher education forces us to think about the kind of society we want and the type of education our citizens require so as to contribute with solidarity to the transformation of our societies and the sustainable development of our peoples. The challenge is to build mechanisms allowing the integration of the mission, the scope, and the actions of the higher education systems and institutions in terms of their social responsibility.

Higher education as part of the educational system of Latin America and the Caribbean

Higher education is today an aspiration of young people graduating from high schools and of many adults who did not use to have access to this educational level. The increasing demand for access to higher education requires the satisfaction of multiple needs, resulting in the diversification of the offer provided through different types of institutions, programs, teaching-learning modalities and training strategies. Today,

when discussing higher education, we refer to a wide and diverse set which goes beyond our traditional conception, which used to identify higher education with universities.

In this context, the articulation of higher education with the other educational levels is essential. However, while higher education criticizes the education students received before having access to it, it does not assume the commitment it has, more specifically, in terms of the quality of teachers' training. This is a critical aspect which should be addressed, both by higher education institutions, as well as by public policies: it is necessary for the institutions to give priority to quality training, centered on the current needs of children and adolescents. Moreover, public authorities should be actively involved in the design and implementation of policies that reassess the teaching profession, recognizing its central role, and adequately rewarding educational performance.

Furthermore, the issues related to quality should be addressed in a context of diversity. This requires the definition of quality with the participation of the main social actors, and the establishment of indicators adequate to the training objectives of the institutions, which should incorporate inclusion, diversity and relevance as core values. It is necessary to design policies and mechanisms which are not limited to assessing, but which are determined to promoting quality and support to the institutions so that they, while in exercise of a responsible autonomy, assume the commitment to steadily advance in the capacity to meet the needs of the students and the social environment surrounding them.

If higher education is to contribute more and more to the wellbeing of the region, it is necessary to promote the articulation of higher education institutions with the different social sectors, and to ensure lifelong training opportunities for all.

Higher education, internationalization and integration of Latin America and the Caribbean

In Latin America and the Caribbean, “ensuring the right to equitable and inclusive quality education” (CEPAL, 2016) is one of the cornerstones supporting the necessary social and economic change. Its achievement is related to the development of competencies allowing the region, its countries and its citizens to act in a relevant manner in complex scenarios, and to be inserted effectively in the knowledge-based world dynamics. This requires changes in the educational systems and their institutions, which should consider cooperation, exchange of knowledge and transference of resources among regions, countries and institutions with solidarity. In the region, internationalization should foster interinstitutional cooperation based on solidarity among equals, with emphasis in South-South cooperation and regional integration. It should promote an intercultural dialogue, respecting the idiosyncrasy and identity of the participating countries, fostering the organization of interuniversity networks, and strengthening the national capacity by means of interinstitutional collaboration and interaction among academic peers at regional and international spheres. This will foster the flow and ownership of knowledge as a

strategic social good, favoring the sustainable development of the region and its countries.

In this context, internationalization is a key tool, which is essential to transform higher education, to strengthen the communities, and to promote quality and ownership of teaching, research, and outreach. This favors the training of citizens and professionals, while being respectful of cultural diversity, and committed to intercultural understanding, and a culture of peace, with the capacity to live together and work in the global and local community. The antithesis would be the conception of a market-oriented internationalization which favors the hegemonic and denationalizing interests of globalization.

Compliance with these objectives demands the use of systemic, comprehensive, global strategies cutting across all institutional development policies. Likewise, it is essential to have public policies supporting the internationalization process by means of the establishment of organizational frameworks facilitating regional academic integration, student and teacher mobility, the recognition of international training, the international dimension of academic programs and international cooperation in research, among others.

Higher education, cultural diversity and interculturality

The policies and institutions of higher education should proactively contribute to the struggle against all mechanisms generating racism, sexism, xenophobia, and all other forms of intolerance and discrimination. It is essential to guarantee the rights of all sectors of population which may

be discriminated due to their race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic standing, disability, sexual orientation, religion, nationality or forced displacement. Financial resources and research, teaching, and outreach efforts should be allotted to these purposes.

It is necessary to promote cultural diversity and interculturalism under conditions of mutual respect and equality. The challenge is not just for higher education institutions to include women, people with disabilities, members of Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations and individuals of groups historically discriminated, but to transform the institutions so that they become socially and culturally relevant. These changes should ensure that the worldviews, values, knowledge, wisdoms, linguistic systems, learning methods, and means of production of knowledge of those social groups and peoples are incorporated into higher education institutions.

The epistemology, learning methods, and institutional designs characteristic of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, farming communities, and other sociocultural distinct communities have to be recognized and valued. All these should be guaranteed by adequate quality assurance policies and mechanisms; and to this end, specific indicators should be used. The free and informed participation of representatives of those groups should be fostered.

Education is not just a human right but a right of all the peoples. The Latin American and Caribbean States and societies have a significant historical debt with Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. Although their rights are recognized in several international

documents and in most of the national constitutions, there is still a deficit in the effective enjoyment of these rights, even in higher education. The institutions of higher education should guarantee the effective enjoyment of these rights and should educate the population in general, and in particular, their communities against racism and all forms of discrimination and related intolerance.

