UNESCO/ICS/Final Report

International Conference of States to Examine and Adopt Amendments to the 1983 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific

25-26 November 2011
Grand Prince Hotel, New Takanawa, Tokyo, Japan

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

Pursuant to the decision of the 35th session of the General Conference of UNESCO (October 2009), the International Conference of States (ICS) to Examine and Adopt Amendments to the 1983 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific was convened in Tokyo, Japan, from 25-26 November 2011.

The ICS was hosted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) upon the kind invitation of the government of Japan.

Member States from Asia-Pacific and Contracting States and Parties to the 1983 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific were invited to the ICS as full participants. All other Member States of UNESCO were invited to take part as observers, as were representatives of IGOs, NGOs and experts.

The ICS was attended by a total of 88 participants: 76 participants from Member States out of which 62 from the 26 participating Member States and 14 from the observer Member States. In addition, 8 representatives of NGOs and IGOs and 4 resource persons attended the ICS.


OPENING SESSION

On behalf of H.E. Mr Masaharu Nakagawa, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, Mr Takashi Kii, Vice-Minister delivered the welcoming speech to the participants of the ICS.

Ms Margaret Proctor, President of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention Committee gave the Opening Remarks, outlining the process that led to the revision of the Convention presented for adoption to the ICS and informing of the next steps towards implementation that will be carried out under the leadership of the current Bureau of the Regional Convention Committee.
Mr Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education (ADG/ED) of UNESCO, in his Opening remarks, thanked H.E. Mr Nakagawa Masaharu, Minister of Education of Japan for hosting the Conference, the participants for attending the conference and underlined the significance of this particular ‘landmark’ event, assuring of UNESCO’s support in its implementation.

ADOPTION OF WORKING DOCUMENTS AND ELECTION OF CONFERENCE OFFICERS

Mr Qian Tang, ADG/ED, put forward the Draft Rules of Procedure for adoption. The Rules of Procedure were adopted without any further changes.

(Appendix II: Document UNESCO/ICS/WD.2, Rules of Procedure)

Mr Qian Tang, ADG/ED invited nomination for the President, 2 Vice-Presidents and General Rapporteur of the ICS.

Based on nominations from the floor, the following officers of the ICS were unanimously elected:

- Mr Tsutomu Kimura, (Japan), President
- Dr Abdul Muhsin Mohamed (Maldives), Vice-President
- Ms Patricia Lucuanan (Philippines), Vice-President
- Ms Frances Kelly (New Zealand), General Rapporteur

After the election, the President of the ICS, Mr Kimura, based on rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure announced the list of the Credentials Committee members as follows:

- Ms Margaret Proctor (Australia), Chair
- Mr. Du Yue (China)
- Rev. Father Friedrich Bechina (Holy See)
- Dato’ Dr. Syed Ahmand Hussein (Malaysia)
- Mr. Askarali Daminov (Uzbekistan)

Based on Rule 9, the President announced the Drafting Committee Members as follows:

- Ms Margaret Proctor (Australia), President
- Mr Guo Xinli (China)
- Rev. Father Friedrich Bechina (Holy See)
- Mr. Kuniaki Sato (Japan)
- Mr. Tony Davies (New Zealand), Rapporteur
- Ms Ethel Valenzuela (Philippines)

After the appointment of the two Committees’ members, the ICS Agenda was unanimously adopted.
INTRODUCTION OF THE REVISED REGIONAL CONVENTION

The President invited Tony Davies, (New Zealand), Facilitator, to introduce the revised Regional Convention.

First, Tony Davies gave a comprehensive overview of the process that led to the revision of the convention. He reported on the different phases of the revision carried out by the Working Party set up for this purpose by the Regional Committee in Charge of the Application of the 1983 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education at its 8th session in Kunming, China in 2005. The objective of the work was to reflect the changes in higher education in the 21st century and develop a dynamic tool to meet the specific needs of the Asia-Pacific region in the future. He also pointed to the similarities and differences between the 1983 and 2011 texts.

