



UNESCO Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARCHE +10) “Towards an Arab Space for Higher Education: International Challenges and Societal Responsibilities” Cairo, 31 May – 2 June 2009

Introduction

ARCHE +10 was held in Cairo with representatives from: UNESCO, ALESCO, ISESCO, Association of Arab Universities, the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research, Arab Countries, NGOs National & International, and the media. IFUW was represented at ARCHE +10 by Dr. Souad El-Khateeb and Dr Georgette Karam of the Lebanese Association and Mrs Aliaa El-Erian of the Egyptian Association.

The Conference assessed progress in the ten year period since the first ARCHE Conference in Beirut in 1998. Delegates looked at factors that have impacted higher education in the region, including globalization and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which have severely affected the development and diversity of higher education; scarcer job opportunities for university graduates; scarcity in some university specialties; tremendous growth in private higher education; and increased inter-continent circulation.

ARCHE+10 addressed four themes: Study Opportunities & Equality, Quality Improvement & Assurance, Societal Responsibilities of Universities, and Management – Governance – Funds. Delegates highlighted the importance of strengthening both national and regional policies related to higher education structures, circulation of staff and students, quality and outputs.

ARCHE+10 was meant to be the first step toward creating an “Arab Space for Higher Education”, similar to one established by European countries in the Bologna Declaration of 1999. One of the outcomes was the drafting of an Arab Higher Education & Agenda for presentation at the UNESCO World Conference in Paris 5-8 July, 2009.

Conference Findings and Recommendations:

I. Higher Education Opportunities

- Although the percentage of students registered in higher education in the region had increased from 1998 – 2008, it remains extremely low when compared to developed or even other developing countries.
Arab Countries: 16% in 1998 25% in 2008
Latin America: 31% in 2006
U.S. & Europe: 70% in 2006
- Registration in higher education differs by country, ranging from 8% to 49%.
- Only 30% of students are registered in basic and applied sciences compared to those registered in humanities. This low rate severely affects development, research, innovation and technology management.
- While the number of postgraduates registered for Masters degrees doubled and those registered for PhDs tripled from 1998-2008; those registered for advanced degrees only increased from 5.8% in 1998 to 6.7% in 2008.
- Although private universities and institutions form 37% of the total facilities, they only take 9% of the total students. This makes an extensive load on government/public facilities.

It is essential to promote higher education opportunities, government/public universities, open universities, remote education and e-learning. The target for registration in higher education in the next 10 years is 30%..

II. EQUALITY & EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Although females represent 51% of students in higher education in the Arab Region in public universities, there is obvious inequality between rural/urban areas and between poor, average and higher income classes.

III. QUALITY EDUCATION

The new Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) was established in 2007. Its work is financed by the World Bank & UNESCO. Its major objective is to decrease the gap between quantity & quality in higher education in the Arab Region. Its target is to introduce quality assurance evaluations in at least 50% of the region's higher education institutions.

IV. EXTERNAL EFFICIENCY

Higher education outputs should relate more to development and job market needs. Major obstacles include brain drain, high unemployment rates and the low quality of university graduates..

V. SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Universities and other higher education institutions should play a more effective role in society by offering social services for students and by promoting an understanding of citizenship issues, human rights, religious acceptance and the Arab language.

VI. GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

Higher education institutions need to be independent from Higher Education Ministries in order to achieve a more effective role in the development of quality education.

VII. FUNDS

Universities and other higher education institutions received only 1.4% of GNP in 2000 and 2% of GNP in 2008. This extremely low spending rate is causing severe deterioration of government/public universities and institutions.

VIII. ARAB & INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION:

The circulation of both students (2%) and staff (6%) within the Arab Region is extremely low. Non-Arab staff represent less than 1% of the total staff. More mobility and circulation of students and staff is needed in order to develop higher education in the region.

IX. SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH:

Only 0.2% of GNP is spent on scientific Research in the Arab region. This is extremely low when compared even to other developing countries (minimum 1% of GNP). The result is severe deterioration. The target is to increase spending to at least 2% of GNP over the next 10 years.

DECLARATION OF ARCHE + 10 is based on

1. Access to Higher Education equally available to all based on international human rights
2. Lifelong Learning based on four pillars: education for knowledge, education for work, education for living with others and education for "being"
3. Importance of the application of the UN Recommendations for Higher Education
4. Arab Countries have common History, Language, Culture, & Traditions
5. Globalization and ICT development necessitate more highly-specialized graduates
6. Recommendations of Previous Conferences: UNESCO – ALESCO - & ISESCO
7. The 1998 Beirut Declaration on Higher Education.

The “Brain Drain” in the Arab Region should become a “Brain Gain” in order to achieve the real development urgently needed in Higher Education.

For more information on ARCHE +10:

<http://www.arche.org>

<http://www.unesco.org/beirut>

For more information on ANQAHE:

<http://www.anqahe.org>

Aliaa El-Erian, Egyptian Association and Member, IFUW Status of Women Committee

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