

**1st MEETING OF THE LATIN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY VOLUNTEER
NETWORK UNDER UNITEs**

Colima, Colima, Mexico. September 23 and 24, 2004

REPORT

On September 23 and 24, the First Meeting of the Latin American University Volunteer Network under UNITEs was held in the City of Colima, Mexico. This meeting was attended by distinguished representatives of the United Nations (UN), university presidents, vice-chancellors, and institutional contacts from Latin American universities located in Colombia, Costa Rica, Brazil, and Mexico, in addition to university and government officials.

Opening Ceremony

In a ceremony presided by Carlos Salazar Silva, President of the University of Colima, the corresponding welcoming speeches were given, an activity led by the University President himself, who honoured the memory of Sharon Capeling-Alakija, Executive Coordinator of the Volunteer Program, by stressing that the young people who participate in the UNITEs Network should emulate her enthusiasm and commitment to volunteer work.

Similarly, he stated that this program's priority is to contribute to achieving the UN Millennium Goals, with the participation of young people who could share their knowledge with the use of technological tools, keeping in perspective the fact that education is the only approach to enhance development.

Afterwards, Mr André Carvalho, UN's Chief of the Program Development and Operations Group, referred to the origin of UNITEs, an initiative of Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN, designed to promote the use of Information Technologies (ITs) and bridge the digital divide. He noted that with the formation of this network, Latin American universities would be giving their students the opportunity to be rewarded for their contribution towards opening doors and providing opportunities for human beings from all around the world. Volunteers apply their natural creativity to solving the daily problems of our communities.

Finally, in the name of the United Nations Volunteer Program, he officially declared the Latin American University Volunteer Network under UNITEs open, whose primary objective is to bridge the digital divide in Latin America.

Later, on behalf of Prof. Gustavo Vázquez Montes, Governor of the State of Colima, Ana Cecilia García Luna, Secretary of Culture, stated that it was a great honour for the State of Colima to participate in this historic event, and pointed out that the University of Colima has the quality, technological development, the internationalism and the leadership of young people to meet the highest management standards in a Latin American network.

Keynote Presentations

The following keynote presentations were given in our program:

Ms Alexandra Haglund-Petitbo, UNITEs Program Coordinator, gave a lecture entitled **“Youth and Volunteer Work”**. She firstly thanked the University of Colima for fulfilling a dream that began 2 years ago. She then made reference to UNITEs’s early days, in which 2 young and enthusiastic marine biologists turned a solitary endeavour into the real consolidation of the spirit of volunteer work, which has grown day after day.

She regarded today’s young people as the engine of change, and stressed the importance of this section of the population in volunteer work, stating that even when theirs did not coincide with the volunteer’s profile that was upheld for many years, they have succeeded in demonstrating their value and particular characteristics, achieving positive results.

The next lecture, entitled **“What is the Role of a Network?”** was given by Ms Genoveva Amador Fierros, Director of Academic Exchange and Scholarships at the University of Colima. In this presentation, she referred to the benefits derived from social network collaboration and work. Network collaboration empowers our ability to bring about changes, particularly those resulting from shared knowledge and power. She stated that the network members must play an active role in the definition of their objectives, thus turning isolated efforts into articulate movements.

Ms Lourdes Feria Basurto, Coordinator of Information Technologies and Services, gave the lecture entitled **“Technologies and Network Collaboration”**, intended to provide an overview of the achievements of the University of Colima in this field. As a result of these achievements, the University has been declared UNESCO Charter in New Technologies. Towards the end of the lecture, the UNITEs Website <http://unites.ucol.mx> was presented by Ms Mayra Silva Almanza. Additionally, the participants were encouraged to make suggestions and contribute to the improvement of the website, in order to make it an efficient contact medium.

Afterwards, a teleconference was begun with Universidad Autónoma de Madrid’s Alfonso Simón, whose institution has gained experience in the coordination of a national network of University Volunteers under UNITEs in Spain. Two young Spaniards participated in the event with an emotional account of their experiences in Sarajevo and Mongolia, in which they detailed the academic and personal benefits they received and could also be obtained by those who join the program.

As part of the program, two young volunteers, and alumni of the University of Colima, also presented their projects, activities and experiences in Colombian communities, in addition to providing details concerning the responsibilities of those who commit to this kind of work.

Workshop

In the second part of the activities agenda, the workshop entitled “**Which Millennium Goals Does Our Network Contribute to?**” was held.

In this workshop, attended by the Network’s members and university officials, Mr André Carvalho and Ms Alexandra Haglund-Petitbo presented the 8 Millennium Goals approved in the 2002 United Nations World Summit.

Afterwards, Ms Lourdes Feria Basurto, MS, explained to the participants the 7 premises which provide the basis for the creation and identification of the Latin American University Volunteer Network under UNITEs.

As the third part of the program, Ms Genoveva Amador Fierros, MS, explained the mechanics to be used in the brainstorming session, through which we obtained elements derived from the participant’s perception with regards to the following questions: what is the purpose of a university network? How is a Latin American network different from the networks in other regions? Which Millennium Development Goals will our network respond to? How will others identify us? The participants’ comments will be applied to the design of the future actions within the Latin American network.

Immediately after that, Carlos Salazar Silva, President of the University of Colima, presented the Network’s 2005 Work Plan, which comprised the explanation of the calendar for the publication and promotion of forthcoming calls for volunteers. Similarly, the University President presented a list of Mexican higher education institutions which will participate in the project, expressing his interest in having the Network’s activities evaluated on a regular basis, particularly the results of volunteer work (how many professors? how many students? how many alumni? their actions and their impact). The corresponding evaluations would be conducted through meetings attended by the Network’s members, in which the partial results of the program would be discussed, and new communication channels would be opened.

Finally, we proceeded to discuss where the next meeting would be held. Two proposals were received for this purpose, one from EAFIT University, in Colombia, and the other one from Pernambuco University, in Brazil. It was later proposed that formal letters be sent by the university presidents in which they would decide on the place for the next meeting. The Network’s members would therefore consider the presidents’ suggestions, and choose a place for the 2005 and 2006 meetings.

FRIDAY, 24 September, 2004

The First Meeting of the Latin American University Volunteer Network under UNITEs was inaugurated with the presentation of the Youth Leadership Program, with the participation of enthusiastic young people who talked about their activities within this initiative. Dr. Miguel Ángel Aguayo, Secretary General of the University of Colima, referred to the developments which led to the establishment of the Leadership Program with a Human Approach (PROLIDEH), coordinated by Graciela Contreras, whose main objective involves training young entrepreneurs, so as to enable them to make every effort to improve the living standards of the population, as a hope for the world.

PROLIDEH comprises the participation of 20 students, professors and collaborators, who teach the diploma course entitled Leadership with Human Quality, also intended for the students of the University of Colima who apply for participation in the UNITEs Volunteer Program.

Finally, the results and agreements of the meeting were presented in the document entitled “2004 Colima Declaration”. Additionally, the results of the workshop held the previous afternoon were also presented. Mr Carvalho addressed the audience to close the First Meeting of the Latin American University Volunteer Network.