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**Ninth Session of the Regional Committee Meeting for the
Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and
Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific**

in conjunction with the

**Regional Seminar on Regional Harmonization: Establishing
a Common Higher Education Area**

Seoul, Republic of Korea

22-23 May 2007

**Country Report
HOLY SEE**

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National Report **for the Ninth Session of the Regional Committee** **for the Regional Convention on the Recognition** **of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education** **in Asia and the Pacific** 22-23 May 2007, Seoul, Korea

I. Introduction

The Higher Educational System of the Holy See is quite unique, inasmuch as there are only two such educational institutions within the legal borders of Vatican City. The tertiary academic centres for which the Holy See bears responsibility have a long tradition of academic excellence and are classified into two groups: the first being, Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, or Ecclesiastical Higher Education Institutions (EHEI) and secondly, Catholic Universities, Colleges and other institutions of higher learning, or Higher Education Institutions (HEI). The distinction is made in light of the finality and content of the study programs as well as the legislation that regulates their relationship to the Holy See through the Congregation for Catholic Education. To understand the structure of higher education in institutions for which the Holy See is responsible, it is necessary to be aware of the characteristics that distinguish Ecclesiastical Higher Education Institutions (EHEI) of the Catholic Church from Catholic Universities (HEI).

EHEIs, in fact, constitute the ‘national’ higher education system of the Holy See. The mission of these institutions is to cultivate and promote, through scientific research, their proper disciplines which concern Christian revelation and its related questions. Their primary objectives include: to provide students with a quality formation in their particular disciplines, in accord with Catholic doctrine, so to prepare them adequately to carry out their particular service to the Church and society; to prepare men for the priestly ministry in the Church; and, to promote the continuing permanent education of the ministers of the Church. The basic legal framework for these institutions is found in the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* (1979).¹ All EHEIs, approved by the Holy See and ordered in accord with the above mentioned legislation, have the right to grant academic degrees under the authority of the Holy See. There exist in Asia and the Pacific Region 18 autonomous EHEIs and 56 institutions that are affiliated/aggregated to or incorporated into an EHEI.

Secondly, HEIs of all types, which operate in the name of the Catholic Church and have received official recognition as such by the competent Church authority, are called Catholic Universities. Catholic universities are found in seventy countries throughout the world. All Catholic universities (about 1,300 throughout the world) teach and carry out

¹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15041979_sapientia-christiana_en.html

research in the disciplines common to all universities, in light of the Christian faith, and in most cases, are integrated into and follow the academic legislation and educational structures appropriate to their respective nations. In addition to the Statutes of the institution, documents regulating Catholic Universities include, the Code of Canon Law,² the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (1990),³ and the proper national “Ordinances” for its local application. As outlined in these documents, HEIs relate to the Holy See indirectly, through the local competent ecclesiastical authority, which ordinarily is the local bishop. The number of Catholic universities in Asia and the Pacific region is 547. Inasmuch as the degrees awarded by Catholic universities are done so in conformity with local educational standards and often with civil approbation, the process of recognition of these degrees outside the countries in which they are granted would correspond to the policies for degrees of that particular nation. Only EHEIs and their affiliated, aggregated or incorporated institutes, are affected by the Holy See’s adherence to the UNESCO Regional Conventions.

II. Situation Analysis of Cross-border Education

As mentioned in the Introduction of this Report, the Holy See can be understood as a trans-national provider of higher education.

Currently, the number of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties throughout the world number one-hundred-eighty-six (186), as listed in the official yearbook of the Holy See.⁴ In some countries (*e.g.* Austria, Germany and Poland), EHEIs are integrated in the local national systems or are even part of public or private higher education institutions in the respective countries. The requisite collaboration between the two “national” higher education systems is, in most cases, regulated by Concordat or other contracts of international law. While efforts to implement common international principles, like those of the Bologna Process, reveal some difficulties in their application from the perspective of two distinct systems, the experience has also led to a greater openness to cooperation and mutual respect.

Furthermore, the Holy See is also responsible for Institutes affiliated to, aggregated to or incorporated into its EHEIs in thirty-nine countries worldwide. In the Asia-Pacific region, there are fifty (50) such institutions that grant degrees authorized by the Holy See, by way of Incorporation, Aggregation, or Affiliation. With the approbation of the Congregation for Catholic Education, the EHEI assumes the responsibility for guaranteeing the quality assurance and the standard of the academic programs leading to the Ecclesiastical degrees which it awards through the “incorporated,” “aggregated,” or “affiliated” institute. (cf. *Sapientia christiana*, Articles 62-63)⁵ It is recommended that the responsible faculty should be situated in the same country; however, this may not be possible and is not compulsory. In addition to the number of students studying in EHEIs or their incorporated, aggregated, or affiliated institutions in Asia and the Pacific region, there are a great number of students from the region who are pursuing academic degrees in EHEIs in Rome and in other countries and regions.

² http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM

³ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html

⁴ *Annuario Pontificio 2007*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 2007: pp. 1775-1813.

