

13 January 2009
MR/E01/09



**UNITED NATIONS
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UNU Establishes New Research and Educational Institute in Tokyo
United Nations University Institute for Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP)

The United Nations University is pleased to announce the establishment of a new research and educational institute located in Tokyo: the UNU Institute for Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP). Conceived by UNU Rector Konrad Osterwalder and formally approved by the governing UNU Council at its 55th Session (held in Bonn, Germany, on 1–5 December 2008), UNU-ISP became operational on 1 January 2009 under the directorship of Vice-Rector Kazuhiko Takeuchi. The intent is to give an institutional identity and profile to the integrated academic activities of both Environment and Sustainable Development and Peace and Governance Programmes at the UNU in Tokyo as well as to clarify the structure and administrative/coordination role of the headquarters unit of UNU Centre.

For the past decade, the division between the administrative and academic roles of the UNU Centre in Tokyo has been blurred, with research and training activities undertaken by two thematically focused programmes — the Environment and Sustainable Development Programme, and the Peace and Governance Programme — and assisted by a separate Capacity Development Programme within the Office of the Rector. The activities of these programmes will now be unified within UNU-ISP, which becomes the 14th in UNU's global network of Research and Training Centres and Programmes (RTC/Ps).

It has become evident that escalating environmental issues, such as global climate change, the double energy threat and the looming food crisis, are profoundly impacting human security, especially in the poorest countries. The new institute will provide a unique opportunity to exploit the strengths in natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities of the two former thematic programmes, and to create transdisciplinary synergies that can more effectively address pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare.

UNU-ISP aspires to further boost the UNU's contribution to international society by seeking a greater understanding of the broad, intersecting themes that extend across three of the most-pressing issues on the UN agenda: (i) global change and sustainability, (ii) international cooperation and development, and (iii) peacebuilding and security. UNU-ISP will bridge these cross-cutting issues through a comprehensive and integrated approach, and will actively roll out a series of research, educational and social-collaborative initiatives aimed at solving current problems and anticipating future challenges.

While there are hundreds of peace institutes and environmental institutes around the world, UNU-ISP is unique in that its innovative approach to sustainability as the concept embraces not only environment and development, but also peace and security. UNU-ISP's work will provide entry points for joint collaboration with other UNU institutes, and for new cooperative relationships between UNU and the global academic and policy-making communities.

Two innovative activities of UNU-ISP merit special mention.

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UNU-ISP and UNU-INRA as “twin institutes”: Under the new “twin institutes” framework envisaged by the UNU Rector, each UNU institute in a developed country will build up a twin partner in a developing country. The rationale is that by having a research institute with campuses in both a developed and developing country, the UNU will be able to enhance its efforts in the developing world, where its assistance and capacity development support are most needed.

UNU-ISP will implement this concept by dynamically developing and engaging in activities in Africa in partnership with the UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA), located in Accra, Ghana. As a first step towards the envisaged twinning of UNU-ISP and UNU-INRA, a project on Education for Sustainable Development will be jointly implemented. Within the scope of this project, which will receive financial support from the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the UNU will serve as an intermediary to link relevant educational institutes in Japan and Africa, and will implement personnel development and educational programmes to support education for sustainable development in Africa.

UNU-awarded graduate degrees: The UNU is now working to formalize the process for the accreditation of UNU-awarded degrees; this initiative is based on another decision by the 55th Session of the UNU Council in December 2008. Discussions are underway between UNU-ISP and top universities in Japan and other Asian countries for the initiation of joint graduate school programmes. It is anticipated that master’s and doctorate degree programmes will be established at UNU-ISP in the near future. The UNU-awarded degrees would be “transdisciplinary” in nature with students taking courses on themes relevant to the UNU-ISP’s focus on sustainability and peace.

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For more information about the UNU Institute of Sustainability and Peace, or to arrange an interview with UNU Vice-Rector Takeuchi or UNU-ISP academic personnel, media representatives may contact Naoko Yano, UNU Office of Communications (tel.: 03-5467-1311; e-mail: media@unu.edu).