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New initiative aims to forge closer links between UN and academia



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (centre) launches UN Academic Impact

18 November 2010 – Over 300 university presidents, faculty members and students gathered at United Nations Headquarters today for the launch of a new initiative that seeks to create partnerships between the world body and academia and foster a culture of intellectual social responsibility.

“By sharing ideas, across borders and disciplines, we can find solutions to the interconnected problems that cause so much suffering,” [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon [said](#) as he launched the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI), an initiative of the Department of Public Information (DPI).

The launch event includes a two-day conference where participants commit themselves to ten principles derived from the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), the global anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

Each of the more than 500 member institutions, from over 90 countries, pledges to undertake at least one activity or project every year which tangibly supports and furthers the realization of these principles.

Referring to the UN’s expectations of member institutions, the Secretary-General described a mutually beneficial relationship.

“We are not asking for your intellectual property. But we are demanding your dynamism, your energy and your commitment,” he said.

“You get more than the immense personal satisfaction of teaching, learning and individual research. You get the even greater pride of seeing your scholarship help people cope with their day-to-day struggles.”

He detailed the important role that academics and intellectuals have played in the past and present of the UN and pointed to the positive impact closer partnership could have in the future.

“By formalizing our relationship today, we can magnify the already great impact the academic community is having,” he said.

“A single idea can generate a breakthrough that saves millions of lives. A new technology can spare whole populations from hardship. Even a theory can unlock action for peace.”

Over the course of the two-day conference, participants will share their views and suggestions about how their work could support, and be supported by, the UN.

The first UNAI conference is set to be held at the Centro Niemeyer in Asturias, Spain, on 15 December.

Named after Oscar Niemeyer, the only surviving member of the team of architects that designed the UN Headquarters complex 63 years ago, the centre opens its doors on the Brazilian architect’s 103rd birthday to host the UNAI conference.

“Oscar Niemeyer has invested the precision of his craftsmanship with ingenuity and daring,” said Kiyo Akasaka, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. “His famous remark, that he was not attracted to the ‘straight line, hard and inflexible, created by man’ can be said to sum up the spirit of the United National Academic Impact, where the distance between intent and conclusions in scholarship is not always linear, but is enriched by creative diversions that can themselves yield a solution.”

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