PEOPLES' SUSTAINABILITY TREATY ON HIGHER EDUCATION

1. Preamble

Foreword

This Treaty, developed in May 2012, is the latest in a series of documents which emerges out of a need to rethink higher education and its role in a transition towards a more sustainable society. It has been written at a time when there is mounting concern for the future of people and planet but also fresh opportunities to act through commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Treaty has been drafted by representatives from twenty five higher education agencies, organisations, associations and student groups rooted in different parts of the world. The cross-cultural dialogue and development process underpinning this document has served to build collaborative links and ownership. It has paved the way for a new consolidated platform for cooperation beyond the Rio+20 event in June 2012. It is envisaged that the document could lead to joint implementation projects and the sharing of best practices as well as modalities that are less bureaucratic.

Those signing this Treaty are seeking pathways and possibilities for progressing sustainability in higher education. They are committing to contribute towards societies that are fair, participatory, future facing and peaceful and able to restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, as well as promote human development in an equitable and inclusive manner.

Contextualising Commitment

Universities and colleges of higher education have a long history of engaging with the generation of knowledge and shaping social and scientific paradigms that influence everyday life. They are well positioned to link the regions, transcend disciplinary boundaries as well as local and global dimensions of development. They are recognised for their influence on policy directly, as well as indirectly, through the education of policy makers. They are influential in the development of leaders and for shaping history.

Numerous international statements and national declarations reflect the aspirations of stakeholders to redefine higher education. *Appendix 1* lists some of these key documents which have been influential in seeking support for sustainability in higher education. This Treaty builds upon the vision and initiatives listed.

Transforming the Sector

Authoritative documents have consistently argued that before higher education can genuinely contribute to sustainable development, it must transform itself. Those signing the Treaty agree that:

- *Transformation is complex and a long term ambition.* It must begin by recognising that the sustainable development agenda demands a paradigm shift in education. It is about the transformation of institutional responsibility as well as the reorientation of curriculum and pedagogy to better serve needs of current and future generations. This will take time and a resilient as well as an inclusive approach to change.

- *Transformation must be guided by vision and clarity of purpose*. Before changes in structure and governance are proposed, those engaged in, and within, higher education need to define a vision

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and purpose for higher education which align with sustainable development. This vision building must occur at a localised level and be explicit of the inner values as well as intangible guiding principles which define higher education institutions and their practice.

- *Transformation of knowledge structures is required*. Structures must be changed to allow for a more integrated approach to sustainable development. This will allow Universities and colleges to address global challenges in a more holistic and realistic manner. The approach would cut across the traditional knowledge disciplines, theoretical and methodological mainstay and engage with communities of practice to facilitate the co-creation, co-design and co-production of knowledge.

- *Transformation requires fostering respect for and understanding of different cultures and embraces contributions from them*. Higher education must promote intercultural understanding and cross-cultural dialogue critical to the attainment of sustainable development. It must be inclusive of indigenous knowledge, wisdom and values, lifestyle and attitude as well as the development of mutual respect and the promotion of multilateral engagements and agreements beyond higher education.

- *Transformation of lifestyles as well as professional competences is required.* Universities and colleges must promote less carbon intensive, less consumerist, healthier lifestyles across campuses and through external partnerships. This needs to be supported by training and education of staff and stakeholders as well as the embedding of professional competences in sustainable development within the curriculum.

- *Transformation requires the development of innovative competences*. The German Rectors' Conference (2010) and Sapporo Sustainability Declaration (2008) reminded us of the importance of promoting qualities such as innovation, curiosity, humility and boldness through the system as these are fundamental to triggering the transformation process. These should be reflected in the institutional culture as well as curriculum.

- *Transformation requires effective leadership.* Leaders that are able to translate vision and clarity of purpose into an inclusive transformational change process are difficult to find. There is a need to identify and celebrate effective leadership as well as provide leadership development opportunities to current and future leaders engaged within the sector.

