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International Cooperation Working Group (ICWG)

Report for the attention of the Board, BM57

Period: BM56 (May 2009) - BM57 (November 2009)

To contact the ICWG, please email internationalwg@esu-online.org

I Introduction

a) Mandate of the ICWG

At BM54 in Brusno (May 2008) a working group for international cooperation was established, and VSS-UNES-USU Switzerland was elected chair of the ICWG with a one year mandate, until BM56 in Brussels. NSU Norway was included in the work from the beginning on, and approved as co-chair of the ICWG by ESU's Executive Committee on the 15th of September 2008.

After accomplished work and reporting to BM56 the mandate was prolonged to encompass the necessary work of coordination of international cooperation towards and during the World Conference on Higher Education (5-8th of July 2009). BM56 adopted an internal motion that mandated the ICWG *to coordinate the organization of another meeting of global student representatives after the WCHE +10 in Paris and if requested to take the adequate measures*

to ensure the follow up of what was agreed upon there in a coordinating role according to the needs in this specific situation and the resources of our respective unions.

The ICWG was asked to report back to the board at BM57. This report will give an overview of the actions taken since last board meeting, what has been achieved, provide documentation of the work, and outline an appropriate follow up.

b) Composition of ICWG

VSS-UNES-USU and NSU co-chair the working group. The following individuals have been active within the working group since BM56:

- NSU: Marte Sendstad (EC NSU 08-09), Naomi Røkkum (NSU 08-09), Magnus Malnes (EC NSU 09-10)
- VSS-UNES-USU: Andrea Blaettler (EC VSS-UNES-USU, EC ESU 09-10), Lara Lena Tischler (former EC ESU), Christian Boesch (former CoCo ESU), Rahel Imobersteg (Secretary General VSS-UNES-USU), Rahel Siegrist (EC VSS-UNES-USU 09-10)

Cooperation has been close with the Executive Committee of ESU, especially Olav Øye (ESU EC 08-09/coordination ICWG) and Ligia Deca (Chairperson of ESU) supported and coordinated the work of the ICWG in relation to externals and hacks, out of which Inge Gielis (ESU SAC 08-09) has been contributing to the work as well. Furthermore, the ICWG enjoyed support from Gertie de Fraeye (VVS).

II Motivation

VSS-UNES-USU and NSU have both a history of engaging in international cooperation and in solidarity with students in other parts of the world. One recognises a development where decisions that affect students are not only taken on a national or regional level, but also at a global level. There is today no active student body to answer to this demand. At the same time

we see that student rights are threatened in many parts of the world and there is a need for student solidarity to support each other in the challenges we face. VSS-UNES-USU and NSU therefore recognise a need to widen the range of student cooperation to approach enhancement in global conditions and structures of higher education. We see that the world needs a strong global student voice and thus a coordinated global student movement and it is our aim to contribute to this as the ICWG of ESU.

III UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education + 10

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) was held within the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 5-8th July 2009 and gathered more than 1 000 participants from governments, IGOs, (I)NGOs, there under student organisations, and experts.

a) Main objectives

From the beginning on the main objective of the working group has been to contribute to the coordination and to enhance the communication between students organisations on a global scale in order to prepare for the WCHE and cooperate on political positions and work during the conference. A second target was to increase the communication and cooperation between the student organisations on a global level generally, also after the WCHE. A first UNESCO/student NGOs consultation was organised on 21-23 January 2009 in the headquarters of UNESCO within the previous mandate of the ICWG as a preparatory meeting. In the end, the assembled student organisations adopted a statement on a students' vision on the needs of 21st century. The report for this meeting, including the Global Student Statement, is available in the ICWG report to the BM56.

b) Preparations before the WCHE

After BM56, intensive work on preparing for the WCHE was done in coordination with ESU Executive Committee. The ICWG contributed by:

