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Graz Declaration on Committing Universities to Sustainable Development

The European Union through the Resolution of the Gothenburg Council and the Lisbon Process has put itself on the frontline of the implementation of sustainable development in the global context. By this, the European Union has taken over a major responsibility to reach the UN Millennium Development Goals. The Bologna Process constitutes one of the most efficient means to realize this ambitious objective in the arena of Higher Education.

On the occasion of launching the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in higher education, an international conference on “Committing Universities to Sustainable Development”, was held from 20-23 April 2005 in Graz, Austria. The conference was jointly organized by COPERNICUS-CAMPUS, the Karl-Franzens-University Graz, the Technical University Graz, oikos International, and was sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The objective of the conference was to discuss the role of universities and other higher education institutions in an overall societal transition towards sustainable development as well as strategies for the necessary opening of universities to society.

After the deliberations during the conference, the participants came to the conclusion that the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 confronts universities throughout the world with a strong challenge as well as with new opportunities. As the location of academic education, universities bear a distinctive responsibility for the students and their professional and moral quality as future leaders in society and economy. As major contributors to research, they have to tackle questions which arise in connection with the transition of societies around the world towards more sustainable development paths. As significant societal actors, universities shape their local, regional and national environs and are therefore an important partner of other stakeholders, and society at large, for a sustainable future. All these challenges and opportunities require universities to re-think their position in society in order to meet expectations as well as to take full advantage of emerging opportunities.

Against this background, the participants in attendance at this conference endorse the following in view of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development:

1. Call on universities to give sustainable development fundamental status in their strategy and their activities and to promote the creative development and implementation of comprehensive and integrated sustainability actions in relation to their three major functions – learning and teaching, research, internal

and external social responsibility. By co-operating more closely institutions of higher education could share experiences and develop together inter- and transdisciplinary innovative approaches to sustainability in all their functions. Universities are also called for closer interaction with other stakeholders in communities to better respond to their needs and requirements as well as to learn lessons from professional and life experiences.

2. Call on Ministers at the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education to be held in Bergen in May 2005 to use sustainable development as a framework for the enhancement of the social dimension of European higher education as well as to contribute to the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area. The participants urge the Ministers to request the Bologna Follow Up Group to submit a proposal for criteria and procedures on how to integrate sustainability issues into the framework of the Bologna Process using COPERNICUS as one of the starting points for further deliberations.
3. Call on UNESCO as a designated lead agency for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, in co-operation with other relevant parts of the United Nations system, to support these efforts in the higher education sector and to promote and support international academic cooperation contributing to a better integration of sustainable development in the institutional mission and to see it to be part of academic values. UNESCO shall provide a critical partner in linking the European efforts in globally promoting sustainable development in higher education.

The “Graz Process”, initiated at this conference, will provide a supportive mean and a sounding board to integrate sustainable development into the Bologna Process and on the global level.

Graz, April 23, 2005

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