

Distinguished Dr Salazar, Rector of the University of Colima
Distinguished Rectors and Representatives of Latin American
universities participating to the UNITEs University Students
Network

Dear participants

Let me first thank the organizers for inviting the United Nations Volunteers Programme to attend this first meeting of the Latin America UNITEs University Students network. This meeting signals the effective launch of your network and opens a new era of cooperation among yourselves and between yourselves and the United Nations system. My colleague Alexandra Haglund-Petitbo and I are honored to be among you and to pass on to you the warm greetings of our colleagues in Bonn and of our more than 5,600 UN Volunteers around the globe.

UNITEs is an initiative launched four years by the United Nations General Secretary Mr. Kofi Annan to help promote information technology in the South and reduce the divide in its use between North and South. Through this initiative, the United Nations acknowledges that information technology is a resource of critical importance for development and that its use must be generalized. It also recognizes that volunteers can play an essential role in promoting it and generalizing its use.

The UN Secretary General has entrusted the implementation of UNITEs to the UNV Programme and since 2000, under the enlightened leadership of our late Executive Coordinator, Sharon Capeling-Alakija to whom we want again to pay homage in this occasion, we in UNV have attempted to make the idea of UNITEs a reality. You have joined us in this endeavor and we are grateful that you are partnering with us in this exciting venture.

We, in the UNV Programme, are working with other UN agencies, governments and various other partners to help achieve the eight

priority goals to which the world population has committed when our governments adopted the Millennium Declaration during the 2001 UN General Assembly session. These goals aim at reducing poverty, generalizing education, achieving good health for all, promoting gender equality, fighting HIV/AIDS, preserving the natural environment and establishing a new world partnership for achieving the previously listed objectives. UNV's objective is to unleash the potential of volunteering to help achieve these goals. In other words, UNV is working to help generalize the use of voluntary effort as an engine to help transform for the better the lives of millions of people who live below the poverty threshold.

UNITEs fits within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals and is an instrument that can help create a favorable environment for these goals to be attained. By disseminating knowledge about information technology and developing capacity for its wide use, UNITEs is helping put this development resource in the hand of people and countries that are less privileged and empowering populations in these countries in joining a global effort to reshape the world.

UNITEs is also helping bring together two forces that naturally converge and blend well: youth and volunteering. Youth is the force behind the information technology revolution. It has brought to this field vibrant creativity and a range of possibilities that appear infinite. Youth has brought to IT dynamism and a thirst and drive for achievements that push everyday further the frontiers of discovery. Youth does this through sharing (for instance in developing open source software that puts productivity software in the hands of more people) and networking. They have understood that individual talent is important but can only change and transform things when it joins other talents in larger-scale endeavors that impact on ways things are done. UNITEs offers a platform for the youth to get involved in reshaping the world. It provides a medium for making North-South and South-South

cooperation an everyday reality. It has the potential for helping forge partnerships between communities of practitioners in every corner of the globe and avail the benefits of IT for all.

Your network is an instrument of facilitation of South-South Cooperation between countries in Latin America. It can be effective if you want it to be so. As institutions of learning, it offers you opportunities to pool together resources to contribute to transforming the way various actors from the public, non governmental and private sector work in your subcontinent. By availing your IT students for exchange, and by involving them in providing direct support to the work of various institutions, you are offering them early opportunities to contribute. Through their assignments, they are familiarizing themselves with the real world in all its diversity. They are learning to know what poverty means and how it constrains the potential of people to express their full potential. They learn to know other people and other countries; they learn to appreciate the constraints faced by IT professionals in the real context of our countries. We strongly believe that through the work they do under UNITEs, they get rewards from feeling that they can contribute; they get opportunities to test their real abilities and their capacity of adaptation. They are key advocates of a cause and they can open doors if they excel and apply their natural creativity to helping resolve everyday problems.

Your network is part of a pilot initiative that aims at convincing both donors and recipients that there is a cost-effective way of bridging the digital divide. It is by excelling in what our students do and will do to actually create capacity in the institutions to which they will be assigned, it is by gaining recognition for it, by documenting it systematically and making it known that we can convince the skeptics and doubters and help mobilize resources at a wider scale to help generalize the use and application of IT for development. Your responsibility as institutions is therefore important and you should strive to discharge it the best you can.

This network, even though inspired by the Secretary General of the UN, is yours. Mr. Kofi Annan has called on your countries and you to contribute to a cause. He has asked us, the UN Volunteer Programme to help facilitate your action. We are opening a platform for you to contribute and network worldwide, we are helping you to link with donors, governments and non-governmental institutions. But the work to be done is for you to define, the way for it to be done is for you to decide, the story to tell is for you to write, shape and make available to the world.

The UNV Programme will continue to act as an advocate for the cause of UNITEs, for the work you do and for the benefits it brings to people . We shall continue to assist you to link with donors and recipients of your assistance. Our UNV teams in the different countries will continue to help find assignments for your students and provide to them administrative support and security coverage during the time of their assignment. We strongly wish to help you to tell your story to donors and we need you to tell us what is it is that you are doing everyday. The Volunteer Web Portal that we administer will echo all the good stories you will tell us. We shall continue to talk of what you do to the UN, to the governing bodies of UN agencies and to partners of the corporate world. We shall help to link you with institutions across continents.

Thank you for your attention.