Second, Tony Davies presented the revised Regional Convention based on the final revisions introduced following the written amendments sent in by Member States. He pointed to some areas that were still open to discussion, such as: changing ‘periods of study’ to ‘partial studies’ to reflect content rather than duration; postponing definitions of substantial differences to the implementation phase; retaining the ‘non-discrimination’ clause as one based on UNESCO’s underlying principles; retaining recognition for employment purposes; retaining the section relating to refugees.

Third, he presented the Convention text section by section. The delegates were invited to make comments.

Several comments were made by the delegates, which were passed on for review to the Drafting Committee.

The President invited the Credentials Committee to present its report.

According to the report of the Credentials Committee, the following 11 Member States were given full authority to sign the Convention based on their credentials:

- Armenia
- Bangladesh
- Kingdom of Cambodia
- People’s Republic of China
- Lao Democratic Republic
- Malaysia
- Philippines
- Republic of Korea
- Republic of Timor Leste
- Turkey
- Holy See

(Annex IV: Document UNESCO/ICS/WD.6, 7 Reports of the Credentials Committee)
Following the reports of the Credentials Committee, the President asked whether there were any other business items to be discussed.

Mr Tang, ADG/ED took the floor. He opened a discussion on the opportunity of elaborating a Global Convention, based on the momentum gained through the ‘new generation’ of conventions. He underscored that the revised Asia-Pacific Convention represented a particular landmark in this respect, stemming from the most populous region of the world with rising student and academic mobility both to the region and from the region. He also reminded that all Member States of UNESCO had been invited to the Conference and representatives of all regions were attending.

The debate supported the idea of a global convention, it being understood that regional specificities will continue to be respected. There was also a proposal to continue implementing regional conventions in parallel with developing a global one.

ADG/ED concluded the discussion by proposing that a feasibility study be carried to inform the elaboration of a possible Global Convention.

PRESENTATION OF THE FINAL TEXT OF THE CONVENTION

Tony Davies, Rapporteur of the Drafting Committee presented further changes introduced into the revised Convention, following the discussion and oral comments made by delegations.

Based on the comment by the delegation of Iran, a definition of displaced person was introduced to read:

**Displaced person** refers to a person forced to move from their locality or environment and occupational activities;

Based on the comment presented by the delegation of Sri Lanka the definition of ‘higher educations institution’ was extended to read:

**Higher Education Institution** means an establishment providing higher education recognised by the relevant authorities of a Party;

Based on the comment by the delegation of Turkey, the UNESCO Diploma Supplement was defined to read:

**UNESCO Diploma Supplement**, a reference document of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, commonly known as the Lisbon Recognition Convention, means a document providing a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended.

Furthermore, the Drafting Committee suggested the following:

Based on a proposal by Australia, the title of Section II was changed from
“Competencies of Authorities” to The “Competent Authorities”.

That Section VII referring to the Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation represents a key issue and should be addressed in more detail during the implementation phase.

Article VIII. 4 was expanded to read:

(a) UNESCO Diploma Supplement or any other comparable qualification supplement

The final draft of the Convention, so amended, was distributed. There were no further amendments or comments by the ICS participants.

The President invited the participants to adopt the final draft. The final draft was adopted by acclamation.


PANEL ON IMPLEMENTATION AND TRANSPARENCY TOOLS FOR THE REVISED CONVENTION

A Panel on Implementation and Transparency Tools was held before the Signing Ceremony. It was facilitated by Ms Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, Former Chief of Section of Higher Education, UNESCO. In her introductory remarks Ms Uvalic-Trumbic expressed hope that the presentations may add to clarifying some of the questions raised in the discussion about the Convention text, coming respectively from the regions of South-East Asia and Europe and presenting a global tool that could support the implementation of the Convention, notably the UNESCO Portal to Recognized Higher Education Institutions.

