

SPEECH BY ARMOOGUM PARSURAMEN DIRECTOR, UNESCO-BREDA AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE CONFERENCE OF RECTORS, VICE-CHANCELLORS AND PRESIDENTS OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES (COREVIP 2003) Mauritius, 17 - 21 March 2003

The Right Honourable Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius

Mr. Amara Essy, Interim President Transitional Committee, African Union

Hon. Steeve Obeegadoo; Honourable Minister of Education of Mauritius

Dr. Pius Y Ng Wandu, Honourable Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education of Tanzania and Chairman MINEDAF VIII

Prof George Eshwani, President of the AAU

Prof Goolam Mohamed Bhai, Vice Chancellor, University of Mauritius

The representative of the Minister of Education from Ghana

Rectors and Vice-Chancellors of African Universities, Distinguished Members of the AAU Board,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, I would like to thank the Association of African Universities (AAU) for associating UNESCO with this important conference.

Rt. Hon Prime Minister, on behalf of UNESCO, I wish to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to you for your visionary leadership, your innovative reform and your personal commitment in according to education and training the priority that they richly deserve. The educational plans and policies put in place by government has made it clear that a small but determined nation can be a leader and a trail blazer in an increasingly competitive world. As a fellow Mauritian I can only wish you and Mauritius more success and greater glory.

I wish to pay homage to Mr. Amara Essy, Interim President Transitional Committee, African Union for his great commitment to education development in Africa. His presence at MINEDAF VIII last December in Tanzania and today in Mauritius at the AAU Conference bears ample testimony to this.

The presence of the Honourable Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education of Tanzania and Chairman of MINEDAF VIII, at the Conference is a demonstration of the commitment of African Ministers to support AAU and involve it in the follow up to MINEDAF VIII.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be in the midst of the heads of African universities - intellectuals and leaders who are transforming the landscape of higher education on the continent.

In a knowledge economy, higher education is crucial to the development of a skilled workforce and a community of intellectuals who not only shape public opinion but also take the destiny of their societies in their own hands, giving direction to national plans and policies. UNESCO, realising the importance and role of higher education, organised the World Conference on Higher education in 1998, at which the 4000 delegates affirmed their conviction that higher education and sustainable development are inextricably inter-linked.

In fact, UNESCO has played a critical role in the creation of the Association of African Universities. It was in September 1962, at the UNESCO Regional Conference on the Future of Higher Education in Africa in Antananarivo, Madagascar, that a recommendation

stipulated a revitalized cooperation among tertiary institutions and the need for (and I quote) "creating a permanent mechanism to be set up in the forthcoming years... so as to enable heads of African universities to share information about, and review on regular basis, problems of common interests. "UNESCO in collaboration with the International Association of Universities and Ford Foundation convened a meeting in Khartoum in September 1963 to discuss how the recommendation could be implemented. It was at this meeting that it was decided to establish an independent organisation to promote cooperation among African tertiary institutions. UNESCO was also involved in the AAU Constitutive Conference held in Rabat in 1967.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The aim of recalling this history in some detail is to show the symbiotic link that has always existed between UNESCO and the AAU. This link has been the basis of our relationship in the past and will continue to buttress our activities on the continent in future.

To further strengthen our co-operation, I wish to reaffirm UNESCO's commitment to support AAU activities and involve it in implementing BREDA's Work Plan for Higher Education in Africa in the 2004-2005 biennium programme and budget.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the greatest challenges facing higher education in our times is that of "massification". (Today student numbers are estimated at the 79 million mark and are expected to reach 100 million by 2025. Most of these will be in the developing world). This major change is forcing institutions to diversify in order to meet this increasing demand. Open and distance learning methodologies as well as the advent of new information and communication technologies become viable for meeting this challenge. The oldest distance learning University, UNISA, is located in Africa.

The success of distance education in Africa and Asia indicates that this could well be the way forward for many of our institutions. Distance education can help us address issues of access, equity and equality of opportunity. In fact the Open University of Tanzania, in its short existence, already caters to 50% of the overall enrolment in higher education in that country. UNESCO is pleased to have accompanied Tanzania in the development of both OUT and the newly created Zanzibar State University. (Mr. Chairman Allow me a pleasant digression to congratulate the Hon Minister of Higher Education of Tanzania (Minister for more than 20 yrs) on his brilliant success this year in completing his LLB Honours Degree at the Open University of Tanzania). Not only does open learning enhance access, it also brings down costs and places the learner at the centre of the teaching-learning transaction. In fact distance education has proved that many individuals in our societies are capable of self-directed learning if the materials are appropriately designed. Effective distance provision is based on the principles of instructional design and a good learner support system. If adequate attention is accorded to these two aspects, a quality education and training can be provided to large numbers and even those in remote and far-flung areas. New ICTs can be harnessed to support the provision of distance learning for academic, professional, vocational, continuing education and even research programmes. It is imperative that existing contact institutions consider making the transition to dual-mode. UNESCO-BREDA would be able to offer the requisite technical assistance. In addition, UNESCO is developing a Higher Education Knowledge Base for Decision Makers. This knowledge Base is in the process of development and once ready, will be a valuable

resource for making informed decisions.

You are aware of the UNITWIN and UNESCO Chair scheme, which aims to foster collaboration and twinning between universities as well as to encourage the pursuit of excellence in advanced training and research. This is an area in which we have valued your continued support and partnership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are also aware of the Arusha Convention on the accreditation of courses, certificates, diplomas and other academic degrees within African Member States that was adopted in 1981. This legal instrument provided a framework for a) maintaining high academic standards and b) encouraging mobility of staff and students within academic institutions not only within Africa but internationally. New developments in the delivery of education, especially the advent of open and distance education and technology-enhanced learning have changed the ways in which we teach and learn. As such, an urgent need had been expressed to revise and update the Convention. UNESCO and COL jointly undertook to convene a meeting of African experts to review and revise the Convention in June 2002.

So far the Arusha Convention has only been signed by 19 countries. The revised convention needs to be signed, ratified and implemented so that Member States can commit themselves to mutually recognise qualifications, facilitate credit-transfer and promote mobility across the educational systems on the continent leading to African Unity and human resource development in the region. The AAU can be a major partner with UNESCO in promoting and developing the activities needed for the implementation of this important instrument. Copies of the revised Arusha Convention in English and French translation are now available (On www.dakar.unesco.org). Let me seek your cooperation and support in the expeditious implementation of this important document.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot end this statement without considering with you the expectations that NEPAD inspires in us for the next decade.

NEPAD envisages that Africa takes its destiny in its own hands. Those that will be in the avant garde of this process will be `our' university community. Today the participation in higher education in Africa is only 3.6% - which is far behind the rest of the developing world. The same is the case with research. Africa, with 12.3% of the world's population, accounts for no more than 1.5% of the research titles published worldwide. We speak repeatedly of the "digital divide" but what of this huge 'knowledge gap'? Will Africa continue to hover in the shadows of ignorance and under-development? Or will the continent renew itself and fulfil its' tryst with destiny" as envisaged by our statesmen and leaders? We are at the crossroads and the choice must be made. On our decisions today will rest the future of our younger generation and indeed of the whole continent.

I wish you success in all your deliberations.

Thank you.