

11 August 2017

# World Humanities Conference

Liège, Belgium, 6-11 August 2017

## Outcome Document

### A New Humanities Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

We, the participants in the World Humanities Conference held in Liège, Belgium, from 6 to 11 August 2017, who have come from all around the world to reflect and to engage in dialogues to establish a new agenda for the humanities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century;

Commending the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH) for their joint organization of the Conference;

Building on a long tradition of intellectual cooperation and solidarity anchored in humanities scholarship and underpinning the creation of UNESCO;

Inspired by the Constitution of UNESCO, which states that it is in the minds of women and men that the defences of peace must be constructed and that peace must be founded upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind;

Recalling that gender equality and Africa are the two Global Priorities of UNESCO;

Considering the Constitution of CIPSH, which states that a better knowledge of human behaviour is indispensable to a closer understanding of peoples, and identifies cooperation among scholars and with non-academic partners as relevant levers for fostering such knowledge and its dissemination, and reiterating the 2010 call by the General Assembly of CIPSH, meeting in Nagoya, Japan, for a new foundation of the humanities rooted in

responsibility in managing the human and cultural complexity of our societies, within a plurality of world cultures;<sup>1</sup>

Aiming to contribute actively to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the specific approach and competences of the humanities, understood as including philosophy, history, literature and language, and the arts;

Recognizing that the humanities have a specific competence and responsibility in fostering the freedom and diversity of thought and the transparency that are fundamental for all aspects of life in society, while stressing the irreplaceable role of the humanities for a critical approach to values and for the understanding of long-term processes, such as the challenges related to environmental changes and global migrations;

Affirming the essential role of the humanities in fostering epistemological decolonization;

Reaffirming the 2011 Busan Declaration,<sup>2</sup> which states the urgency of addressing the current status of the humanities and rethinking the meaning of humanism in the face of ongoing crises and rising uncertainty in a world affected by rapid globalization;

Recalling the statement of UNESCO's Executive Board in May 2017 reaffirming the importance of "the role of humanities in a world in transition" and their "historic task of struggling against xenophobia, intolerance and fundamentalism";<sup>3</sup>

Noting that the World Humanities Conference has taken place during the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures and contributed to the achievement of the objectives thereof;

Further noting the outcomes of the preparatory meetings that took place in Brazil, China, Colombia, France, Jamaica, Lebanon, Mali and Portugal, as well as the results of the 4<sup>th</sup> World Humanities Forum and of the International Year of Global Understanding;

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<sup>1</sup> Final Statement of Outcomes presented at the CIPSH-ISSC General Assembly and a Joint Scientific Symposium (<http://www.cipsh.net/upload/userfiles/ISSC-IPSH%20Joint%20Symposium%20Statement%20of%20Outcomes.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Busan Declaration: Towards a New Humanism for the 21st Century (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002212/221283e.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> 201 EX /Dec. 37 (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002480/248002e.pdf>)

Expressing our sincere appreciation to all the institutions that made the preparatory meetings possible;

Warmly thanking Tencent, the Global Chinese Arts and Culture Society, and Wallonie Bruxelles International, for their generous financial support, as well as all the institutions that made valuable in-kind contributions to the organization of the Conference;

Expressing our particular gratitude to the Foundation for the World Humanities Conference for its local organization and financial commitment, and to the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium for its support;

1. Call on UNESCO, CIPSH, and their partners to adopt a gender lens and integrate gender-based perspectives in all the following calls to action;
2. Call on foundations, councils, sponsors and other funding bodies, public as well as private;
  - to establish transparent mechanisms of collaborative international funding for the humanities, securing the academic independence of researchers and the wider dissemination of new knowledge resulting from such efforts;
  - to establish mechanisms in each country to synthesize results from humanities studies and to present them to policy-makers and civil society;
3. Call on the media to make the message of the World Humanities Conference accessible to all members of civil society, and subsequently to engage in regular discussion with regard to how and why the humanities matter to everyone's lives individually and collectively;
4. Call on higher education institutions, academies, research centres and similar scholarly bodies and communities:
  - To foster disciplinary research, along with interdisciplinary collaboration with other domains of science and humanities research and human reflection, as well as with the arts, the letters and non-academic knowledge, while also collaborating in

conceiving new ways of teaching the humanities in general education and for life-long learning;

- To improve the participation of young scholars in all humanities research activities;
- To recognize that specific and transparent criteria for qualitative assessment of research in the humanities should be discussed and agreed upon, also countering any attempt to advocate one single methodology or epistemological perspective in any particular discipline or to dismiss any domain of scholarly research;
- To endorse language diversity in education and in academic publications, with particular reference to the use of indigenous languages, to produce multi-language lexicons in the various fields of studies and to secure translation of all major international conventions into all national languages;
- To promote pluralism in the humanities with due regard for indigenous and traditional knowledge;
- To recognize the irreplaceable capacity of the humanities in helping contemporary societies to meet critical challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as well as other global agendas such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction, the New Urban Agenda, and the 2063 Agenda for Africa, which relate to meanings, values, understandings and long-term trends;
- To join and contribute to UNESCO and CIPSH initiatives to follow up on the World Humanities Conference, especially by enhanced collaboration through the establishment of new regional and global humanities networks, starting with Africa and its diaspora;

5. Call on CIPSH and its member organizations:

- To promote, in the framework of a research agenda, the re-foundation of the epistemological framework of the humanities through interaction and convergence of different academic traditions, the reconnection of scholarly disciplines through the humanities, and the restructuring of the humanities research framework, for

instance by fostering multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects such as a Global History of Humankind and by engaging other fields of expertise in CIPSH, including the humanities dimension in all scientific research, when addressing reasons, dilemmas, values and ethics;

- To discuss and assess their contribution, along with UNESCO and other potential partners, including the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the International Social Science Council (ISSC), towards global projects and mutual interactions for the advancement of academic knowledge as well as the re-introduction of humanities perspectives into the daily life of societies;
6. Call on UNESCO, through its Secretariat and Member States and in cooperation as appropriate with the United Nations system and other relevant international and regional organizations:
- To ensure the strong presence of humanities within the Management of Social Transformations Programme, in particular by promoting the establishment of a network of UNESCO Chairs in all regions of the world to facilitate international scientific cooperation among the disciplines of humanities, and with social sciences, in close collaboration with CIPSH, and by scoping periodical editions of a World Humanities Report;
  - To take into consideration the outcomes of the World Humanities Conference within their own strategies, in particular in devising research and education policies, language considerations and quality assessments in order to reinforce funding of the humanities, as well as their engagement to face critical societal challenges;
  - To ensure that the outcome of the World Humanities Conference is taken into account by the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2017, as requested by its Executive Board, and furthermore widely circulated to national research and higher education institutions.