



Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in support of Cultural Rapprochement and Biodiversity

24-26 January 2011
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Concept Note

Preamble

The Ministry of Education in Oman, represented by the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in partnership with UNESCO and in line with the outcomes of the Euro-Arab Dialogue, is organizing a conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Support of Cultural Rapprochement and Biodiversity. The conference will take place in January 24-26, 2011 at Al-Bustan Palace Hotel in Muscat. This conference is organized with the aim of helping educational systems to promote international efforts to reduce the conceptual gap between culture and nature and assist in endeavors to go beyond the “biological and social” dichotomy.

Background

The Bonn Declaration that emerged from UNESCO’s Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) held in Bonn, Germany, in 2009 acknowledged the fundamental role of youth in the implementation of ESD. This acknowledgement is based on the increasing belief that the human factor is the most crucial factor affecting the various dimensions of the concept of sustainable development whether positively or negatively. The declaration called for the strengthening of international and regional efforts for promoting the ESD agenda. At the practice level the declaration also stressed the importance of engaging international expertise within the UN system to convene in addressing key issues, such as biodiversity, intangible heritage and climate change.

The International Year for Youth

The International Year for Youth that was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly and is being celebrated globally between August 2010 to August 2011, with the aim of promoting dialogue and mutual understanding provides the platform for youth involvement in promoting key global issues for sustainable development including biodiversity and cross-cultural dialogue. The Oman National Commission has been active in adopting several youth focused activities through UNESCO’s ASP network including twinning projects with Germany. The *Connecting Cultures Project*, that is based in Oman and has been recognized by the Alliance of Civilizations, as a flagship venture in working with young people in the field of intercultural dialogue will also be conducting a youth expedition during the conference.

The International Year for Rapprochement of Cultures

The proclamation of 2010 as the International Year for Rapprochement of Cultures by the United Nations General Assembly and the lead role of UNESCO in celebrating this year have been instrumental in promoting dialogue among cultures and focusing on contemporary youth-related issues. UNESCO has teamed up with partners including National commissions, UNESCO Associated Schools, UN system agencies and other governmental and non-governmental organizations to celebrate this year through a strategy, as stated by UNESCO, focusing on four key themes:

- promoting reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity.
- building a framework for commonly shared values.
- strengthening quality education and the building of intercultural competencies.
- fostering dialogue for sustainable development.

With an ultimate goal of demonstrating "the benefits of cultural diversity by acknowledging the importance of the constant transfers and exchanges between cultures and the ties forged between them since the dawn of humanity. As cultures encompass not only arts and humanities, but also lifestyles, different ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs, the protection and promotion of their rich diversity invites us to rise to new challenges at the local, national, regional and international levels".

The International Year for Biodiversity

The United Nations General Assembly also proclaimed 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity and appointing the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity as the focal point and calling upon UNESCO to play an active role in the advancement of biodiversity through activities and programs executed by the Natural Science sector to raise public awareness on the importance of the preservation of Biodiversity. Through the celebration of this year the following goals will be the center of focus.

- Enhance public awareness of the importance of conserving biodiversity and of the underlying threats to biodiversity
- Raise awareness of accomplishments to save biodiversity realized by communities and governments
- Promote innovative solutions to reduce the threats to biodiversity
- Encourage individuals, organizations and governments to take immediate steps to halt biodiversity loss
- Encourage dialogue between stakeholders for the steps to be taken in after 2010

Youth, Cultural diversity and Biodiversity:

Educating youth is the main key to facing the cultural and natural challenges of the world today. This is one of the few common beliefs that are shared by human societies worldwide in the twenty-first century. This also is the strong foundation of ESD. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg in 2002 has "recognized that education in fact has the capacity to put sustainability concerns at the centre of the learning context. At that conference, governments agreed to reorient national education systems to a vision of sustainability that links economic well-being with respect for cultural diversity, the Earth and its resources" .

Objectives

The objectives (goals) of this activity are multiple:

- Exploring the various linkages between culture and nature and how they contribute jointly to shaping human life and realizing the concept of sustainable development in today societies.
- Raising educators awareness of the different strategies and approaches for integrating culture and nature in school curricula and pedagogy.
- Contributing to the process of enhancing biodiversity- conservation by educating people, via awareness raising and information exchange.
- Contributing to the process of engaging young people in playing an active role in biodiversity conservation and inter-cultural understanding, utilizing the roles of education and science.
- Strengthening the recognition that biodiversity is a cross-border and cross-cultural issue that concerns the global human community.
- Presenting the role of culture and nature in building sustainable economies.
- Promoting inter-cultural agenda for improving cultural diversity and biodiversity.
- Bringing together best practices through the collaboration of the UNESCO National Commissions and investing in the power of the UNESCO's network of National commissions.

Themes

- Education for Sustainable Development
- Cultural Diversity and Heritage.
- Biodiversity&Natural Heritage.
- Youth participation in cultural and natural heritage management and common values across diverse cultures.

Expected Participants

- UNESCO National Commissions (from the Euro-Arab region).
- Educators.
- Youth.
- Specialists in cultural and natural heritage, biodiversity, cross-cultural issues and ESD.
- Tourism specialists concerned with heritage and culture.

Venue

Al-Bustan Palace hotel, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, tel :+ 96824799666

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