

Speech by Carl Lindberg, Member of the UNESCO High-Level Panel on Education for Sustainable Development at the UNU/UNESCO international conference “Pathways Towards a Shared Future: Changing Roles of Higher Education in a Globalized World in UN House ,Tokyo, Japan 29–30 August 2007.

Distinguished Director-General Matsuura,

Distinguished Rector van Ginkel,

Dear friends,

I am certain that all of us assembled here today would like to express our great pleasure and gratitude to United Nations University and to UNESCO for hosting this important conference on Higher Education in a Globalized World.

All of us have long been aware of the challenges facing mankind. They have been well documented in a number of international conferences, including Johannesburg in 2002. But I do not feel that the calls from Johannesburg and other United Nations conferences have been taken seriously. One of the reasons is the lack of political leadership in the efforts to achieve sustainable development, as underlined by Kofi Annan in his speech in Nairobi last year.

The political will and responsible leadership for tackling many of the major challenges facing humanity in all our countries can only be created by well-informed and educated public opinion. The world needs public opinion which, in democratic elections, elects political leaders who are able to take responsible and long-term decisions. This is the whole point of education for sustainable development.

This conference gives us all the opportunity to exchange experience on how higher education institutions are meeting the commitments we made at the summit in Johannesburg in 2002 and to encourage each other to take new initiatives to inspire our higher education institutions so they can vigorously contribute to a sustainable future.

Higher Education Institutions have a special responsibility to work so that sustainable development becomes a guiding light in the education sector from pre-school to university. It is an imperative necessity. This is why the UN resolution on a special Decade of education for sustainable development is so extremely important also for Higher Education Institutions. It is a golden opportunity for all of us.

Three years ago my home country, Sweden, had the privilege to host an international conference: “Learning to change our world” on Education for Sustainable Development. In his inaugural speech the Swedish Prime Minister announced: “I would like to state here and now that the time is ripe to include sustainable development in the

Swedish Higher Education Act. The policy document for universities and university colleges must clarify this social commitment in the same way it already clarifies Swedish pre-school, compulsory school and upper secondary school. In this way, our engineers, economists, social workers and mathematicians will be able to adopt the holistic approach that is so necessary if we are to succeed in the transition to a more sustainable society. In this way, university managements will be stimulated into allocating resources and building up expertise around learning for sustainable development”.

One year later the Swedish Government proposed the Swedish Parliament to amend the Higher Education Act. The Parliament approved the amendment so that, with effect from 1 February 2006, Swedish universities and university colleges, (I quote).” in their activities have to promote a sustainable development, which means that current and generations to come are secured a healthy and good environment, economic and social welfare and justice”(End quote). The proposal to amend the Higher Education Act has generally been received positively by the university leaders.

University managements, and among them those who are responsible for the training of teachers, engineers, doctors, etc., are now going on to draw up action plans to ensure that education is indeed characterised by a sustainable development perspective. I would like to mention one example:

In December 2006, the Vice-Chancellor of Uppsala University – Sweden's oldest university – decided on a number of actions:

- to instruct the boards of the faculties to assume responsibility for the integration of sustainable development as a perspective and content in all educational programmes and relevant courses,
- to improve opportunities for students to supplement their education by taking additional courses in sustainable development,
- to prepare a central action plan on education for sustainable development, and
- to instruct the board of the recently founded Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development(CSDU) to follow up sustainable development activities, to earmark development funds, to offer didactic courses on sustainable development to university teachers, and to develop support material for teachers.

In the presence of this audience I would like to add that in May this year Uppsala university had the honour of being visited by the Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko during the celebration of 300 years since the birth of the Swedish Scientist Carl von Linné. On this occasion The Emperor Akihito accepted to be appointed honorary member of Uppsala University.

As it is very important to promote ESD also within international development aid the former Swedish Government decided last year to

instruct the Swedish International Development Authority to initiate the work to develop a centre for learning for Sustainable Development. My hope is now, that the current Government, during the next few weeks will finalize this decision.

Education for sustainable development is not indoctrination. It never should be, since we can never know for sure whether the application of certain knowledge or technology, or certain behaviour, can lead to the expected result. ESD should lead to the willingness and ability to freely and voluntarily take part in work to achieve a sustainable future.

Students and their own organisations are extremely important in the ESD processes as those who are studying in higher education today are the ones who will be building for the future. In Sweden, for example, student representatives have considerable influence on Swedish university governing boards and use it very constructively in a way that is greatly appreciated by university leaders.

I would now like to present some of the experiences from the participants in an international follow-up conference two years ago of our conference in Gothenburg called “Drivers and Barriers for Implementing Sustainable Development in Higher Education” (Technical Paper No 3 – 2006, ESD in Action, UNESCO Education Sector):

* It is clear that the concept SD cannot be exactly defined – and it should not! It can be compared with the concept health as health cannot be defined in precise terms either, and yet, everyone has an idea about what health is and health is important for everyone. When

we meet each other we often ask: how are you? Sustainable Development can be seen as the health of societies and the planet. If we are concerned about the present development and whether it is sustainable we instead ask each other: how are we?

* Sustainable developments bring many challenges to the university. It must be hard to find something as multi- and transdisciplinary as sustainable development. It is also quite clear that the traditional discipline-based structure of knowledge and research is here to stay. This combination constitutes a major challenge for universities when implementing learning for sustainable development in higher education. This several fold challenge must be dealt with from different angles: the university culture, in which depth is perceived as better than breadth; the merit system, the publication tradition, the award system, the peer review system, the evaluation of job applications, the funding system etc.

* A common experience from proactive universities is that some kind of organisation with overview and responsibility outside and across the traditional disciplines is essential for making multi- and transdisciplinary ESD activities become a successful and lasting concept

* Both separate courses and programmes and/or an integrated perspective are needed throughout the education system as a whole—but the most important thing is that all students should be included. The separate course is needed to give the basic understanding of the challenges associated with sustainable development; to deliver tools and conceptual models for dealing with dynamic and complex systems; and to attain a feeling of how things are interconnected. The separated basic courses on sustainable development delivered at

universities today have often an environmental focus. This needs to be balanced with more integration of social and economic aspects of sustainability.

Like President Yoshikawa recently made, I would like to conclude by referring to professor Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2006, by quoting from his Nobel Lecture in Oslo:

“We wanted to go to the moon, so we went there.

We achieve what we want to achieve. If we are not achieving something, it is because we have not put our minds to it.

We create what we want. What we want and how we get to it depends on our mindsets. It is extremely difficult to change mindsets once they are formed.

We create the world in accordance with our mindset. We need to invent ways to change our perspective continually and reconfigure our mindset quickly as new knowledge emerges.

We can reconfigure our world if we can reconfigure our mindset.”

Dear friends, therefore : It is up to all of us to put Sustainable Development at the centre of Higher education throughout the world if we are to achieve our objectives and find Pathways Towards a Shared Future and a Sustainable Development.