- *Transformation strategies need information and decision-making tools.* Tools that can provide relevant data and real-time dashboards that can bridge the gaps between strategic policy, academic development and operational issues are needed.

2. Principles

Principle #1: To be transformative, higher education must transform itself

To fulfil expectations in relation to sustainable development, higher education has to face the challenge of transforming itself. This principle is perhaps the most important and has been unpacked in the previous section.

Principle #2: Efforts across the higher education system must be aligned

Higher education institutions are a part of a system composed of universities and colleges, research and training centres, innovation clusters, employers, student bodies, quality, assurance agencies, governmental and administrative bodies. This is important for a number of reasons: for example, while universities are innovating practice, those engaged in informing, funding, regulating or

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supporting the system influence the pace and direction of change. Understanding the system and seeing its connectedness is key to effecting change.

Principle #3: Partnership underpins progress

The higher education system must recognise its place and role within a broader social system consisting, among others, of policy makers, governments, industry, NGOs, civil society and traditional knowledge organisations. It should endeavour to act as a facilitator of cross sector discussions to link and leverage activities as well as build on the strength of the stakeholders enhancing their capacity to construct more positive and sustainable futures.

Box.1 The higher education Stakeholders

The stakeholders can be divided into three broad categories:

1- Those engaged in the activities of higher education institutions – for example: University Executive, Council or Boards, registrar's and administrative officers, academic managers and implementers, researchers, educators, students.

2- Those engaged in the higher education system – for example: ministries of education and its administrative offices; funding agencies; quality assessment bodies; international organisations (e.g. IAU, UNESCO, UNU-IAS).

3- Those forming part of the communities which the higher education system serves - for example: local communities, NGOs, indigenous communities/groups, professional bodies, businesses and young people and those in their third age.

Principle #4: Sustainable development is an institutional and sector-wide learning process

Sustainable development is itself a learning process. Achieving progress requires us to build capacity, learn through experience and collaboration. Implementing change towards sustainable development within universities and colleges requires the creation of opportunities to co-construct knowledge and develop competences of staff and students along the journey. Equally, advances across the higher education system require the creation of collaborative platforms, the sharing of experience and expertise and understanding the need to reorient the system towards sustainable development.

Principle #5 Facilitating access to the underprivileged

In order to avoid reproduction of societal divisions based on the socio-economic and political affiliations, language, culture, ethnicity or gender, the higher education system must aspire to improve access to higher education for those from less privileged backgrounds. It must address the issue in collaboration with other partners representing policy makers, school system, civil society and international organisations tackling financial, cultural and political barriers to wider access to higher education.

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Principle #6: Inter- and trans- disciplinary learning and action

With rapidly and constantly changing realities, multi- and transdisciplinary approaches to learning become more appropriate and significant. The complex challenges facing society and the environment cannot be understood or dealt with in isolation and will need innovation and cross-disciplinary dialogue. Higher education must create opportunities for furthering these approaches.

Principle #7: Redefining the notion of quality higher education

Higher education is currently driven by performance indicators associated with *excellence, quality* and *impact*. The sector must re-evaluate the assumptions currently underpinning these assessments and driving investment and reputation across the system. The meanings of these terms need clarifying and/or realigning with the notion of sustainable development.

Principle #8: Sustainable development as a whole-of-institution commitment

Sustainable development must be an institutional commitment and be reflected across campus management; curriculum, research and student and community engagement activities. It cannot rely on the efforts or commitments of a few champions operating on the fringes. Sustainable development must be embedded in governance and decision making processes, at an organisational as well as sector level. It is important that these processes are open, transparent and based on stronger elements of participation within and outside of the organisations.

3. Commitments

Those signing the declaration commit to change at five levels:

3.1 Cultural

Change is required so that sustainable development becomes a key element and guiding principle for higher education. When cultural change has taken root, sustainable development will be adopted and advocated by the membership of the institutions and key catalysts in the higher education system.

