

STUDENT DECLARATION

OF THE UNESCO NINTH COLLECTIVE CONSULTATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

April 8, 2005

We, the representatives of students' democratically run organisations assembled in Paris for the Ninth Collective Consultation on Higher Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), support the work and importance of NGOs consultations within UNESCO Forum. In particular we reconfirm the conclusions of the Ninth Collective Consultation on HE of UNESCO.

Hereby we affirm our longstanding commitment in principle and in deed to the right of all people to have complete access to and participation in higher education in all its forms, with special attention to the provision of public education.

In the past, at the 1998 World Conference on Higher Education, we have made our views and hopes known in a document entitled *Opening the Big Door*. Presently, we affirm these views and note that the concerns that were raised in this document have not yet found solutions that prioritise access and participation.

In particular, we note that the legacies of colonialism and imperialism continue to act as a major barrier to post-secondary education.

We are gravely concerned that the many threats to public education posed by the successive rounds of trade negotiations continue to be manifest, with more and more governments implementing trade liberalization measures that include aspects of higher education. The pressure towards privatization, educational user fees, lack of academic protections and freedom, and restrictions on access that trade liberalization usually entails are real threats to the work of improving access to high quality public education for all.

We note our particular concern about the upcoming ministerial meetings of the World Trade Organization scheduled to take place in Hong Kong from December 15-18, 2005. We urge all governments to remove education from the negotiations of the General Agreement on Trade in Service.

Further, we urge governments and international bodies to make greater efforts to include and encourage the activities of democratic students' organizations from every region.

We note that students' representatives from the regions of Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Middle East and Africa are often excluded for financial and political reasons in the planning and management of higher education.

We also note that a culture of peace must be a priority, especially given the awful destruction of universities and precious cultural resources that has taken place as a result of conflicts.

We note that access to higher education is still considered to be a privilege by some, and is not always integrated as a priority with primary and secondary education. Given that so many new jobs require post-secondary education, and that, in fact, post-secondary education is necessary for a thriving and innovative economy and a democratic citizenry, although informal education is also crucial, an organized and adequately funded higher education sector is as crucial.

As part of our vision for higher education and for society as a whole, we believe that access to public higher education through eliminating student fees and providing grants to students is not enough. Unfortunately gender inequalities still play a role in access to education, and in higher education in particular, therefore, mechanisms to secure equality in access and continuation of studies need to be identified and implemented. We believe that retention of students from all socio-economic backgrounds and women in particular is also of the utmost importance, and this necessitates changes not only to the funding of education, but also to curriculum, hiring, provision of counselling services and the overall relationship of higher education institutions to their local and global communities.

In this, the year commencing the UNESCO decade of education for sustainable development, there are tough choices facing all governments. We see higher education as an important aspect of building each country's capacity to face these challenges and, as an international community, to continue to build the intellectual capacity to implement decisions that favour sustainable development, even if they call for a significant re-alignment of the global economic and military order. Therefore higher education needs to be seen as an integral part of sustainability development discussion, rather than only an addition. Once again we stress the importance of involvement of democratic and representative students' organizations in the development of sustainability strategies.

Signed,

- AEGEE – European Students Forum
- All Africa Student Union
- ASA – Asian Students Association
- ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe
- IAAS – International Association of Students in Agricultural and Related Sciences
- International Union of Students
- ISHA – International Students of History Association
- JADE – European Confederation of Junior Enterprises
- JECI/MIEC – Catholic Student Movements
- WSCF – World Student Christian Federation

