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**Towards the World Conference of the Humanities, 6-12 August, 2017**

## **INVITATION TO ALL SCHOLARS AND SCHOLARLY INSTITUTIONS IN THE WORLD**

The world – all countries and nations, all people and academies – is experiencing and facing the challenges of global cultural, social and environmental changes, which call upon all to find innovative responses, rooted in the diversity of perspectives driven by the multitude of diverse past and ongoing understandings of science, culture, education and sustainability.

Human history is the history of transitions, of changes, and of the capacity to build from diversity and convergence. Beyond the pressures of immediate needs, it is foresight, equipped with mid- and long-term vision, that allows human societies to make sense of the world they are living in.

A fundamental role of the humanities is precisely to strengthen such foresight from academic perspectives, while embracing a permanent interaction with all other sectors of knowledge and policies in society.

UNESCO conducted a debate on the need to resume this understanding, within its programmes and beyond, and to promote it within global, shared and convergent policies. The Executive Board of UNESCO adopted a decision in 2011, at the initiative of the Republic of Korea, which *inter alia* recognized “the role of the humanities as a provider of visions and insights in line with the focus of UNESCO’s new humanism, which underlines the importance of preventing the fragmentation of humanity and the need to build genuine foundations for development and peace” and reaffirmed “the invaluable contribution that the humanities can make towards establishing new human values in times of increasing globalization, greater connectivity and also rising uncertainty, in the face of new economic, financial and social challenges”.

Since 2009, as proposed by CIPSH, the need to organize a World Humanities Conference has been agreed with UNESCO. The General Assembly of CIPSH in 2014 approved the proposal of LiègeTogether to organize the World Conference, considering in particular that “there has been no global re-thinking on the role and scope of humanities following the major global changes that were accelerated in the past few decades” and that “there is a growing need to re-introduce in the daily agenda of society a mid and long term perspective, that is required in face of the future uncertainty and which finds no answer within the limits of a purely immediate problem-solving approach”.

The World Humanities Conference will take place in Liège, Belgium, from 6 to 12 August 2017. It will be preceded by a series of conferences and other academic events, engaging all continents. The conference, which will involve scholars

from all fields of the humanities, but also of the natural, social and formal sciences, is open to all possible contributions and will be structured around six main themes:

- a) Humans and the environment;
- b) Cultural identities, cultural diversity and intercultural relations;
- c) Cultural heritage;
- d) Boundaries and migrations;
- e) History, memory and politics;
- f) The humanities in a world in transition.

The Conference will strengthen the organization of the humanities, notably in its interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary dimensions, including all sciences. It will contribute to epistemological debate and convergence of scholarly and wider cultural approaches, with a view to bridging the gap that often exists with the rest of society and the design of research, education and territorial policies. A major strength of human societies is their diversity and Humanities are particularly well placed to foster such diversity and complementarity.

On the 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation on 18 January 1949 of the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences, UNESCO organized a working meeting in Paris to prepare the World Humanities Conference, with the participation of CIPSH, Liège Together and the ambassadors and permanent delegations of several UNESCO member states.

On this occasion, UNESCO, CIPSH and LiègeTogether formally invite all scholars and research networks in the world to engage with the preparation of the Conference, in particularly by proposing papers and sessions, organising meetings of research networks during the Conference, involving young researchers and students in the preparation process, promoting preparatory events or involving the relevant non-academic sectors in the Conference debates.

The aims and challenges are very demanding and difficult. But the current global context, academic and beyond, demands no less.

Paris, 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2016



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## ANNEX

### World humanities Conference and related events

#### What?

UNESCO, with the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences and Liège Together, started the preparation of the WORLD HUMANITIES CONFERENCE.

This will be a major gathering to be prepared during the next 18 months, engaging all fields of knowledge in all countries, focused on the role and scope of the humanities in contemporary society.