Cultural change underpins a whole-of-institution approach to sustainable development and enables the embedding of sustainable development frames within the governance, research, teaching, management and operations as well as public engagement. Senior management commitment is key to cultural change. This leadership needs to be backed by institutional as well as higher education stakeholders groups if the change is to be achieved.

3.2 Campus

The last ten years have seen significant advances in the area of campus management for sustainable development at universities and colleges. These include: modelling biodiversity and energy conservation; adopting sustainable procurement principles; building campuses as living laboratories for learning, research and community engagement; supporting fair-trade and socially just causes as well as lowering their carbon footprint. This practice needs mainstreaming across the sector. Higher

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education funding and regulatory agencies as well as higher education associations, student groups and professional support bodies have a key role here to assist with extending this good practice.

3.3 Curriculum

Perhaps the greatest challenge of all is to reorient the higher education curriculum so that it aligns with sustainable development. This requires not just the inclusion of relevant subject matter and the pursuit of inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches but also the development of education for sustainable development competences of university and college educators as well as learners. Competences associated with: systemic thinking; critical reflective thinking; futures engagement and values clarification; the ability to deal with complex and contradictory situations; the capacity to work in partnership in order to facilitate transformative actions towards sustainability are vital. The UNECE ESD competences provide a useful framework to advance actions in this area. The curriculum gate-keepers, professional bodies, government agencies, student groups and academic development bodies as well as teaching colleagues have a key role to play to achieve this ambition.

3.4 Community Engagement

Sustainable development can be the key to revitalising the role and relationships universities and colleges have with the communities they serve. Higher education institutions can often be accused of being too inward looking. The walls of higher education, which can exclude and disconnect the work of institutions from local, social and professional communities, need to be demolished. Access to higher education needs to be improved and greater connectivity with the sector's social mission is required. Academic, administration and support colleagues all have a role to play in bringing about this change. Equally, community and government stakeholders can accelerate this change process by providing opportunities and incentives for change.

3.5 Connecting the System

There are contradictions in the purpose and practice of higher education across the system. It is important to review the various policies, incentives, rewards, platforms and mechanisms driving higher education to ensure that they are aligned with sustainable development. Important to this effort is the rethinking of measures associated with *quality*, *excellence* and *impact*.

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4. SIGNATORIES

a. Partners in the Development of this Treaty

Alpen Adria University Klagenfurt
Asian Universities Alternative Appraisal (AUA)
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)
Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS)
Catalan Network of Education for Sustainability Research, Catalunya, Spain (EduSost)
Conferencia de Rectores de Universidades Españolas, Spain (CRUE-CADEP)
COPERNICUS Alliance (CA)
Education for Sustainable Development HE Programme of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC)
Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies at Alpen-Adria-University Klagenfurt
International, Environment and School Initiatives (ENSI)
Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges, UK (EAUC)
Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research
Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI)
Global Universities Partnership on Environment and Sustainability (GUPES)
Iberoamerican Network of Universities for Sustainability and the Environment (ARIUSA)
International Association of Universities (IAU)
International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN)
Korean Association for Green Campus Initiative (KAGCI)
Learning for Sustainability Dutch National Programme (HE Section), Netherlands (LFS)
Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSD)
Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA)
Postgraduate Researchers Interested in Sustainability Matters (PRISM)
Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network (ProSPER.Net)
Students for Global Sustainability
Sustainable Futures Leadership Academy (SFLA) for Higher Education
The Baltic University Programme/Network (BUP)
The China Green University Network
The Reorienting Teaching Network
UN Education Caucus (EDC)
UNESCO Chair in Citizenship, Education and Environmental Sustainability of Development
UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility
UNESCO Chair in Higher Education for Sustainable Development
United Nations University IAS (UNU)
United Nations Environment Programme – Environmental Education and Training Unit (UNEP-EETU)
Universities Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in Africa (MESA)
Universities and Regional Centres of Expertise in ESD (UNU RCE)
UK Teacher Education for Equity and Sustainability (TEESNet)
World Student Community for Sustainable Development (WSCSD)
Working Group for Sustainability in the German Higher Education System

b. Signatories

1. Ashwani Vasishth, Center for Sustainability at the Ramapo College of New Jersey, USA
2.

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5. ANNEXURES

1. Action Plan

Those signing this Higher Education Treaty commit to:

