

**2<sup>nd</sup> Global Meeting of Associations of Universities and other Higher Education  
Institutions**  
**on**  
***The Role of Associations in Enhancing Quality of Higher Education***  
Paris, France  
May 31 and June 1, 2007

**Welcoming Address by Goolam Mohameebhai, IAU President**

On behalf of the International Association of Universities, I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to this 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Meeting of Associations of Universities and Other Higher Education Institutions to discuss a topic that is now recognized for its importance and implications world wide: the quality of higher education.

First, allow me to emphasize the importance of this gathering. This is the second time that a meeting of university associations, including rectors conferences and vice-chancellors committees, whether national, regional or international, is being organized globally. The IAU has always recognized the important role that university associations play in higher education matters, and in the year 2000, at its General Conference held in Durban in South Africa, it amended its constitution to allow university associations to become full-fledged members on the same footing as institutional members. Indeed, two members of its 23-member Administrative Board are elected representatives of university associations. At present the IAU has some 31 national and regional associations as members. Through these associations, as well as through its institutional members, the IAU is in a position to reach out to a very significant proportion of higher education institutions of the world.

The first Global meeting of Associations was organized by the IAU in Alexandria, Egypt, in 2005 and at that meeting it was proposed that a meeting of Associations should be convened by the IAU every two years. Identifying a topic for the 2007 meeting was easy, quality in higher education being a global concern. Finding a venue and a partner for organizing the meeting was also not difficult. The IAU secretariat is located here in Paris and the Conference of University Presidents of France, the CPU, seemed an appropriate choice to us. The presence of more than 35 associations in this

room attests to the fact that the issue and the venue were well-chosen. This is perhaps the most internationally comprehensive meeting of university associations and rectors' conferences ever held, and the IAU is happy to have been able to use its convening power to bring so many higher education associations together. We have also among us representatives from countries which do not have such associations or committees of VCs and rectors, and perhaps a gathering like this one may inspire them to create such a group. Certainly the IAU stands ready to be of assistance in such an initiative.

Quality is quickly becoming one of the most discussed and examined issues in higher education at the national, regional and international level. Internationally, concern about quality in higher education goes back to 1991 when the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, INQAAHE, was created. In 2002 UNESCO launched its Global Forum on Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, the linking of existing frameworks dealing with quality assurance and providing a platform for dialogue between them being part of its objectives. And the topic of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the Global University Network for Innovation, GUNI, held in November 2006, was "Accreditation for Quality: What Stake?". Regionally, the World Bank is funding quality assurance initiatives in several parts of the world, including in Africa through the Association of African Universities. The theme for the OECD Ministers of Education Meeting in Athens in June 2006 was "Higher Education: Quality, Equity and Efficiency". And the most recent meeting of Ministers of Education in London on the Bologna Process again stressed the importance of quality assurance, an area which has been the focus of much discussion and work in Europe, involving not only university associations, quality assurance agencies but students as well.

This preoccupation with quality stems primarily from the importance of higher education to local, national and regional economic, social and cultural development. However, as higher education expands, diversifies and moves across borders in ever-new ways, the assurance that what is being learned and offered is of quality becomes more important. Today, all higher education stakeholders are interested in ensuring, demonstrating, accounting for and of course improving the quality of what is offered by universities and other HEIs. Public funds, even if they are diminishing, remain a

major source of higher education financing and thus public HEIs have a special responsibility to provide higher education of highest quality to all learners. As National, Regional and International Associations we, along with other actors, share that responsibility of promoting on-going improvements in the quality of higher education.

It is for this reason that the IAU agreed to convene this 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Meeting and, together with the CPU, offer you a forum for sharing your experiences and learning about the various regional and national developments and efforts to improve the quality of higher education worldwide by looking at the role you play, or may wish to play in the future, to enhance the quality at home and abroad.

Avant de terminer, au nom de l'Association Internationale des Universités, je voudrais remercier très chaleureusement la Conférence des Présidents d'Université pour leur collaboration et leur support qui ont permis d'organiser cette rencontre conjointement dans les meilleures conditions. Je souhaite qu'il y ait d'autres occasions de collaboration pour nos deux associations.

Chers collègues, chers amis, mesdames et messieurs, je tiens à vous remercier tous de votre présence. Je sais que beaucoup d'entre vous ont fait un long voyage pour assister à cette réunion à Paris. J'espère que vous trouverez cette rencontre d'une journée et demie intéressante et enrichissante et qu'elle vous permettra de nouer des contacts qui pourraient vous être utile dans vos démarches de promouvoir la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur dans vos pays respectifs et dans vos régions. Pour les associations qui ne sont pas membres de l'AIU, j'espère que cette réunion vous donnera l'occasion de mieux connaître notre organisation et nos activités.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.