

## **NATIONAL COMMITMENT ON THE “DECADE ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”**

### ***Presentation***

During the past years, the world has emphasized the importance of sustainable development to promote the right for all human beings to a high quality of life in harmony with their environment. Education has been repeatedly highlighted as an indispensable element to generate cultural changes towards sustainable development.

In this sense, the UN General Assembly established, through resolution 57/254 of December 20, 2002, the “Decade of Education for Sustainable Development” to start on January 1, 2005. UNESCO was assigned as the coordinating body for this Decade; a part of its responsibilities is to define the strategies to link this Decade to other related initiatives, such as the Dakar Action Plan for Education for All, the UN Decade for Literacy and other educational projects.

In addition, the UN Assembly invited the governments to consider including, in their respective educational action plans and strategies, different actions that coincide with the objectives of this Decade.

In this context, Costa Rica once again joins an International initiative on Sustainable Development and subscribes to the following National Commitment on the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

### ***Consider that:***

1. The Political Constitution of Costa Rica, in article 50, establishes as a right and social guarantee that: “the State will attempt to provide well-being for all the citizens of the country, to organize and stimulate production and to distribute wealth appropriately. Every person has the right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. Therefore, it is legitimate to denounce any act infringing upon that right and to demand the repair of the damages. The State will guarantee, defend and preserve that right. The law will determine the corresponding responsibilities and sanctions.”
2. Costa Rica has adopted multiple international commitments on sustainable development - implementing instruments like the Dakar Action Plan on Education for All, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and many others.
3. Costa Rica is an exceptionally rich country in terms of biological diversity and has become an example of how research, sustainable use and preservation of biodiversity can support the economic growth and sustainable development of the country.

4. For more than 30 years, Costa Rica has been promoting environmental education. This has increased the awareness of the population about the importance of maintaining a harmonious relation with the natural surroundings.
5. In spite of the efforts and achievements towards development, Costa Rica still suffers from important economic, social and environmental deficiencies: more than 20% of families live in poverty, there is an unequal distribution of wealth and the situation is not improving, 2/3 of the youth do not finish secondary education and there are still illiterate people, a system of protected wildlife areas has been created, but there are acute urban problems (urban sprawl and pollution surrounding the cities), increasing symptoms of violence and persisting inequalities by region, gender and age, among others.
6. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is an approach to bring about change, oriented to improve the quality of life of human beings through development that takes into account social, cultural, environmental, economic, political, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual dimensions, assuring the social equity and the satisfaction of the needs of present and future generations. ESD promotes social equity by eliminating the breaches that arise from poverty as well as from excessive privileges. This is a key aspect to constructing a society in which democracy, equal access to increasing opportunities and social justice for all citizens prevail.
7. The main objective of ESD is to integrate the inherent values of sustainable development in all aspects of education, and promote behavioral and cultural changes that would facilitate the attainment of a more sustainable and just society.
8. UNESCO defined the following objectives for ESD:
  - a. Provide opportunities to refine the concept and promote the transition to sustainable development using all forms of education and sensitization of public opinion.
  - b. Put into perspective the essential role of education and training in the search for sustainable development.
9. Promoting ESD is a responsibility for all people on Earth; it involves political, social, cultural and environmental aspects on the national, regional and local scope.
10. ESD implies the adoption of a multi-sectored and interdisciplinary approach to integrate the contributions of all relevant actors.
11. Some of the objectives of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) are:
  - a. Facilitate the creation of networks, exchanges and interactions between the parties interested in ESD.
  - b. Promote higher quality of education and learning in the field of ESD.
12. The work of UN Member States on the DESD is defined in four main aspects:
  - a. Improve access to quality basic education.
  - b. Reorient existing educational programs.

- c. Increase the knowledge and consciousness of the general public.
  - d. Provide training.
13. During the 32nd General Conference of UNESCO, in October 2003, a resolution to “recognize the Earth Charter as an important ethical framework for education for sustainable development” was adopted. This resolution suggests to Member States to utilize it “as an educational instrument, particularly in the framework of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.”

***Therefore, Costa Rica commits to:***

1. Generate cultural changes through an integral and holistic approach to ESD, that would guarantee Costa Ricans of present and future generations a peaceful coexistence, with social equity, in harmony with themselves, the others and their surroundings, preventing different forms of discrimination, such as gender, race, religion, nationality, culture, age, sexual orientation and others.
2. Implement ESD in an integral way, using the principles of the Earth Charter as a framework. Those principles are organized under the following fundamental ideas:
  - a. Respect and care for the community of life.
  - b. Ecological Integrity.
  - c. Social and Economic Justice.
  - d. Democracy, nonviolence and peace.
3. Design coherent strategies to sustainable development and apply the necessary action plans, programs, projects and activities to the effective implementation of those strategies, putting special attention to the following subjects:
  - a. Eradication of poverty and the increase of equal opportunities.
  - b. Economic dynamism based on an increasing productivity and compensation of resources, in the context of an increasingly integrated economy world-wide.
  - c. Universal access to a relevant and quality education.
  - d. Promotion of healthy lifestyles and universal access to basic health services.
  - e. Equality and equity of gender.
  - f. Sustainable use of biodiversity and the protection and restoration of ecosystems.
  - g. Physical, social and environmentally sustainable urban development.
  - h. Dynamic, integrated and sustainable rural development.
  - i. Consolidation of a rich and diverse cultural identity that respects its different manifestations.
  - j. Promotion of peace, harmony and human security.

- k. Encourage ethical and aesthetic values which strive for the good and beautiful in all aspects.
4. Promote ESD's interdisciplinary and holistic approach in all educational programs, from pre-school to higher education.
5. Implement formal, nonformal and informal training processes in topics related to ESD.
6. Create pedagogical materials to support educators, in formal, nonformal and informal settings.
7. Systematize and replicate good practices that have been shown to be effective for achieving a culture for sustainable development.
8. Develop and implement projects and actions on ESD, in coordination with other actors and sectors of society.
9. Coordinate technical and financial cooperation efforts between national and international institutions and organizations.
10. Consolidate the institutional capacity needed to fulfill this commitment:
  - a. Strengthening the spaces for coordination, allowing all participant institutions to learn, share and put in practice ESD.
  - b. Incorporating adequate financial resources to the Annual Operational Plans and institutional budgets.
  - c. Organizing meetings to follow up and evaluate the commitments of the Decade, in order to establish more adequate benchmarks, policies, strategies and evaluation processes. The first follow up meeting will revise the context and operationalization of the commitments in this document. The Ministry of Public Education will coordinate these meetings, but it is entitled to request the support of the signatory institutions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The original document was signed on 17 October 2006 by the President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias Sánchez, and all seventeen Ministers of the Government's Cabinet.