Immediate actions (no later than mid-2013)

Action 1. Transforming the paradigms that underpin current higher education practice. We will draw lessons from previous successes and shortcomings, to redefine the higher education system with a new vision and purpose. Those committing to this treaty will engage in reviewing their organisational ambitions and action plans to ensure there is alignment with this action.

Action 2. Establishing a communication platform that would facilitate exchange of experiences among partners of the higher education system and serve as a forum for consolidating future strategies and actions in the area of sustainable development.

Action 3. Developing a set of indicators which can guide the change process and help capture developments which bring us closer to the goal of sustainable development. These indicators will capture the dynamic change processes as well as performance measures. We commit to periodically report on actions and achievements against these indicators.

Action 4. Sustainable development actions and initiatives must be implemented using participatory processes which engage the university community in diverse and cross-stakeholder dialogues. Regional Centres of Expertise (RCEs) and similar platforms have an important role to play here.

Action 5. Finding opportunities for integrating education for sustainable development competences within the plans and actions associated with the Green Economy ideal and initiatives to address the current socio-economic crisis.

Short-term (2012-2015)

Action 1. To invest in research in order to understand trends of societal development and define the role of higher education in contributing to more sustainable futures.

Action 2. To create structural and supportive frameworks for embedding education for sustainable development competences within higher education experiences. This will require collaboration amongst those signing the treaty with the national agencies including quality bodies to strengthen the presence of these competences in ESD for national needs and priorities.

Action 3. To contribute to improvement of basic education and access to higher education for disadvantaged groups. Those signing the Treaty commit to cross-sectoral partnership, particularly with governments, school systems, non-formal education, in order to improve quality of education at all levels.

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Action 4. To undertake research, public and policy engagements in order to deconstruct the existing notion of *quality*, *impact* and *excellence* and agree on their new meaning based on the principles of sustainable development.

Action 5. To support initiatives which seek to develop the capabilities of existing leaders to enact sustainability commitments and to ensure succession plans and selection processes for future leaders give focus to this area.

Medium-term (2016-2025)

Action 1. To support the development of fiscal models that are sensitive to long-term consequences on higher education and society in embedding sustainable development; and to engage into the partnerships that would lead to the restructuring of the higher education financing system.

Action 2. To develop professional development models and support for staff in this area. Related to this, revise promotion criteria so that sustainable development related work is recognised and rewarded in career development pathways and embed within position descriptions and responsibilities.

Action 3. To initiate transdisciplinary research and learning processes. Such advancement would lead to engagement of other sectors of the society into the co-generation of knowledge and the reframing of methodologies and to joint efforts to address sustainable development issues.

Action 4. To support actions associated with the mainstreaming of education for sustainable development competences into national education systems ensuring that sustainability literacy and engagement is an integral component of all curricula.

Long-term (post-2026)

Action 1. To achieve cultural change across the higher education organisations and institutions we are engaged in.

Action 2. To model sustainability across all our campuses and learning sites so that we demonstrate sustainability in practice.

Action 3. To embed education for sustainability competences within our teaching and learning systems and ensure that all staff and students have opportunities to engage at a professional and personal level with this agenda.

Action 4. To improve access to higher education through the work of our organisations and institutions.

Action 5. To create a greater alignment across the higher education system so that sustainable development takes meaning in the key drivers, reputational and rewards systems important to those engaged in higher education.

