

The Education of Young People

A statement at the dawn of the 21st century



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Presented by the Chief Executive Officers of five of the world's largest non formal education organizations with the active support of the CEO of the International Award Association.

World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations

John Casey, Secretary General, YMCA

The YMCA works with youth and other concerned citizens in close to 130 countries around the world towards the advancement of people in all spheres of human endeavour - social, economic, political, cultural, intellectual and spiritual. In so doing, it affirms the vision of a common humanity based on peace with justice for all.

World Young Women's Christian Association

*Elaine Hesse Steel, General Secretary, World YWCA
(January 1987 - August 1997)*

The World YWCA is an international volunteer membership movement uniting some 25 million women working in 103 countries to achieve social justice imperatives by increasing the participation of women at all levels of society. Crossing barriers of distance, language, and culture, World YWCA members join together to work for peace with justice, sustainable development, human rights for all and environmental integrity.

World Organization of the Scout Movement

Dr. Jacques Moreillon, Secretary General

There are more than 25 million Scouts, boys and girls, in 215 countries and territories. Scouting is education for life; it is fun with a purpose. Scouting contributes to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual potential as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local national and international communities.

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

Jan Holt, Director, World Bureau (September 1990 - July 1997)

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts is the largest voluntary organization for girls and young women in the world, with nearly ten million members. Through its national Member Organizations in 136 countries. WAGGGS provides a dynamic, flexible, values-based non formal education programme, which is relevant to girls' needs. Based on spiritual values, WAGGGS has a commitment to peace and world citizenship.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

George Weber, Secretary General

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is an international humanitarian organization with a unique world-wide network. It exists to improve the situation of the world's most vulnerable people, providing assistance without discrimination and promoting humanitarian values. The Red Cross Red Crescent youth network, with its several million volunteers, has been continuously developing programmes and activities for 75 years.

The International Award Association

Paul Arengo-Jones, Secretary General

The International Award Association is responsible for the co-ordination and progression of the International Award for Young People, a development of the UK's Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The Award is a Programme of leisure-time activities - an adventure designed to challenge the whole individual, regardless of gender, colour, creed or ability. Since 1956 it has given nearly 4 million people from over 90 countries the chance to set and achieve personal goals and to learn about themselves and their community.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In its broadest sense, education is a lifelong process which enables the continuous development of a person's capabilities as an individual and as a member of society. The purpose of education is to contribute to the full development of an autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed person. Education is provided through a number of channels; formal (e.g. schools), informal (e.g. family, peer groups, media) and non formal (e.g. youth movements, clubs). Each channel has a very significant part to play; all are interdependent and complementary.
- 1.2 One of the challenges before us all is to realise that accelerating changes in society are impacting to a significant extent on young people and that this needs to be reflected in the educational opportunities offered to them. A major problem today is that formal, academic education continues to be seen as the only essential part of education. Thus non formal education, which is best equipped to prepare young people to cope with social changes, is underestimated and opportunities to benefit from it are not fully realised.
- 1.3 **There is a need to recognise the universal validity of the non formal education of young people, particularly through the work of world youth education organizations.**
- 1.4 Under the Chairmanship of His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, Chairman of the International Award Association, the Chief Executive Officers of five of the largest, world-wide, non formal education organisations: World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, World Young Women's Christian Association, World Organization of the Scout Movement, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, have shared their vision of the education of young people both now and into the next century.
- 1.5 Altogether, their organizations today actively involve in excess of 100 million young people, supported by the involvement of adults, and these organizations have contributed to the education of more than a billion boys and girls during this century.
- 1.6 In view of the universal importance of the education of young people, the Chief Executive Officers of these organisations issue this joint statement based upon their experience and expertise in this field.

2. The challenge

Accelerated changes in society have significant implications for young people and the educational opportunities available to them need to reflect these changes.