- Informing as many student organisations as possible on how to participate in the WCHE, including helping with finances for travels and accommodation for the global student meeting.
- Coordination of global working groups established after the UNESCO/NGO student meeting in January. Especially, United States Students Association (USSA) contributed to this work of one of these groups.
- Taking the necessary actions to ensure facilitation of a global student meeting on the 9th July.
- Worked to get as many as possible student leaders as speakers in panels and sessions of the WCHE, and to enhance student involvement throughout the Agenda.
- Coordinated contact between student organisations and UNESCO secretariat, with ESU Chairperson Ligia Deca acting as a focal point for the student organisations globally. Ligia Deca took part in the Committee of the WCHE which prepared the conference.
- Participated in the ESU delegation to the North-American and European Regional preparation meeting in Bucharest in the end of May. Here it is noteworthy that other regional student organisations had strong participation at their respectively regional meetings as well. For instance OCLAE published a book on the student organisations opinions to the Latin-American and Caribbean conference.
- In these stages, the Global Student Statement was used as a platform for the political priorities and work. Through regional conferences and commenting on the zero draft of the WCHE communiqué, the awareness of the global student coordinated voice gain stronger influence.

c) Enhancing global student cooperation during the WCHE+10

About 40 different regional, national and sectorial students' organisations participated at the WCHE within the delegations of their INGO or in national delegations. During the conference, the ICWG contributed to coordinate and facilitate cooperation between the students participating. This was done through organised coordination meetings open for all student delegates every evening (some carried on into the night), morning meetings, and

continuous online communication during the conference. The aim was to streamline the political priorities and inputs by the student organisations, to be able to act as a coherent and strong group at the WCHE. The coordination meetings worked out lobby strategies, political priorities and argumentations and joint inputs for the conference Communiqué, which was lobbied for and addressed in speeches. ESUs Chairperson Ligia Deca, was a member of the conference drafting committee, and was able to work on behalf of all the student organisations present.

Although, the agenda gave limited space for student organisations in panels and sessions, and these had to be fought for, the student organisations were mutually able to give a strong impression and clear voice. This was notably visible through the plenary speeches of ESU Chairperson Ligia Deca, All-African Students Union (AASU) General Secretary Olundare Ogunlana, and the stakeholder session chairing of VSS-UNES-USUs General Secretary Rahel Imobergsteg and active presence in almost all the 30 parallel sessions of the conference.

d) Political results

The evaluation done at the proceeding global student meeting pointed out that the coordination had been important for the success in the conference. Students, even though being a relative small group at the conference, and given few spaces in the program, fought through a lot of strong opinions. Provisions in the final Communiqué with strong messages on higher education as a human right, public responsibility and public good; stakeholders participation; removal of references to tuition fees and university rankings; emphasis on social responsibility, access and success; and statements of student participation was pointed out as valuable achievements of our work.

The WCHE ended with adopting a Communiqué available at http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/WCHE_2009/FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE%20WCHE%202009.pdf Several of the formulations were worked in by the students during the conference. It was essential for success, that ESUs Chairperson Ligia Deca, was a member of the conference drafting committee, and was able to work on behalf of all the student organisations. Good coherence between the positions raised by students during

parallel sessions and speeches and the demands put forward in the drafting committee was also crucial.

IV Global Student Meeting

Based on the discussions and the agreement among the organisations participating at the first UNESCO/student NGO consultation meeting in January 2009, BM56 adopted an internal motion that mandated the ICWG to organise a meeting after the WCHE *to gather the student representatives from all over the world to decide on further steps and hopefully more concrete plans for how to build a form of continuous global student cooperation*. The ICWG organized the logistics for this meeting on the 9th of July; the day after the WCHE 2009 ended, and prepared an agenda for the meeting as well as background information for a discussion towards a concrete agreement of future global student cooperation which can be found in the annex.

a) Participants

Regional platforms present included the All–Africa Students Union (AASU), the Asian Students and Youth Association (ASA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the Organisation of Latin American and Caribbean Students (OCLAE) and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS-FCEE). Sectorial platforms involved in the meeting have been l' Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe (AEGEE), the European Democrat Students (EDS), the European Law Students' Association (ELSA), the International Association of Students in Agriculture and Related Sciences (IAAS), the International Association of Dental Students (IADS), the International Federation of Medical Students Association (IFMSA), la Jeunesse Etudiante Catholique Internationale (IYCS–JECI), the European Confederation of Junior Enterprises (JADE), and the International Union of Students (IUS). A number of representatives from national unions of students also observed the meeting.

