



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Education

Muscat Declaration

**Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in
Support of Cultural Diversity and Biodiversity**

**Organized by the Sultanate of Oman in collaboration with
the UNESCO Regional Office in Doha**

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
24 to 26 January, 2011



The Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Support of Cultural Diversity and Biodiversity organized by the Sultanate of Oman - in cooperation with the UNESCO regional Office in Doha was held in Muscat from 24 to 26 January 2011, with the aim to contribute to the objectives of the 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, the UN Decade for Biodiversity and the International Year of Youth, as well as to highlight the fruitful cooperation between UNESCO and the Sultanate of Oman.

Introduction

The accelerated human mobility, facilitated by the development of communication technologies, has raised new challenges in all areas of sustainable economic, social and environmental development. To address these challenges and to overcome the "crises of coexistence" experienced by all societies in the era of globalization, we, the participants in the Conference strongly believe that there is an urgent need to identify the relations between cultural diversity, biodiversity and intercultural dialogue for a sustainable development and a rapprochement of cultures, which are not sufficiently taken into account by the current political agendas. Therefore, we adopt the following Declaration:

I- The Importance of Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue for an Effective Rapprochement of Cultures

1. Culture reflects the wealth of humanity's creative diversity. Since ancient times societies have been built on the fundamentals of dialogue, cooperation and harmonious coexistence, regardless of cultural, religious or gender differences. In fact, it is the comprehension of the relationships between cultures that shaped and continue to shape positive attitudes within and among our contemporary, de facto, diverse societies. In this regard, the respect and the promotion of cultural diversity and its corollary intercultural dialogue have become an urgent global demand, as the world feels a great malaise and the need to understand other cultural idioms rather than to fight them.

2. We are aware of the power of the world's cultural diversity and its impact on sustainable development and peace. In this respect, as the world today consists of societies with more and more diversified cultural and religious backgrounds, we call upon a better understanding of the cultural specificities of communities and individuals as well as the similarities and ties forged between them.

3. In an era of dense interconnectivity, we underline the necessity to promote media pluralism and the new communication and information technologies to change the perception of different cultures and religions through, *inter alia*, the promotion of dialogue on the Internet and social networking where numerous cultural and linguistic expressions can be circulated, translated and shared.

4. In the light of the above, we believe that there is a twofold challenge to be met by decision-makers and other stakeholders: the promotion of cultural diversity on the one hand, and the promotion of intercultural dialogue on the other. This should enable more informal and consensus-based policy choices, optimizing the different actors engaged in all domains, while recognizing the distinctive roles and added value of each. To this end, we must:

- a. Harness all energies and forces emanating by educational, scientific, cultural and media institutions through a bottom-up and a top-down approach to create synergies among all actors in order to mainstream the values of diversity and meaningful dialogue for an effective sustainable future, stressing both differences and similarities among cultures.
- b. Build new capacities, attitudes and skills through the lens of dialogue and diversity in order to achieve a better understanding and to sustain a culture of dialogue and peace; special attention will be given to youth namely through the channels of formal and informal education.
- c. Create greater opportunities for research and public debates on the wealth of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue by illustrating exchanges and transfers between cultures. A particular attention will be given to the role of creativity, which is a fundamental attribute of innovation. Emphasis should also be given to an integrated vision of all aspects of the cultural heritage, as a bearer of history and identity that must be preserved and transmitted to future generations through exhibitions, fairs and festivals, using community centers and institutions such as schools, universities, museums, art galleries, foundations, cultural centers, libraries etc ...
- d. Stress the need to integrate the principles of cultural diversity and its corollary dialogue in all policies, particularly Education, Science, Culture and Communication policies in the hope of correcting flawed cultural representations, values and stereotypes.

II. The Need to Preserve Biodiversity in order to Protect Life on our Planet

5. The climate fluctuations and the emission of greenhouse gases, the damage resulting from air and water pollution, and the depletion of biological resources all lead to the loss of biodiversity, to the degradation of ecosystems which are central to the human well-being. This requires from the international community to take immediate measures to strengthen international efforts aiming at a sustainable use of biodiversity.

6. Being aware of the challenges that face biodiversity in the context of the escalating environmental pollution and depletion of resources and their unsustainable use; we call upon governments to take necessary measures to increase their efforts in conserving ecosystems, especially among the local population living in areas containing endangered ecosystems and biological diversities.

7. We; furthermore, underline the need to raise awareness of the relationship between food security, biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of ecosystem services, and to encourage in-depth studies on this relationship at a state level on the basis of the specificity of these three elements (food security - Biodiversity - Ecosystems).

