

WELCOME MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE HELLENIC NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO

Summer school on Education for Sustainable Development in Protected Areas and Biosphere Reserves

Coordinators: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Development Management and Education in the Mediterranean, Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice Office)

With great honor I welcome today, as chairman of the Hellenic National Commission for UNESCO, the participants of the summer school on “Education of Sustainable Development in Protected Areas” organized by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Development Management and Education in the Mediterranean and the Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice Office) and which is under the auspices of the Hellenic National Commission for UNESCO.

The Summer School composed by two parts: the first one deals with the training of post graduate students participating in the Erasmus plus, while the second focuses on training and further specialization executive bodies and institutions dealing with environmental protection issues.

The Hellenic National Commission for UNESCO is watching with great interest and supports initiatives that promote environmental protection, as strongly believes that awareness of the citizens on matters of environmental resources management, sustainable development and sustainability are critical, not only for our country but for the entire humanity.

The UNESCO, being International organization of the United Nations established in 1945, strives consistently to the development of Culture, the diffusion of Education, the strengthening of Sciences, the promotion of the Communication between people, with respect to the values of each civilization and culture, but also for the protection of the environment.

Today, UNESCO is working hard to make a decisive contribution to the achievement of the eight Millennium Development Goals of the UN, including the

implementation of strategies for sustainable development and environmental protection, which holds a major position. At this point, I would like to point out that the year 2010 has been dedicated to Biodiversity and rapprochement of cultures.

As part of its actions, UNESCO supports and develops many programs for the environment. These include: 1) the **MAB program** ("Man and Biosphere"), studying ecosystems and sustainable management of natural resources on a global scale, 2) the **International Geoscience Programme** (IGCP), which through networking of geologists, hydrologists and environmentalists is trying to contribute to social and economic sustainability, 3) the **International Hydrological Programme** (IHP), aimed at sustainable management of water resources and to develop tools and strategies to prevent interstate conflicts related issues and 4) the **World Water Assessment Programme** (WWAP) in order to improve the stock and quality of global clean water.

Furthermore, I would like to point out that in Greece 4 Chairs working on issues related to the environment are active. These are the followings:

- At the Laboratory of Environment Chemistry, Department of Chemistry, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the **UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Development Management and Education in the Mediterranean**, led by Professor, Dr. Michael Scoullou,
- at the National Observatory of Athens, the **UNESCO Chair on Natural Disasters in Geosphere, the Hydrosphere and Atmosphere**, led by Professor, Dr. Christos Zerefos,
- at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the **UNESCO chair and Network International Network of Water-Environment Centres for the Balkans**, led by Professor Dr. Iakovos Ganoulis and
- at the Department of Primary Education, University of Crete, the **UNESCO Chair on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** headed by Professor, Dr. Vassileios Makrakis.

Unfortunately, a serious problem is the lack of awareness and consciousness of

citizens, and of the responsible bodies of making decisions, who often do not understand the close links and the delicate balances between the protection of the environment and ecosystems, the public health and the economic and social development.

Our planet needs now more than ever global visions for ensuring sustainable development, based on mutual respect of cultures, the respect for human rights, respect for the environment, solidarity and communication.

In a society that invests in the development of knowledge and consciousness of citizens, environmental policies must have a complete content and should aim at sustainable development. Furthermore, the provision of energy education and the highlighting of the strong energy bonds and common environmental concerns of the people, it is imperative to exploit as a tool for intercultural communication society.

At a time when a lot of people like to point out the features that are supposed to differentiate our cultures, UNESCO is opposed to confrontational logic promoting those characteristics that unite cultures for the benefit of the global community through a meaningful dialogue based on respect for the values of each civilization and culture. This dialogue, however, requires substantial knowledge of the cultures and traditions so as to enable them to coexist harmoniously, to prosper and to dream.

In closing I would like to congratulate the very active Professor Dr. Michael Scoullos and the contributors of the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development for the excellent organization and I wish this current initiative to inspire similar actions in the future.