(Provisional translation)

CRES+5 DECLARATION

Version of 14 March 2024

**PREAMBLE**

We, the participants of the Follow-up Conference to the III Regional Conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, referred to as CRES+5, representing governments, public bodies, higher education institutions, networks, associations, trade unions, multilateral organizations, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, students, academic, technical-administrative, and scientific staff from Latin America and the Caribbean, convened in Brasilia from 13th to 15th, 2024, recognize the significance of this intermediate meeting strategically positioned between CRES-2018 and its forthcoming continuation in 2028. This initiative provided a valuable opportunity to assess and reaffirm the guiding principles and actions for transforming education, particularly higher education, in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We affirm that higher education is a universal human right and a social public good that must be fully guaranteed by States, as endorsed and approved in the Declarations of the 1998 UNESCO World Conference, the Regional Conferences of Cartagena, Colombia (2008), and Cordoba, Argentina (2018). We also agree that this principle should be the cornerstone guiding the comprehensive organization of the education system.

The CRES-2018 Declaration particularly emphasizes that the agreed initiatives are based on the deep conviction that access to, utilization, and democratization of knowledge are social, collective, and strategic goods essential for guaranteeing the basic human rights necessary for the well-being of our peoples, the construction of full citizenship, social emancipation, and the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean in solidarity”.

This implies, among other things and emphatically, advocating against the commercialization of education and the privatization processes of educational systems at all levels. It also involves promoting and ensuring regulations and controls that prevent education from being treated as a for-profit commodity, as education is a public good.

Similarly, we emphasize the alignment of this Declaration with the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, we underscore the centrality of affirmative actions that the States of the region must promote, committing to the transformation of educational systems and societies, and enhancing the strategic role of higher education for the sustainable development of our region.

Special attention is dedicated to promoting inclusion and equity throughout the entire system, ensuring the essential integration and evaluation of academic quality with social relevance, as well as for other levels of the education system, and enhancing the value of teaching professionals, administrative technicians, and scientific staff. It is imperative to promote policies that guarantee the rights of higher education workers, eradicate job insecurity, lack of stability, wage depreciation, and the progressive deterioration of social security conditions and benefits.

**AN URGENT CALL TO ACTION**

From 2018 to the present, there has been a noticeable deterioration in the political, economic, and social spheres that significantly impacts higher education in the region. Governments have emerged that openly oppose participatory democracy, autonomy in the acquisition of knowledge for achieving full sovereignty in science and technology, the humanities, culture, and the arts. Some even deny fundamental aspects necessary for our future.

For this reason, we argue that to defend higher education, we must defend democracy, and to defend democracy, we must defend the university. This includes advocating for a diversified higher education system and supporting open, pluralistic, inclusive, and humanistic science. It also involves reaffirming the public significance of knowledge.

It is necessary to denounce the danger posed by the anti-scientific denialist speeches of political leaders who revisit dogmatic and religious views. The propagation of dogma is the smothering of the possibility of deliberation, and without deliberation, democracy cannot exist.

It is imperative to acknowledge the ongoing deterioration that has significantly impacted the working conditions of higher education workers in recent decades. This is evident in increasing job insecurity, lack of stability, wage depreciation, and deteriorated social security conditions and benefits. These challenges are compounded by a regional context marked by a significant rise in poverty, marginalization, and inequality. Work precarization has reached such proportions that it is affecting all sectors of higher education. It is imperative to acknowledge that advancing in higher education is contingent upon ensuring the rights of workers, who are instrumental in implementing progressive policies. We must promote policies that make a difference, based on dialogue with society.

Higher education must contribute to addressing the historical debt owed by contemporary societies and states to indigenous peoples and people of African descent; to educating against racism, racial discrimination and all forms of intolerance; and to guaranteeing the educational rights of these peoples, which are recognized in numerous international conventions, treaties and declarations. To achieve this, higher education must be transformed with an intercultural perspective, overcoming the limitations of monocultural and monolingual approaches that impact its quality and socio-cultural relevance.

Similarly, we must encourage for policies that promote equal opportunities for women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. States and higher education institutions, working in collaboration with student groups, trade unions, and social representatives, should initiate efforts that advance gender equality, respect for diversity, and effective non-discrimination policies. This approach will ensure that all members of the community can thrive, regardless of their sexual orientation, ethnic-racial background, gender identity, or expression.