8. In the light of the above, and in line with the objectives of the UN Decade for Biodiversity and the strategies adopted by the Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, (Nagoya, Japan, October 2010), we believe that the preservation of biodiversity on the planet is one of the most important pillars of sustainable development; therefore, it requires the establishment of a strong regional and international coordination and cooperation. To this end, we must:

- a. Guide national and international efforts to preserve biodiversity and conserve ecosystems, which imply the adoption of sustainable eco-tourism options, the rehabilitation of degraded areas, the decrease of the loss of natural resources, the reduction of pressures on coral reefs and the protection of marine and inland waters as well as coastal and inland regions.

- b. Support scientific research and design innovative mechanisms that benefit biodiversity, including industries related to marine and terrestrial organisms in order to maintain their sustainability, and to avoid their endangerment as it was the case of existing resources on land and sea that have experienced depletion.
- c. Help communities to reach sustainability and to address many of the problems related to water, energy and climate change issues; and help them mitigate the effects and risks of disasters and reduce the loss of biodiversity, food crises and health risks.
- d. Encourage environmental formal and informal education for youth through-*inter alia*- the development of the subjects related to the importance of biodiversity in school curricula, the establishment of field visits and scientific experimentation; and collaborate with the institutions of public education and higher education to raise awareness of the importance of conservation of ecosystems and to encourage them to join the scientific and professional disciplines that support this area.

III. The Necessity to Provide Youth with appropriate Capacities in the Framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

9. Recalling the general objectives of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) to promote networking and collaboration among stakeholders in ESD; to foster greater quality of teaching and learning of environmental topics; to support countries in achieving their millennium development goals and to provide them with new opportunities and tools to reform education.

10. We reaffirm the objectives of the 2009 Bonn Declaration of the UNESCO World Conference on ESD to involve youth in the design and implementation of ESD programs and to mobilize their skills, organizations and networks for the promotion of ESD, and we acknowledge the role played by youth organizations and UNESCO Associated Schools in support of education for sustainable development; however, much remains to be done to increase youth participation in these processes.

11. We; moreover, stress the need to make all efforts to build an enabling environment for youth initiatives and to facilitate dialogue and partnerships between youth and the relevant public and private institutions, organizations and civil society at local, national, regional and international levels.

12. In the light of the above, and in line with the World Program of Action for Youth, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1985 during the celebration of the International Year of Youth, we support initiatives such as "Connecting Cultures" and "Earth Care" and we encourage the participation of youth in such projects. In this regard, we must:

- a. Spare no effort to provide youth with quality education, health care, training and work opportunities in line with the objectives of Education for Sustainable Development.
- b. Strengthen the leading role played by the UNESCO Associated Schools to the development of plans and programs supporting students and teachers involved in these
- c. Raise environmental, cultural and social awareness by revisiting education systems, promoting-*inter alia*- collaborative programs and projects at national, regional and international levels.
- d. Facilitate and support youth participation with regards to governance, programming, policy development, advocacy and monitoring.

IV The Challenge Raised by the Muscat Declaration to Embrace Cultural Diversity, Biodiversity and Intercultural Dialogue and a Rapprochement of Cultures in the Context of Education for Sustainable Development

13. We invite all stakeholders (decision makers, academia, the civil society, and the private sector) to explore the existing and countless links between cultural diversity, biodiversity, and intercultural dialogue to find out the added value of this approach in order to foster human development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth and environmental sustainability, but also as a means to achieving a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence, in harmony with nature and the world cultures.

14. We invite UNESCO and other UN relevant organizations and bodies to organize periodic international conferences to assess the current state of biodiversity and cultural diversity, namely with the tools provided by international legal instruments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on

the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the UNESCO Universal Declaration On cultural Diversity.

15. We encourage the development of concrete grassroots projects to share best practices, strengthen networks and involve civil society in general and youth in particular in programs of UNESCO related to biodiversity and cultural diversity.

16. We call upon the Ministries of Education, the National Commissions of UNESCO and UNESCO itself to involve youth in all decision making and to strengthen the support and cooperation mechanisms with relevant research institutions and the UNESCO associated schools and chairs, to create synergies between scientific knowledge and local expertise for the sake of sustainability.

17. We; thus, call upon the participating countries and organizations to:

- a. Support efforts and initiatives to foster a culture of dialogue and a rapprochement of cultures
- b. Develop national plans in order to maintain the ecological balance on the planet
- c. Invest in youth as they are key players in sustainable development

18. In conclusion, we commit ourselves to work towards the implementation of the recommendations and directions listed in this Declaration, and we thank the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for hosting this Conference and express our satisfaction at what has been reached through the findings and recommendations. The Government of the Sultanate of Oman also expresses gratitude to UNESCO and to the UNESCO Regional Office in Doha for their support for this conference. The Omani Ministry of Education and the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science would like to congratulate the Conference organizing committees and all the participants who have enriched the Conference for its success, which undoubtedly strengthens the " intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity" to build a more sustainable future for all.