

IAU AND HIGHER EDUCATION FOR TODAY AND FOR TOMORROW

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(Adapted from the Opening Speech to IAU 14TH General Conference)

Prof. De la Fuente, IAU President 2008-2012 welcomed the participants to the IAU 14th General Conference and thanked all of those who made the Conference possible and in particular the local organizing committee and Prof Manuel Fernós, President of the Inter American University of Puerto Rico and his team.

“Since the IAU 13TH General Conference in Utrecht in 2008, much has happened and a lot has changed. Four years is a long time for higher education. It represents the graduation of a new generation of students. It is marked by changing scholar and research priorities changing government policies, new social dynamics and constantly evolving economic conditions which impact on the treasured Independence of the academic world; it is marked as well by the belief that universities are key to society and are central actors in the ensuring the pursuit of a better world for all through the creation of new knowledge and development of informed citizens with expert knowledge. We have all had to deal with the challenges of a global economic crisis affecting almost every economy; the effects of a spreading war on terror and drug trafficking; frequent social instability and natural disasters that seem to be more frequent than ever before.

In the midst of this complexity, IAU constantly strives to contribute to strengthening higher education through international cooperation and by offering a global forum for higher education leaders, helping institutions to promote, through teaching, research and services, the principles of freedom, justice, human dignity and solidarity.

Most of IAU's thematic priorities focus on addressing issues pertaining to higher education and the global Agenda, which include:

- Internationalization
- Intercultural Dialogue
- Sustainable Development
- Equitable Access and success
- The delicate issues on ethics and higher education, which the late Professor Pier Ugo Calzolari, our Treasurer, was so committed to, and wide range of social responsibilities.

As we look to the future at this marker in the life of the Association, key questions we should all be looking to solve should be:

- How can Higher education (HE) best address all challenges humanity has to face today?
- How can HE be more useful to society?
- Is HE responding adequately to the expectations of the youth, for the future?

·What economic model would best suite HE today in order for it to contribute to improving the world in which we and future generation will have to live?"

The IAU 14th General Conference dealt with these and other questions related precisely to the Global Agenda: pathways to the future and alternative pathways. Juan Ramón added "To best explore new pathways we need to dare, and we need to learn to dare.

- Higher education should speak up and to be a voice for values, and not be a silent observer.
- Higher education should be a model for international cooperation, not for international exploitation.
- Higher education represents the culture of dialogue and so should therefore stand for the best possible dialogue between cultures.

But higher education goes beyond that. It has to tackle so many things, that it is very difficult to set priorities. Some have stated that the problems we are faced with today are too complex, that our resources are too modest, and that other tasks are too pressing. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion... so must we think anew..."

The IAU 14th General Conference was devoted to thinking anew, to identify and debate alternative pathways to the future and through the stormy present.

Juan Ramón concluded: "Universities existed throughout most of the last millennium and the will, I trust, through this one. But the crucial question we must all address is 'how effectively does our work and that of our graduates contribute to the momentous challenges that now confront the world's peoples?'"

If ever there was a need for a critical review and for creativity and for innovation, then it is within our own institutions that we should do this.

For those who are newcomers to the IAU, I trust you will find it to be a friendly association, one that shares the principles of solidarity, respect for diversity and collaboration; one that is open, willing to share, learning to do better, be better and know better, especially in this rapidly

changing world, where no definite answers to new and old problems seem to be at hand, but for which answers need to be explored jointly

It has been an honor and a privilege for me to serve the IAU for 12 years now, and for the last four years as its president, and in collaboration, with outstanding colleagues on the Board, on the Executive Committee and on the Secretariat.

The hospitality of our colleagues and friends from the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, in San Juan is fantastic; many thanks once again. We thank them and all the valuable speakers for a great, thought-provoking Conference".