**WE THEREFORE PROCLAIM**

Our commitment to equity and and lifelong learning. To this end, it is the duty of states to guarantee the necessary and progressive funding for the work and strategic tasks of public higher education institutions, in order to provide better responses to a society facing major challenges. Providing adequate funding is not an expense but a responsibility that cannot be negotiated. It must be focused, as a priority, on promoting affirmative policies that have an essential impact on full access, free tuition, permanence and graduation for the most impoverished, discriminated against and marginalized sectors of the education system and higher education, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, migrant and refugee populations, the adult population, people with disabilities and people discriminated against for reasons of gender and sexual orientation, language or skin color, always from an intersectional perspective. We categorically demand a statement from the region's current governments in favor of increased funding and the implementation of educational recovery actions, which have been particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 21st century, higher education institutions, as integral parts of the science, technology, and innovation systems, play a pivotal role in facilitating self-determined and globally connected knowledge building. They serve as a foundation for ensuring that the benefits of research and the generation of new knowledge are accessible to all citizens. However, the generation of knowledge and its transfer can lead to greater collective well-being and reduced inequality only if institutional arrangements and public policies are designed with this goal in mind.

We reaffirm that the exchange of knowledge is intrinsic to higher education. We must enhance the integration of the knowledge and cultures of indigenous peoples, communities, popular sectors, and the workforce in the generation, utilization, and appropriation of knowledge.

In this context, safeguarding students' right to education is particularly important. We advocate for unconditional respect for their organization, expression and critical thinking, allowing them to exercise this right without discrimination or fear of criminalization. Students are at the forefront of our efforts, whether in teaching, research, institutional matters, or social spheres, as they represent the future of our communities and embody the most valuable aspects of our identity and diversity.

We, the participants of CRES+5, express our commitment to strengthening transformative and emancipatory action, valuing higher education as an inalienable right to achieve sustainable development, a culture of peace and non-violence, integral health and the training of citizens aware of their duties and responsibilities. To this end we call on all government actors, authorities, society, networks, unions and associations, from the different communities of our region and our planet to support our statement and our actions.

Regional integration as a change in the conditions under which interregional and global relations take place. A decolonizing perspective must be at the heart of Latin American and Caribbean awareness. Knowledge and science, shared learning and sovereignty in the use and governance of new technologies must be open, freely accessible and considered a human right and social benefit. In this spirit of collaboration, we advocate an inclusive, ethical, and dialogical digital transformation that serves the individuals comprising the educational community and higher education institutions.

We express our committed to fostering collective action among governments, societies, and higher education, science and technology institutions who act towards agreements on horizontal and supportive cooperation, co-participation in good practices and experiences, projects on issues of great relevance to improving living conditions, education, health, and sustainability.

The goal is to create a favorable scenario for significant development as a regional bloc, oriented towards well-being and equity. To achieve this, it is essential to strengthen cooperation networks, particularly highlighting the importance of the Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Meeting Space (ENLACES), as well as all our cooperation and solidarity networks and bodies, to enhance regional integration and cooperation with other regions.

We proclaim that the democratization of knowledge and the universalization of higher education are two strategic objectives for CRES 2028, aimed at ensuring the sovereign development of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the consolidation of democratic systems of government. To achieve this, we must promote broad social and political partnerships, both national and regional, to establish a new socio-educational pact.

It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the increasing complexity of crises, which transcend territorial and disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, solutions must be comprehensive and solidarity-based. During this time, science and its social appropriation, along with the internationalization of higher education systems, emerged as crucial responses to global health emergencies. International collaboration among scientists and the application of joint methodologies remain key to addressing future challenges.

University internationalization policies and mobility programs are particularly fundamental for integrating countries in the region and fostering international relationships, to promote the exchange of academic, scientific and technological knowledge and the development of strong cultural ties among Latin American and Caribbean communities, which contributes to a broader understanding of the cultural diversity that defines Latin America and the Caribbean.

Emancipatory regional integration must be promoted through inter-institutional conventions, student mobility; exchange programs for students, academics, technical-administrative and scientific staff; domestic internationalization programs; and other intra-regional internationalization strategies, as well as through collaborations with other regions of the world.

Therefore, we request that our States ratify both the Regional Convention and the Global Convention on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications.

Higher education institutions have a responsibility to critically analyze their own trajectory and propose transformation pathways that align with the effective democratization of quality higher education. They should also contribute to the establishment of systems for science, technology, innovation, art, and culture that support sustainable, inclusive, and equitable development.

We are committed to the transformation that society expects from our institutions, and we request that governments ensure progressive investment aimed at universalizing higher education, science, technology, and innovation between 2024 and 2030. It is proposed that a certain but growing percentage of these resources be allocated for the purposes of cooperation and integration based on education and science. These resources are essential for implementing projects that address the significant challenges facing Latin America and the Caribbean.

We call on ENLACES and the regional and national higher education networks, associations, and consortia to promote the creation of a Regional Knowledge Agency (ARCO). This agency should facilitate collaborative, solidarity-based, and horizontal research, extension, and innovation, as well as their integration with teaching. ARCO should operate based on a clear, pragmatic, forward-looking, and integrationist approach, aligned with the content and orientation of public policy outlined in this document.

Finally, we endorse the validity of higher education institutions as valuable spaces for building a promising future based on full citizenship, social justice, sustainable development, and regional integration.