

CONCEPT NOTE

Higher Education with Impact: The Importance of Intercultural Learning and Dialogue

IAU 2023 International Conference, Qatar University, 25-27 November 2023

In his keynote address at the IAU International Conference in 1990, the UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor Zaragoza, declared that “*universality and diversity are not to be construed as opposition, but rather a dialectic, which has as its synthesis interdependence*”. More than 30 years later, this message is more important than ever. We have consequently chosen Intercultural Learning and Dialogue as the theme of the IAU 2023 International Conference.

Universities provide excellent environments to foster intercultural learning and competence which embraces diversity, treasures differences and is necessary for graduates to thrive in a globalised world. It enhances their appreciation and respect for the other and leads to a more forceful commitment to human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and building peace. The IAU 2023 Intercultural Conference will explore how universities around the world promote and support intercultural learning and dialogue, the impact geopolitics is having on this goal, and the broader implications it has for our society.

Engaged intercultural learning and dialogue is crucial for addressing the complex challenges humanity and the world is facing – many of which are synthesized in *UN 2030 Agenda – Transforming our World* and the 17 associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Universities have a key role to play in establishing a sense of interconnectedness, in building intercultural competencies, and in nurturing intercultural understanding and collaboration through teaching and learning, collaborative international research and community engagement. Such approaches will contribute to building global citizenship and social responsibility within and beyond national borders.

Higher education must lead by example in fostering cooperation, understanding and appreciation of diversity at local and global level with a view to generating new knowledge and new approaches to issues of global and local relevance.

The IAU offers a truly global platform to many voices from around the world to reflect on how best to connect different perspectives and knowledge systems. Intercultural learning and dialogue is part of the Association’s DNA since its creation by UNESCO in 1950; it informs fundamental academic values

and underpins the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The theme of this conference cuts across the IAU priority areas of work: globally engaged and value-based leadership, fair and inclusive internationalization, higher education and research for sustainable development, digital transformation of HE for society and the global common good.

One of the strategic interests of both Qatar University and the IAU is to shape alliances between cultures and contribute to fostering understanding between them through research, scholarly publications, and other initiatives. The host will showcase their work in these areas at the conference.

The Conference will bring together perspectives from different regions and countries on how intercultural learning and dialogue enhances or can enhance the relevance of higher education and its impact on society while nurturing a culture of peace.

About IAU

The International Association of Universities is a global forum for leaders of universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) and HE associations. For over 70 years, IAU has convened and connected HEIs and associations from around the world to identify, reflect and act on common key priorities: values-based leadership; fair and inclusive internationalization; higher education and research for sustainable development; and the digital transformation of higher education, for society and the common good. It also acts as the global voice of higher education to a wide range of international and inter-governmental organizations - in particular to UNESCO - contributes to global debates, and advocates for strong, higher quality and inclusive higher education.