

MENSAJE DE ANDRE CARVALHO, DIRECTOR DE PROGRAMAS
Y OPERACIONES DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS.

Madam Ramirez Garcia Gonzalez, Rector of the University of Costa Rica

Representatives of the Universities Members of the Latin America
UNITeS University Network,

Ladies and Gentleman

Let me first start by thanking Rector Lopez Aguayo, Coordinator of the Latin America University UNITeS Network for inviting again this year the United Nations Volunteers Programme to participate to the annual gathering of its members and to address the meeting.

Let me also thank the Rector of the University of Costa Rica for having accepted to host this event and for giving us all a chance to visit a country which is a world reference in sound governance, respect for the rights of its people, empowerment of the voiceless and putting right priorities first in its efforts to ensure a balanced development that benefits everyone.

We are gathered here today at the University of Costa Rica for the Third Annual Meeting of the Latin America UNITeS University Network. Three years ago we met in Colima, Mexico, to confirm our commitment to work together to help reduce the digital divide. In doing so, we responded to the call of the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan to help countries in the South catch the train of globalization of information and communication technology and strengthen human and institutional capacity in many core development sectors to properly

benefit from the technologies available. By joining our efforts in mobilizing good will for the purpose set by the Secretary-General, we wanted to ensure that ICT becomes a global resource at the service of all, and an instrument that supports and brings the world together in addressing common challenges.

We made that commitment because our respective leaderships then strongly believed that the Secretary General's call was a worthy one and that joining governments, the private sector, the university world and volunteering had the potential of becoming a winning combination in the global effort to fight exclusion of the less privileged from opportunities to better their lives. At the time we decided to put our efforts together, we were aware that we were walking on a thin rope and that mobilizing support and financial resources to translate our commitment into action would not be an easy task. Indeed, the private sector did not respond to the call as anticipated and our governments remain to be convinced that investing in reducing the digital divide, and mobilizing volunteer effort to this effect, are justified. The United Nations has however organized since a World Summit on the Information Society and reconfirmed the priority it accords to reducing the digital divide and the importance of voluntary engagement in this effort.

Meeting here in Costa Rica three years later is a testimony that our dream then has materialized into something tangible today; that persistence and determination have triumphed over difficulties and doubt, and that Universities in Latin America are as resolute as ever to becoming active actors in shaping a future for the region that is less marked by inequality of the people in accessing development opportunities and benefits. Since last year, you have managed to maintain the number of universities that

have joined your regional umbrella network, bringing along with them a number of other universities in their own country. Some of you have organized encounters with other universities in your country to define together a path for action and shape what would be your collective contribution to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Let me, on behalf of my colleagues in Bonn, New York and around the world thank you wholeheartedly for persisting in keeping the UNITEs initiative alive, and for all what you have done to bring us to the point where we are today.

In two months time, Secretary General Kofi Annan will bid us farewell and Mr. Boon Ki Moon will take over as the new Chief Executive of the United Nations. A page will be turned, but the idea of UNITEs will not turn to dust or die with the end of office of a great man who will be remembered for a long time for the magnificent work he has done for the advent of a fairer world, and to reaffirm and apply in world affairs the principles that are the foundations of our common organization, the United Nations. We have reasons to believe that the new Secretary General will bring the idea of UNITEs to another level, much higher, and in a more resolute manner, as we will have to follow on the recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society.

Universities can influence his choices on this matter, as some of you have already engaged in activities that have confirmed how valuable actors you are and can be in the implementation of the UN Peace and Development Agenda. You have said loud and clear that the divide to be bridged is wider than the digital one alone; it is the larger divide in living conditions between the have and have not, the divide in access to riches and opportunities between countries and social groups, and the divide in

participation to decisions that shape world affairs. Your students and yourselves, rectors, administrators and academic staff have told us that you wanted to do more, that you had talents that you can apply to many fields in helping to fight against hunger and poverty and in all the priority areas outlined in the Millennium Development Goals. You have told us that you had the will to contribute and that you can help make a difference if you are given opportunities and the space to participate. You have also clearly indicated that volunteering would be the way for you to participate, provided that you are helped in organizing it and if you continue to do it in partnership with the United Nations System.

I take this opportunity to salute the decision of Colima University to create a full Student Volunteer Service, building on the UNITEs experience. Under the leadership of committed rectors and very capable and dedicated staff, this university has demonstrated that with little resources, a lot can be done to engage many in contributing to resolving wider development issues.

Last year you committed to working towards a common programme that would bear an authentic Latin America imprint and would seek to expand your engagement in areas beyond ICT. This meeting will offer us the opportunity to measure the progress you have accomplished, to identify, analyze and agree on how to overcome the obstacles you have faced, and clarify approaches, objectives and the roles and responsibilities of each in the way forward.

To bring your agenda forward you will have to engage further your governments, both national and local, in supporting financially your endeavors, especially those that relate to in-country activities. The

Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, which is the coordinator of the Spanish UNITEs University, has managed to engage some provincial governments in funding volunteer assignments overseas. You can inspire yourselves of this example. But you can extend the reach further to the private sector in your countries to have them engaged in social responsibility activities that you undertake. Natal Voluntarios in Natal, Brazil, has managed to involve the local private sector in financing and participating, through the involvement of their employees on a voluntary basis, in the activities that its volunteers undertake. You may wish to approach the UNDP Offices in your countries to assist you in building these partnerships and to discuss the possibility of joint undertakings.

For your regional activities, you will need to come up with a consolidated programme for which you may need to engage in resource mobilization efforts with the support of the UN Volunteers Programme and develop partnerships with other university networks, such as the Spanish one, to assist you in opening doors for accessing development assistance funds from bilateral governments.

For its part, the United Nations Volunteers Programme remains committed to supporting your efforts, through facilitation of the deployment of your volunteers in countries where it has a Country Office Team, advisory support in your programme development efforts, advocacy and pairing with you in mobilizing resources from various sources to support your efforts.

Thank you all for your attention.