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Appendix 2. International declarations, regional and national initiatives

Year	Declaration/Charter	Partners involved	Scope	Short description/Keywords
1990	Talloires Declaration	University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF)	Global	First declaration specifically targeted to the higher education sector. *Keywords:* leadership for sustainability; support; mobilisation of resources.
1991	Halifax Declaration	Consortium of Canadian Institutions, International Association of Universities (IAU), United Nations University (UNU)	Global	The ethical and moral obligation of universities in addressing sustainability was recognised. *Keywords:* ethical obligation; shape present and future; leadership; development of policies and practices.
1993	Kyoto Declaration on Sustainable Development	IAU	Global	Closely tied to Agenda 21 and the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development (UNCED) Conference in Rio de Janeiro 1992. It called for specific sustainability plans. *Keywords:* sustainability action plans; ethical obligation; sustainability imperative; environmental education; sustainable physical operations.
1993	Swansea Declaration	Association of Australian Government Universities	Global	The declaration stressed the commitments outlined in previous documents. *Keywords:* review of physical operations; environmental literacy and curriculum; ethical obligations; research and public service.
1994	COPERNICUS University Charter for Sustainable Development	Association of European Universities (Copernicus Alliance)	Regional (Europe)	It called for a paradigm shift in European universities. *Keywords:* core social mission; new frame of mind; whole-institutional commitment; environmental ethics and attitudes; education of university employees; programmes in environmental education; interdisciplinarity; dissemination of knowledge; cooperation and networking; partnerships; continuing education programmes; technology transfer.
2001	Lünenburg Declaration	Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership (GHESP)	Global	In preparation for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. *Keywords:* key role of universities; catalyst for social change; globalisation, poverty alleviation, social justice, democracy, human rights, peace and environmental protection; generation of new knowledge; training of future trainers; curriculum re-orientation; lifelong learning.
2002	Ubuntu Declaration	UNU, UNESCO, IAU, Third World Academy of Science, African	Global	Called for the development of a global learning environment for learning for sustainability. It suggested the creation of networks and Regional Centres of Expertise (RCEs). *Keywords:* review of programmes and curricula;

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		Academy of Sciences and the Science Council of Asia, COPERNICUS-Campus, GHESP, ULSF		attract future trainers; meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG); knowledge transfer; development of an action-oriented tool kit for universities; development of sustainability strategies for reform; development of an inventory of best practice and case studies.
2003	April 2003 – 2nd Sub regional conference for ESD in Bishkek, Statement of the conference participants.	CAREC and five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, in cooperation with partners and donors	Sub-regional	These initiatives became Central Asia's commitment to the UN Decade for ESD. Keywords: sustainable development literacy, collaboration UN DESD.
2004	Memorandum "Re-Thinking Academia. Reorientation on the horizon of sustainability"	Group 2004 (interdiscipli-nary group of German professors, all being committed to higher education policy)	National (Germany)	Contribution to the German debate on the higher education reform. It called for a paradigm shift in German universities. *Keywords:* sustainability science, innovation of higher education, sustainable universities, inter- and transdisciplinarity
2005	Graz Declaration on Committing Universities to Sustainable Development	COPERNICUS CAMPUS, Karl-Franzens University Graz, Technical University Graz, Oikos International, UNESCO	Global	Stresses the key opportunities which the Bologna Process creates for embedding sustainability across higher education. *Keywords:* give status to sustainability in universities' strategies and activities; sustainability as a framework for the enhancement of the social dimension of European higher education.
2005	Bergen Communiqué	European Union (EU) education ministers, European Commission and other consultative members	Regional (Europe)	EU universities should build upon sustainability principles. For the first time since 1999, made a strong reference to the Bologna Process as a key mechanism to establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010 and promoting the European system of higher education worldwide. The process should be based on the principle of sustainability. *Keywords:* university reform supporting education for sustainability; interdisciplinarity; innovation to address social challenges; sustainability skills and learning objectives; employability.
2008	Declaration of the Regional Conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CRES)	UNESCO	Regional (Caribbean and Latin American)	CRES was intended to be a contribution to identifying the major issues of Latin America and the Caribbean, looking toward the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in 2009. *Keywords*: sustainability for social progress; cultural identities; social cohesion; poverty; climate change; energy crisis; culture of peace; democratic relations

