

Bergen Declaration

Uniting for a global student voice

PREAMBLE

Education is a Human Right, as recognized by global covenants, and one of the world's greatest social equalizers. In reality, in too many parts of the world this is far from being the truth. Rather than education becoming progressively free and accessible to everyone-in the spirit of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights- we are witnessing the commodification of education, a neglect for quality, a lack of accessibility, and attack on student's fundamental human rights.

Nowadays, increased international communication has created a renewed opportunity to share our experiences as students, including our respective successes and the challenges we face in our various political contexts. Simultaneously, we are experiencing global threats to exercise this human right in terms of access, academic freedom and student's rights to organize, including the commodification of our tertiary education system.

As a result, we the students of the world, wish to express a desire for universal cooperation in the defence of students' rights, public tertiary education and access to education for all. Working together, through our shared principles, will ensure that globally, students voices are heard and that united we are stronger in the face of threats to our education. These are the fundamental building blocks for an ongoing students' global discussion, introduced by and for students and facilitated through the establishment of a global forum.

STUDENTS' RIGHTS

We believe that QUALITY education should be free and inclusive for all, and our education systems should be democratic, built on the principles of academic freedom, and where all students have the right to representation and to self organize.

We believe all students have the right to be represented by and able to participate in a democratically run, autonomous students' union in their institution- membership of which must be accessible and free to all students. Student unions' democratic structures should reflect the diversity of the student population, in particular, equal participation of women must be ensured. A democratically elected national union of students should

represent students nationally, through which students are able to participate in relevant national decision making processes- and which is recognised as the national student voice by the government.

The freedom to self organize- from the classroom to the campus- is a basic right, and all students should have the space and tools available to do so. Students should be free to participate in public displays and demonstrations without repercussion. Students' ability to self-organize must be reflected in their learning experience, where students have the right to be represented by democratically elected representatives. A democratic education system promotes and protects students representation on every level of governance within the institution, and students should be treated as equal partners in their education.

Unless academic freedom is upheld in our education systems, education is not truly free. We believe that campuses must be places for debate and discussion, where freedom of speech is fostered and freedom of ideas is encouraged. Students have the right to self determined and self produced media on campus.

The rights of students to self organise must extend to wider society - we believe all members of society should be free to demonstrate their democratic right, to be active participants in society, and be partners in social justice, for example able to participate in peace processes. We believe students, as active participants in society, should stand in solidarity with student struggles globally, whilst also being free to join and organize with other movements locally, nationally and internationally.

ACCESS TO TERTIARY EDUCATION

We defend that education at all levels is a human right, regardless of an individual's' political views, religion, nationality, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, beliefs, health status, disabilities, socioeconomic background, or any other characteristics. Everyone should have the right to access, retain and complete tertiary education in order to unfold their true potential to support the progress and the equality of the society.

We believe that tertiary education should be a public and universal good, and for that we defend a tertiary education system free of tuition fees and any other cost to guarantee the access to every citizen of the world, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

We believe that the access to tertiary education is about all the processes from the beginning of the education journey until the academic success. Because of that, we defend that the students should be provided with all the necessary requirements that students need to have a completely and emancipated learning experience.

EDUCATION IS A PUBLIC GOOD

Knowledge and education are public goods, and have the power to emancipate those who benefit from them, equipping students with the tools necessary to take power over their lives and wider society. We therefore believe that education must be a right of the people, and should not be a privilege for the few.

Education is a public good that benefits all of society, not only the student as an individual. With this in mind, each state should take responsibility for ensuring that all have access to free quality education.

The tertiary education must be democratic and transparent, and should be open to the society and embedded in communities. We believe in universities and that promote progress of the people and serve society instead of become closed communities of their own, isolated from the outside world.

We believe in free and open access to research. All should be able to benefit from its findings and further work on developing it.

SUSTAINABILITY, MOBILITY AND SAFETY

We acknowledge that the current model of society is not respecting the environment and that this causes dramatic consequences. These effects include climate change, deforestation, mass extinctions of animals, and other plan based species, notwithstanding the alarming effects this has on humans globally.

In light of this, we must acknowledge the serious nature of the issue and act immediately to address it. For this reason, we welcome all global initiatives that share these principles and support them to continue working to enhance global environmental sustainability, and demand students voices should be heard.

Further, we also claim that education is one of the most important tool to provide global citizens with the necessary skills and opportunities to fight climate change, empowering individuals and building resilient communities

that will challenge the current development model which is causing harm to the planet and its people.

As students we highlight the importance of establishing global frameworks to support the internationalisation of the education, science and culture. Because of that, we demand that Governments should work actively towards the development of global frameworks of recognition of qualifications in the area of tertiary education. However, we also highlight the importance of developing these frameworks in accordance with the principles of equality, plurality, social justice and democracy.

Education is increasingly becoming a target in conflicts around the World, hindering access to education, and peace development efforts during and after conflicts. We condemn any attack on education institutions and particularly call for States to commit to initiatives that protect them.

We, the signers of this document, intend to further develop cooperation to defend these principles. Indicative strategies include to host further meetings with students, exchange information in support of our common struggles, and expressions of support to national and regional actions.