Some of the organisations that took part on the NGO student consultation meeting 21-23rd January 2009 and at the WCHE were unable to be present at the global student meeting. Most notably, these were la Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), the National Unions of Students of Australia (NUSA), the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) and the United States Student Association (USSA). Most of these organisations were not as such invited to the WCHE 2009 and could therefore not attend the global student meeting either.

b) Agenda, working procedures of the meeting and outcomes

The agenda included an update on the situation within the student organisations present as it developed since the last meeting in January 2009; evaluation of the global student cooperation during the WCHE; follow up of WCHE; proposals and working groups on ideas for future global student cooperation; elaboration on possible joint campaigns; adoption of a plan for future cooperation, including the delegation of coordination to a Communication Committee consisting of regional and sectorial student organisations (see provision on this in Annex D); and investigation of meeting possibilities for 2010. Negotiations most notably ended with the agreement on an Action Plan for the Global Student Dialogue (please see Annex I).

The meeting went into details on how to improve and continuously enhance cooperation between student organisations on a global level. Several different ideas on this was presented, investigated by a drafting group and discussed during the meeting. However, the provisions adopted by consensus of the meeting are to be found in the Action Plan for Global Student Dialogue. The need and willingness for future cooperation was stated repeatedly by every organisation present.

c) Follow up

The follow up of WCHE and the global student meeting was partly delegated between the organisations. Some discussions took place on the global emailing list in the proceeding weeks. One of the first steps towards continuous cooperation was to organise an online Communication Committee meeting. The Asian Students and Youth Association was

designated to take initiative on this within one month after the meeting. However, due to lack of response from the other student organisations, it has not been set up as of yet.

The ICWG find it important for the ESU board to understand that ESU has through 2008-2009 invested major efforts into coordinating and facilitating global cooperation and communication. During and after the global student meeting it has been made clear that maintaining such a leading role, is not possible without the mutual commitment and ownership of the other organisations as well. This is an important aspect of the division of work that has to take place in the follow up.

V Future work of the ICWG

a) Dissemination of work done

A normal reporting and dissemination of the two global student meetings and the work of the ICWG up to the WCHE will be the key priority of work group up to the board meeting. The ICWG will now produce a general report, including collected results and outcomes of the work of the global student meetings, reporting of working methods, detailed contact lists and handover to new persons active within the work group.

b) Recommendations on further work of ICWG

As outlined above there is still some work left to be done on reporting, dissemination of the meetings with outcomes and compiling the work done by the ICWG in order to ensure that all participating students organisations and partners can access the results and contacts set up. Because of this, and due to the explained hesitation of how the follow up of the Action Plan for Global Student Dialogue will be done in practice, the ICWG is not ready to make concluding recommendations as regard to the possibility of prolonging the work group mandate or how ESU should contribute in the follow up. The ICWG should provide suggestions on future follow up through an internal motion at BM57.

Annex I

Action Plan for the Global Student Dialogue

We, the participants of the global student meeting after the WCHE +10 at UNESCO Headquarters on the 9th of July have discussed on how to cooperate on the global level.

Since the global higher education arena confronts students all over the world with growing internationalization of decision making over issues that affect every individual student on the local level, we see an urge for cooperation of the different national, regional and international student platforms in order to strengthen the students' voice on the global level.

Therefore, we decided to:

- a) set up a Communications Committee (CC) consisting of AASU, ASA, ESU, OCLAE, an organisation from Northern America (to be decided), eventually GUAS (to be confirmed) and two representatives of sectorial/thematic student organisations based on a decision among the sectorial/thematic organisations. The CC is mandated to discuss how to move on with future collaboration and facilitate dialogue that also involves organisations/platforms that are not part of the CC. ASA is responsible for organising the first online meeting of the CC.
- b) continue discussion on potential joint projects and common efforts on the basis of international solidarity.
- c) plan a meeting of regional and sectorial/thematic student organisations in 2010. The communication committee will decide on where this meeting shall be held. Options that will be elaborated are:
 - a. Latin America or the Caribbean
 - b. IAAS World Congress
 - c. Asia
 - d. Malta

Paris on the 9th of July,