It is essential to promote and facilitate the learning of the Indigenous and Afro-descendant languages and their effective use in teaching, research and outreach activities. The training of intercultural bilingual teachers for all levels of the educational systems is a priority for higher education.

Role of higher education in face of the Latin American and Caribbean social challenges

102

In view of the social challenges the region faces, education should provide a quality, universal service to the local community so as to foster the human development of each environment, articulating tradition and state of the art innovation, promoting the diversity of competencies, skills and knowledge, merging specialized activity with daily life, popular wisdom and authentic ethical and esthetic intelligence in territorial harmony beyond any impact. It is essential to consider all people as unique and unfinished, as facilitators of change and agents of development by generating mechanisms for personal and social growth, and for the establishment of communities. In other words, higher education is the co-creator of knowledge and innovation, transforming them into knowledge that is embodied in the

social practices, intellectual independence tools, social transformation and the construction of fairer, more equitable and supportive political structures, and above all, subsidiary to vernacular shared values. The region should promote science for all, critical citizenship and authentic, democratic and transparent governance for an effective construction of re-humanizing territorial relationships with all actors, improving communication among them, and making it possible to select the best contributions, thus generating relationships of co-responsibility which facilitate the wellbeing of the people.

Scientific and technological research and innovation as engines of human, social and economic development for Latin America and the Caribbean

There will be no justice in the region if there is no freedom of thought and expression for the society as a whole, and there will be no freedom of thought if our countries do not generate knowledge relevant to their realities and social innovations to transform the primary production export matrix and secondary production import matrix, and to challenge the established order. Higher education institutions should claim sovereignty to imagine, create, have access to, and apply the knowledge we need for the wellbeing of our societies, as part of their strategic role. One cannot think of a strategy to overcome unfair cognitive gaps without opening new epistemic roads. These new roads require breaking up with the (neo)colonial, (neo)dependent, anthropocentric, racist and patriarchal thought still prevalent in our societies. Only if learning what is known and the generation of new knowledge are reconciled, if theory and

practice go hand in hand, knowledge will support social justice. To understand the dimension of the change required by this epistemic matrix, we have to refer to the management of science and knowledge in the current system in a world favoring accumulation. This management is based on the construction of a hegemonic thought system, in which the exclusive role of science is the accumulation of capital through the production of proprietary technological innovation for commercial purposes. If we are to break up with this logic, we should consider knowledge as a universal human right and a collective right of the people, for it is a social and common public good promoting the sovereignty, wellbeing and emancipation of our societies and the construction of the Latin American and Caribbean integration. In other words, we should recognize that knowledge is the product of the intellectual and experimental heritage of humanity, being therefore a common good, and as a general rule, part of the public domain.

This epistemic breakup implies the recognition of the strategic role played by the arts and culture in the production of knowledge with social commitment, and in the fight for cultural sovereignty and multicultural integration of the regions.

The political dispute over “which knowledge we want” becomes, at the same time, a political dispute over “which society”, and “which region we wish”. There will be no transformation of knowledge without a change in the historical power relationships in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, there will be no change in the

historical power relationships in the region without a transformation of knowledge.

One hundred years after the 1918 University Reform

In order to continue with the spirit and the principles of the 1918 Reform, the Declarations adopted in the Regional Conference, held in Havana, Cuba in 1996, the Regional Conference of Higher Education for Latin American and the Caribbean held in 2008 and the World Conference on Higher Education held in 1998 are hereby endorsed. Higher education is a public, social good, and a human right which should be ensured by the State. Knowledge should be considered a social public good. The State should regulate the higher education system, and it should prohibit all higher education institutions that are for profit.

The current political context in the region leading, in some countries, to the persecution of university authorities, violence against students, economic adjustments and a violation of university autonomy is a historical regression. All these violations should be strongly condemned.

The higher education institutions of Latin America and the Caribbean should defend the political and social rights, and critically advocate for their insertion in the face of a neoliberal development model. Thus, they shall contribute, with social responsibility and commitment to new proposals which recreate the traditions of autonomy, social transformation, anti-authoritarianism, democracy, freedom of teaching, and

specifically a political influence based on knowledge and reason.

Social commitment should be accompanied by equality, full democracy, economic development, creation of and access to culture and the arts, and the defense of human rights. This commitment implies that higher education should be part of the society, and it should uphold democratic principles in all its spheres of action.

Autonomy is an essential condition if the institutions are to play a critical proactive role in the society. This is based on the right to have access to decision making, to representation and full democratic participation expressed in the co-governance as well as in the transparency and accountability of their actions.

It is essential to achieve full gender equality, to eradicate harassment and other forms of gender violence, and to establish affirmative action programs and policies to increase the presence of academic women in postgraduate courses and in the management of universities.

We propose that universal coverage be guaranteed for all between the ages of 18 and 23. The procedures for access should be reviewed, affirmative action policies which do not discriminate on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class, disability should be established, and social inclusion should be expanded.

Public higher education should be free, and it should be accompanied by a system of grants for low income students and students from marginalized populations.

Declaration presented during the Third Regional Conference of Higher Education assembled at the National University of Córdoba, on June 14, 2018.