2.1 Changes in Society and their Implications for Young People

2.1.1 In many areas the generally accepted patterns of society are changing. Some of these changes affect only certain parts of the world, whilst others have far reaching global implications. For example:

- The increasing and accelerated shifts in population, in part due to increased personal mobility, are introducing fundamental changes to traditional patterns of life in both urban and rural areas. Young people are therefore finding it increasingly difficult to rely on the traditional social support structures.
- The evolution of family structures and a declining influence of family life in the education of children and young people is often depriving them of essential parental support. Contemporary pressures force many adults to abandon their traditional culture and they therefore find it difficult to transfer their values and heritage to future generations.
- The development, on a global scale, of lifestyle models which often do not correspond to local realities. An example is the importation of consumerism inconsistent with development needs, generating aspirations which cannot be met and leading to increased frustration mainly among the younger generations.
- A perceptibly decreasing assurance that a young person will be able to assume a full and responsible adult life. This is rooted in the inadequacy of educational systems particularly for girls and young women, a lack of training opportunities and chronic unemployment; it calls for a change in mentality and outlook in respect to the need for security and continuity in personal development.

2.1.2 Social changes such as the ones described above have important implications for young people. If they are to be able to function and contribute within the society in which they live, young people must acquire and develop the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet their needs. These include:

- Obtaining the essentials of life, including food, health and shelter, employment, or other meaningful activity; and a sense of security.
- Discovering a spiritual dimension of life.
- Finding a secure starting point for themselves based on values, self-awareness and self-confidence.
- Coping with change, which requires flexibility, adaptability and mobility
- Gaining constructive control of technological progress through access to knowledge and skills.

- Combating isolation by developing a sense of belonging and identity, gaining acceptance and being recognised.

- Acquiring a sense of usefulness by making a contribution to the development of their community and beyond.

- Learning to recognise the value of co-operation and teamwork

2.1.3 The specific needs of young people will vary from one country to another and indeed from one individual to another, depending on the particular circumstances. In all cases, however, they need to develop themselves, to test their own potential abilities and to discover the world around them.

They need to have access to knowledge and competence to understand the real world.

They need to acquire an active and responsible role in social life, and through that role, a status and a stake in society.

2.1.4 Whatever the environment in which they live, all young people have the same basic needs; they need to acquire the ability to cope and the ability to become the architects of their own development as individuals who are,

autonomous - able to make choices and to control their personal and social life as an individual and as a member of society,

supportive - able to show concern for others, to act with them and for them, to share their concerns,

responsible - able to take responsibility for their actions, keep commitments and complete whatever they undertake,

committed - able to assert themselves in respect of values, a cause or an ideal and to act accordingly,

thereby developing their full potential as individuals and as members of society. This goal can only be reached if the appropriate educational opportunities, which cover the totality of their needs, are offered to young people.

2.2 The Definition of Education

2.2.1 In contrast to the traditional view which normally reserves the common usage of the word "education" to *formal* educational systems (e.g. schools and universities), the authors of this statement consider a more accurate definition to be:

Education is a life long process which enables the continuous development of a person's capabilities as an individual and as a member of society.

2.2.2 In this broader definition education throughout life is based on four pillars¹:

Learning to know, Learning to do, Learning to live together, Learning to be

Learning to know, by combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth in a few subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life.

Learning to do, in order to acquire not only occupational skills but also a broad range of life skills including inter personal and team relationships.

Learning to live together, developing an understanding of other people, an appreciation of interdependence, skills in team work and conflict resolution, and a deep respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding, peace and justice.

Learning to be, so as to better develop one's character and act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect in the development of a young person's potential.

2.2.3 The authors therefore consider that education is both a personal and social process. It should support the development of a person as an individual and as a member of society.

2.2.4 A variety of educational agents make a contribution to the full personal and social development of an individual. The UNESCO definition, generally accepted, shows three distinct types:

Formal education is the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded, educational system running from primary through to tertiary institutions.

Informal education is the process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience, such as from family, friends, peer groups, the media and other influences and factors in the person's environment.

Non formal education is organised educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives.

2.2.5 Each of these three types of education plays a specific role which complements the other two and all are necessary to produce the desired results. In broad terms:

Knowledge and job skills are generally acquired through *formal education*.

A number of skills, both personal and social, are acquired through *informal education*.

The acquisition of life skills and the development of attitudes based on an integrated value system is made possible through *non formal education*.

2.2.6 One of the major issues facing education today is the continuing tendency to devote more time, resources and responsibility to the formal academic education sector. As a result, the importance of non formal education is not recognised and the resources required to support it are being neglected in the increasing demand for finite resources and time.

2.2.7 The importance of non formal education results from the specific characteristics that are intrinsic to it and which are, to a large extent, not present in either formal or informal education. These characteristics are identified on the following page.

¹ The four pillars, and their definition, are summarised from the document "Learning: The Treasure Within", Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, by Mr Jacques Delors.