⁵ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jpii_apc_15041979_sapientia-christiana_en.html

III. National Policies and practices on Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

Currently, the Congregation for Catholic Education (the Holy See's Ministry of Education) is the sole agency responsible for all aspects and levels of education for the Holy See as defined in the Apostolic Constitution, *Pastor bonus* (Articles 112-116).⁶ The Congregation is headed by the Cardinal Prefect is constituted by an international commission of 26 Cardinals and 3 Archbishops. In the operation of the Congregation's business, the Cardinal Prefect is assisted by the Archbishop Secretary, the Undersecretary, and a staff of twenty six members from eleven different nations. Communications can be addressed to:

His Eminence Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect
His Excellency Archbishop J. Michael Miller, Secretary
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In 2005, in response to the reforms initiated by the Bologna Process, preparatory work began to establish an independent agency of the Holy See for external quality assurance, which will be structured upon the ENQA (European Network of Quality Assurance) criteria and will collaborate with other national agencies in Europe and throughout the world. As planned, the agency was launched earlier this year (2007) and is scheduled to be fully operational before 2010. Already, the agency has initiated pilot projects, establishing independent "regional commissions" in select parts of Europe to assist it to function optimally in the various regions organized with diverse academic cultures and legislations. This project was initiated by the Congregation for Catholic Education and is being coordinated by a council of international experts. The said regional commissions are composed of international and local academic experts, stakeholders, representatives of students and employers. Consequently, such initiatives will be made throughout the Holy See's global Higher Education System. The agency already works together with national boards, local representatives and stakeholders. The express responsibilities and procedures of the office include: the verification of requisite standards for the erection or approval of institutions, or to initiate Ecclesiastical programs accredited by the Holy See; the examination of all study programmes offered by these institutions as well as any changes; the examination of the qualifications of all full-time research and teaching staff; the evaluation of the internal quality assurance; and assistance with all questions concerning Quality Enhancement.

The Holy See's Higher Education System is structured upon **three cycles**, which had been already introduced for all programmes in 1979 by the legislation of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana*. The academic degrees conferred are *Baccalaureate* (first cycle), *Licentiate* (second cycle) and *Doctorate* (third cycle). While variable nomenclatures for the above-mentioned academic degrees is permitted in different countries and regions

⁶ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_19880628_pastor-bonus-roman-curia_en.html

according to local custom, the EHEI must clearly indicate their equivalence to the 'official' nomenclature and maintain uniformity among the EHEI in the same geographical area. Special qualifications may also be added to the names of these degrees.

During the last three years, problems have arisen due to the diverse ways of applying the three-cycle structure to EHEIs in different countries. Resolution to these problems should be resolved with the drafting of a National Qualifications Framework. Inasmuch as all EHEIs offer the same academic degrees, the possibility of students transferring from one institution to another should be rather easy, any such discrepancies will necessarily be addressed. In some cases, through the cooperation and authority of two national systems, a double degree can be granted with both ecclesiastical and civil approbation. The Holy See has already begun work consulting its institutions, various stakeholders and experts, in view of adopting the National Qualifications Framework (as defined by the Bologna Process) by 2010.

The Holy See has adopted the **European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)** and currently is in the process of implementing it gradually throughout its European EHEIs. The Holy See, having the advantage of institutions in different countries, is able to examine the practices in other national systems and take into account both the positive and negative outcomes. At this point, ECTS is established for credit transfer, its use for credit accumulation is under debate. Moreover, the Holy See has also moved to implement the **Diploma Supplement (DS)** in accord with the Bologna Process. It has been legally authorised and is applicable to all academic institutions and all programmes. The Diploma Supplement is to be issued in both English and the language of the study programme. In 2005, it became obligatory for all EHEIs to issue the DS free of charge at the request of students. Initially, these reforms are being implemented in the Holy See's European EHEIs, however, they will be implemented eventually throughout the entire Higher Education System.

At present, most of the tasks of a national agency responsible for external **quality assurance** (accreditation) in higher education are fulfilled by an office of the Congregation for Catholic Education (*Congregatio de Institutione Catholica*). This office exercises its responsibility on a comprehensive level according to the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* as well as the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* of 1988. Immediately after joining the Bologna Process, the Holy See set up a commission of international experts to supervise its relevant development in this process. For the moment, the same commission, as well as another group of peers/consultants, provide support in the review of external quality assurance work. The Holy See is currently not a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The future agency, once it is definitively established, will collaborate with ENQA, other international agencies and networks of agencies, maintaining the international character of the Holy See and the institutional collaboration in many countries.

IV. International Cooperation, Bilateral and Multilateral Agreement

The Holy See is presently party to four UNESCO Regional Conventions in the field of Higher Education, namely those for Latin America and the Caribbean (Mexico 1974), for the European Region (Lisbon 1997; Paris, 1979), for the countries of Africa (Arusha, 1981) and

for the countries of Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, 1983). Additionally, the Holy See is a signatory member of the Bologna Process⁷ and is party to the ENIC network.

The Holy See also participates, on various levels, in international institutions dealing with various aspects of Higher Education, among others, in the European Council and in the Cultural Convention. For many years, the Holy See has actively taken part at the regular conference on university problems and also in the Committee for Education. The Conference of the Rectors of the Pontifical Roman Universities (CRUPR) is a collective member of the European University Association (EUA) and cooperates actively in its Council (cf. www.unige/EUA.ch), while various single universities are individual members of the same Association.

V. Emergent Issues relating to Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education

The highly specialized curriculum in EHEIs creates some difficulties relating to the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees from non-ecclesiastical institutions. While the Holy See recognizes the civil effects of valid academic degrees accredited in their local jurisdictions, the programs of study leading to non-canonical degrees (due to fundamental epistemological differences) are not recognized as equivalent to the ecclesiastical curriculum.

VI. Suggestions for the Ninth Session of the Regional Committee

In light of its experience with the Bologna Process, the Holy See, while supporting a similar Process in Asia and Pacific region strongly encourages movement in this direction that is both prudent and respectful of the rich and diverse traditions of the region.

⁷<http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no>