				and tolerance; solidarity and cooperation; critical and rigorous intellectual ability.
2008	G8 University Summit Sapporo Sustainability Declaration	G8 University Network	Global	The aim was to develop common recognition of the need for global sustainability, to discuss responsibility of universities and provide messages to G8 leaders and societies. *Keywords:* universities working closely with policy-makers, leadership for sustainability; re-orientation of education and curriculum; dissemination of information; training leaders; interdisciplinary perspective.
2008	Climate Change Statement of Action	University and College Presidents	National (Canada)	Aims to make campuses more sustainable and address global warming by bringing together institutional commitments to reduce and neutralise greenhouse gas emissions on campus. *Keywords:* creation of emissions inventory; set a date for universities becoming 'climate neutral' within two years, development of action plans, inventory and progress reports made publicly available.
2008	Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network (ProSPER.Net) Charter	UNU-IAS	Regional (Asia-Pacific)	An alliance of several leading higher education institutions in Asia and the Pacific Region that committed to working together to integrate Sustainable development into postgraduate courses and curricula. Keywords: networking, work together to reorient curricula and research towards sustainable development.
2009	World Conference on Higher Education	UNESCO	Global	Called on governments to increase investment in higher education, encourage diversity and strengthen regional cooperation to serve societal needs. *Keywords:* advancement of understanding of multifaceted issues and our ability to respond; interdisciplinary focus; critical thinking; active citizenship; peace, wellbeing, human rights; education for ethical citizens.
2009	Turin Declaration on Education and Research for Sustainable and Responsible Development	G8 University Network	Global	The aim was to acknowledge the pivotal role that higher education institutions and scientific research organisations should play in supporting sustainability at global and local levels. *Keywords*: new models of social and economic development consistent with sustainability principles; ethical approaches to sustainability; new approaches to energy policy; focus on sustainable ecosystems.
2009	Living Sustainably: the Australian Government's National Action Plan	Australian Government	National (Australia)	Sets out a framework for national action that adopts the following four strategies to respond to the needs and priorities of education for sustainability.

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2009	Living Sustainably: the Australian Government's National Action Plan for Education for Sustainability	Australian Government	National (Australia)	Sets out a framework for national action that adopts the following four strategies to respond to the needs and priorities of education for sustainability. *Keywords:* leadership for sustainability; reorienting education towards sustainability; fostering sustainability in business and industry; harnessing community spirit to act
2010	Learning for Change: Scotland's Action Plan for the Second Half of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development	Scottish Government	National (Scotland)	Action plan as a response to the UNDESD. In the higher education sector, the Scottish government has set up specific recommendations for universities on how to advance the sustainability agenda. *Keywords*: monitor progress; sustainability skills; embedding sustainability in teaching and learning strategies; campus sustainability learning; student led activities; strengthening sustainability in teaching standards; interdisciplinary work; climate change action plans.
2010	Declaration "Universities for Sustainable Development"	German Rectors' Conference, German Commission for UNESCO	National (Germany)	Contribution to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. *Keywords*: higher education for sustainable development, sustainable universities, UN DESD
2010	UNICA Green Academic Footprint Pledge	UNICA Network	Regional (Capitals of Europe)	Emphasised the unique position of universities at the different capitals of Europe. *Keywords:* role and purpose of universities; develop campuses as living laboratories in the area of sustainability.
2011	Declaración de las Américas "Por la sustentabilidad de y desde la universidad"	Inter-American Organization for Higher Education IOHE /OUI	Regional (Inter-American)	Commitment of Universities of the OUI to assume institutional responsibility to the global environmental crisis and encourage other social actors to do the same. *Keywords*: new models of social and economic development consistent with sustainability principles; whole-institutional commitment; cooperation and networking.