3. Characteristics of Non Formal Education Organizations

Non formal education organizations, such as youth movements, have a number of characteristics that give them the unique ability to make a contribution to the life long educational process of an individual.

First, they usually are people-centred and place a strong emphasis on the commitment and responsibility of each individual in pursuing his or her personal growth process.

Second, they all have in common several or all of the following characteristics that distinguish them from other organizations and reinforce the individual's motivation to take an active part in the learning process.

- 3.1 **Volunteerism.** Youth organizations are voluntary. Whoever decides to join such an organization does so from his or her own free will or, if some pressure has been exercised at the time of joining by family or peer pressure, a time soon comes when a free personal decision is made to stay or leave. This voluntary involvement strengthens the individual's motivation and commitment and has a positive impact on the shaping of his or her character.
- 3.2 **Experiential learning.** Non formal education organizations offer a practical field of experience in their particular area of focus. Learning comes as the result of the practical experience of the individual and not only from a theoretical explanation. The development of relationship skills will, for example, result from a direct experience of living with others. Discovering one's own abilities and limits will come as a result of direct involvement in the implementation of a project or an attempt to meet a real challenge.
- 3.3 **Progressive Programmes.** Most educational youth organizations have a progressive dimension in their programmes. This is a way of helping a person measure his or her own growth over a period of time in a flexible manner and without the rigidity of a fixed curriculum. The individual starts, implements and completes steps in a programme when he or she is ready to do so according to his or her own level of development and mental preparedness. Linked with the voluntary nature of the organizations and the individual commitment, the progressive dimension becomes a very powerful development tool. This is particularly true when it is conceived as a way for an individual to check his or her own progress as compared to a previous stage rather than in competition with others.
- 3.4 **Peer Groups.** Young people naturally desire group involvement. Non formal education organizations have found ways of harnessing this natural trend to enrich it with an educational dimension. A group of peers provides an ideal framework in which the individual, in association with others, can plan and implement projects, undertake responsibilities, experience relationships, take specific roles, reflect and evaluate with others, receive and provide feedback and learn from the experience.

Furthermore, the peer group plays an extremely important role in the process of the acquisition of values by young people. The opinion of peers is particularly influential when a young person has to make choices, particularly those which are value based (such as drugs, sexual relationships etc).

- 3.5 **Youth - adult relationship.** Educational youth organizations offer opportunities to establish a real partnership between young people and adults in a situation where both are volunteers and recognise that they can learn from each other. This partnership implies reciprocal appreciation and mutual respect. There are very few places where such a youth-adult relationship can develop in a non authoritarian manner and voluntary youth organizations are the most significant of such places.
- 3.6 **Leadership Development.** Educational youth organizations almost invariably provide, as part of their programmes, opportunities for young people to take leadership roles. This enables them to acquire leadership skills and to gradually develop and use these skills without having to wait until they have “grown up”. As a result, they will have important practical, “hands on” experience in the process of democracy, of decision making and of responsible democratic leadership which is rarely provided in a structured way by other educational agents.
- 3.7 **Development of a value system.** All organisations are based upon and reflect a set of values which are normally those reflected in the organization’s ethos. These are an integral part of the fabric of the organisation and exercise a strong influence on its activities, methods of operation, style and external relationships. They therefore offer young people an opportunity to discover, analyse and understand values and their implications, and to build over time a personal set of values that will guide their lives.

4. Actions Required

Accelerated changes in society are having a significant effect on the lives of young people and it is becoming increasingly urgent for the whole educational establishment, in all its facets, to recognise the implications of these changes and to enable young people to meet the challenges of the next millennium.

The authors of this statement strongly encourage all those who will shape educational policies for young people in the next millennium **to accept that non formal education is an essential part of the educational process and to recognise the contribution that can be made by non formal education organisations.**

In particular they are urged to:

- *Seek dialogue with the non formal educational organizations.*
- *Support and utilise the skills, resources and experience of non formal youth educational organizations.*
- *Strengthen partnerships between formal, informal and non formal education in order to create policies that meet all of the educational needs of young people.*

And finally the authors warmly invite all other non formal education organizations to endorse and associate themselves with the vision expressed in this document.

Presented by the Chief Executive Officers of:

World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations

World Young Women's Christian Association

World Organization of the Scout Movement

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

and

The International Award Association

Under the chairmanship of

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