

UNESCO CHAIRS/UNITWIN NETWORKS: A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO PROMOTE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**КАФЕДРЫ ЮНЕСКО/ СЕТИ ЮНИТВИН:
СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОЕ ПАРТНЁРСТВО ПО ОБУЧЕНИЮ ДЛЯ
УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ**

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Distinguished Speakers and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here in this beautiful City of St. Petersburg to attend the International Conference entitled “50 years of Educational and awareness Raising for Shaping the Future of the Oceans and Coasts, organized by the UNESCO Chair in remote sensing and modelling oceanography in the Russian State Hydrometeorological University and held on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the IOC.

I would like to, on behalf of UNESCO, thank and congratulate the organizers and more specifically the UNESCO Chair holder Prof. Sychev, for this excellent initiative.

We are delighted to be here today but we are also lucky to be here today. If the conference had taken place one week before, many of us would not have been able to be here today.

The volcanic eruption in Iceland reminded us of 2 important things:

- Nature is strong and powerful.
- Nature knows no frontiers.

As nature has always inspired human beings, we could also say that knowledge also should be strong and powerful and should disregard frontiers. The analogy stops here as knowledge should never be an obstacle but a bridge between people and between cultures a way of rapprochement between cultures.

Of which kind of knowledge are we talking about?

Scientific knowledge in marine related areas? Certainly, as it is crucial. But we are also referring to our cumulated knowledge after 50 years in the field of Education and Awareness highlighting the need to preserve oceans and coasts, about effective training programmes to develop abilities for critical thinking and problem solving and methods for capacity development in this field, on ways to motivate young

people for science and for the future of our planet. This is the essence of Education for Sustainable Development.

As you may know, UNESCO is the lead agency of the U N Decade of Education for Sustainable Development which seeks to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems we face in the 21st century.

The aim is to encourage adopting the values and behaviours to create a more viable future concerning the integrity of the environment, economic viability and an equitable society for the present and future generations.

The promotion of education for sustainable development (ESD) in higher education is crucial to building a sustainable future and to placing young people at the centre of development. This principle has been highlighted in the Bonn declaration as well as in the communiqué of the WCHE 2009.

Indeed, while at primary and secondary levels ESD mainly focuses on promoting the values and practices of sustainable development, at a higher education level, ESD also means nurturing the innovative thinking and research that will help us address global challenges such as climate change, infectious disease, or poverty. Future engineers and young researchers in sciences but also in many other areas (law, management, communication and social sciences) will have the extraordinary responsibility of contributing to shaping the world of tomorrow. The quality of the training these young people will receive at tertiary level will help them meet this challenge.

In this respect, the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme plays a role of strategic importance. It opens avenues for the higher education and research community to join forces with UNESCO to contribute to its strategic programme objectives and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This program, launched in 1992, was initially conceived as an international plan of action to promote research, training, and the development of higher education programs by creating networks and encouraging inter-University collaboration by cross border knowledge transfers. Today, 659 UNESCO Chairs and 65 UNITWIN Networks in 70 fields are established involving over 770 institutions in 127 countries, in all UNESCO's fields of competence: Science, Education, Communication, and Culture.

52 Chairs and 10 Unitwin networks were established in the field of sustainable development, and the number has been constantly increasing over the last years. 10 of these Chairs are located in Russia out of the 56 Russian chairs and Networks. Today, there are 6 UNESCO IOC Chairs and 20 UNESCO Chairs and Networks on ecosystems and marine sciences established worldwide.

UNESCO Chairs are not traditional University Chairs, but they are (as this is the case of the UNESCO Chair in remote sensing and modelling in Oceanography in the Russian State Hydrometeorological University) composed of teams of researchers, students, professors, within a University department, working in close partnership with UNESCO and with other universities in and outside the country. Each team is coordinated by a Chair holder. The partnership is also opened to NGOs, foundations and public or private bodies interested in the UNESCO chair activities.

The majority of the projects are interdisciplinary, as knowledge has become more and more complex and cannot be dealt with in a single discipline.

Since the adoption of new strategic orientations for the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme in 2007, UNESCO Chairs are encouraged to serve on the one hand as “think tanks,” on a national or regional scale but also as think tanks for UNESCO through an active contribution to UNESCO’s programme elaboration and implementation. The Chairs should serve on the other hand as “bridge builders” between academia, civil society, local communities, industry, research and policy-making. The impact on national and regional policies of UNESCO Chairs is very important.

The regrouping of Chairs at regional or sub-regional level on a specific theme is one of the main orientation given to the UNESCO chairs during the last 3 years. The idea is the creation of poles of excellence and innovation notably in developing countries through North-South and triangular North-South-South collaboration. Indeed, in most of the developing countries, institutions have neither the means nor the capacity to attain the necessary critical mass for research and advanced training activities. A distribution of the tasks, based on regional cooperation and strong international support, are thus a necessity and an opportunity for these institutions to progress. The development of poles of excellence and innovation, in particular between developing countries in a given geographic space, will thereby aim at establishing a synergy between universities, other higher education establishments, training centres, foundations, research centres

and companies of the private or public sector, around common innovative projects. These poles offer the critical mass and the necessary international visibility to become poles of attractiveness and reverse the brain drain phenomenon into brain gain.

Chairs are also encouraged to be regrouped internationally on a thematic basis, to strengthen the academic cooperation. These groupings can take on various forms: Exchanges of information, communities of practice, exchanges of teachers, students, researchers, managerial staff, and the launching of joint research projects.

Many of the chairs working in the field of sustainable development, in the environmental, pedagogical or social spheres of sustainable development, were invited to the international Congress of Khanty-Mansiysk organized by the Russian Federation in September 2009. The Khanty-Mansiysk declaration, which has been widely disseminated by UNESCO, called for the creation of a virtual platform for posting education and methodological materials on ESD issues, ESD strategies and action plans and qualitative indicators for their implementation. I am pleased to inform you that such a platform is now being elaborated within the framework of the Working Group of UNESCO Chairs for ESD, and will be launched soon.

This International Conference constitutes an important platform to enhance policy dialogue in the field of Education and training in marine related areas and more generally in education for sustainable development.

If we are all convinced that EDUCATION is an investment that pays environmental, economic, social and cultural dividends benefitting individuals and whole societies alike, how can and should we capitalize on investments already made, on international experience, build on lessons learnt, on mistakes made during the last 5 decades? Which are the best strategies to reinforce capacity development and to ensure the development of effective training programmes?

I am confident that through the exchange of ideas, and good practices from various cultural and academic contexts, this conference will be able to identify new policies and effective education, training and research programmes which are needed to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to shape the future of our common heritage. In this sense, I hope that from this conference we will see an eruption of innovations and strong and powerful ideas that can go on to spread across the international community in this field.

Thank you for your kind attention.