Dr Ethel Agnes Valenzuela, (Philippines) Senior Specialist, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization’s Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology gave examples of ratification procedures at national level from three South-East Asian countries, the Philippines, Indonesia and Laos. She pointed out the diversity of legislative procedures as well as the diversity of higher education systems and institutions in the region and informed of the existence of mutual recognition agreements. She evoked lessons learned and suggested certain steps in the implementation process, using the “Five Cs” to illustrate them: need to have a Champion, to Campaign, to assure Cash, to have Consistency and Commitment.

Ms Carita Blomqvist, (Finland) President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, in her presentation focused on the Lisbon Recognition Convention implementation arms, the Intergovernmental Committee and the ENIC network, consisting of national information centres. She underlined the significance of subsidiary texts developed by the network, gave information on the fundamental principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, underlining ‘substantial differences’ as being a fundamental one but difficult to define. She introduced the European Area for Recognition (EAR) project and presented the main elements of the EAR manual, a
tool to facilitate assessment of foreign qualifications that can be adapted by other regions.

Dr Tsutomu Kimura, presented the UNESCO Portal to Recognized Higher Education Institutions as the final product of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, adopted by both organizations in 2005. He reminded that the Guidelines were elaborated as an educational response to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which included education as a tradable commodity. The Portal, a white list of recognized higher education institutions in which some 40 UNESCO Member States were actively involved was a tool for providing access to reliable and transparent information on higher education institutions around the world and a means of protecting students from fraudulent and low quality providers.

The presentations were followed by a dynamic Q&A session.

**SIGNING CEREMONY**

The heads of delegations of the following Member States signed the Convention and delivered brief statements on that occasion:

*For the Republic of Armenia:*
Ms Gayane Harutyunyan,
Executive Director,
National Information Centre for Academic Recognition and Mobility

*For the People’s Republic of Bangladesh:*
Mr Md. Iqbal Khan Chowdhury
Additional Secretary,
Ministry of Education

*For the Kingdom of Cambodia:*
H.E. Mr. Im Sethy
Minister of Education, Youth and Sport

*For the People’s Republic of China:*
H.E. Mr. Du Yubo
Vice Minister of Education

*For the Lao People’s Democratic Republic:*
H.E. Mr. Lytou Bouapao
Vice Minister of Education and Sport

*For the Republic of Korea:*
Mr. Kim Eung-Gweon
Deputy Minister for University and College Policy

*For the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste:*
H.E. Mr. Joao Cancio Freitas
Minister of Education
For the Republic of Turkey:
Prof. Dr. Mr. Saban Calis
Vice President
The Council of Higher Education

For the Holy See:
H.E. the Most Reverend Joseph Chennoth
Apostolic Nuncio in Japan

The Philippines and Malaysia did not sign the Convention.

The Head of Delegation of Turkey made a statement before signing the Convention: that once Turkey ratifies the Convention, it will only be valid for the Member States with which Turkey has diplomatic relations.

CLOSING SESSION

The President of the Conference Mr Kimura thanked all delegates, Drafting committee and Credential Committee members as well as the UNESCO Secretariat for their efficient work.

Mr Qian Tang, Assistant Director General for Education of UNESCO, thanked the government of Japan for hosting the conference, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology for assuring the effective proceedings of the Conference, all the delegates for their active participation and interpreters for their excellent work.

Mr Tang in particular thanked Dr Molly Lee, Higher Education Specialist in the UNESCO Bangkok Office for her excellent work as a UNESCO staff member, particularly in organizing this significant event and wished her a happy retirement at the end of the year. He then declared the ICS officially closed.

ANNEXES:


Annex II: Document UNESCO/ICS/WD.2, Rules of Procedure

Annex III: Document UNESCO/ICS/WD.1 ICS Agenda

Annex IV: Document UNESCO/ICS/WD.6, 7 Reports of the Credentials Committee