#### What for?

There is a growing awareness, in face of the critical ongoing societal and environmental trends, that the specific knowledge of the humanities on cultures is insufficiently considered in the public agenda, with often catastrophic consequences.

The Conference will foster a re-foundation of the humanities based on a polycentric approach. Starting from the need to re-think the scope and role of human sciences in contemporary society, affirming the relevance of the humanities for everyday life, the Conference will establish a new agenda for the humanities, with educational, research and policy-making implications in the various countries and regions of the world.

The need for such an agenda is twofold. On one hand, there has been no global re-thinking on the role and scope of the humanities following the major global changes that have accelerated in the past few decades. On the other hand, in the face of major uncertainties that elude a purely immediate problem-solving approach, there is a growing need to re-introduce in the daily agenda of society a mid- and long-term perspective.

The humanities provide unique skills and resources for individuals and societies to meet the growing need for sustainable living, participatory, and peaceful coexistence. Empowered by historical knowledge, critical thinking, and nuanced analysis of human ideas, values, and imagination, the human sciences provide understanding of the new salience of cultural capital in our contemporary world. Humanistic thinking offers a broader, deeper and more creative perspective than conventional problem-solving approaches to societal challenges. It contends that human flourishing can only be realized through renewed awareness of the human condition – past, present, and future – in relation to other sentient beings, our natural environment, and scientific and technological developments. Moreover, the humanities emphasize the potential of artistic expression to provide meaning in increasingly diverse societies.

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In the context of education, a need exists to identify the core elements that should be present in an education for an open citizenship, framed within diversity and flexibility.

In the context of research, there is a need for better articulation of funding strategies of agencies in different regions and countries, aiming at the global improvement of humanities knowledge for the better of societies. This requires an identification of cross-disciplinary priorities at a world scale.

The nature of research organization, among disciplines but also in bridging with society, also requires rethinking. This has started within CIPSH itself and the relations between UNESCO and CIPSH, and overall will be a third major outcome, thus establishing a more efficient tool for the human sciences to pursue their competences.

#### When?

The Conference will take place in Liège, Belgium, from the 6th to the 12th August 2017. It will be preceded by a large number of events that started with a Regional Conference on Science and Civilization of the Silk Roads held in Beijing, in December 2015. Events will occur in all continents.

The proposal for the Conference was first presented to the General Conference of UNESCO by the former President of CIPSH, Adama Samassekou, in October 2009, and received initial endorsement. The General Assembly of CIPSH (Nagoya 2010) approved a first draft of the Conference and its scope and plan went through deeper preparation in the following 5 years, alongside the development of UNESCO's own strategic approach to the humanities.

In particular, the Executive Board of UNESCO adopted a decision in 2011, at the initiative of the Republic of Korea, which *inter alia* recognized “the role of the humanities as a provider of visions and insights in line with the focus of UNESCO's new humanism, which underlines the importance of preventing the fragmentation of humanity and the need to build genuine foundations for development and peace” and reaffirmed “the invaluable contribution that the humanities can make towards establishing new human values in times of increasing globalization, greater connectivity and also rising uncertainty, in the face of new economic, financial and social challenges”.

A report on the highlights of the humanities in the world is now being prepared and aims at incorporating contributions from society. The information meeting will explain how.

#### Where?

The World Humanities Conference will be held in Liège, Belgium.

Following the Regional Conference of Beijing in 2015, regional thematic conferences will be organized in Brazil (October 2016, focusing landscape management and the humanities), Mali (November 2016, focusing on history, languages and culture) and in the Arab region.

Furthermore, specific disciplinary events will take place in several countries (among others: February 2016 in Mariana, Brazil; March 2016 in Mação, Portugal; June 2016 in Macau, China).

The World Humanities Conference will also build on the success and outcomes of the World Humanities Forum, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of which will be held from 27 to 29 October 2016 in Sejon City, Republic of Korea.

### **On what?**

The Conference will be structured around six main themes:

- a) Humans and the environment (how do humans interact in the territories in face of environmental constraints and changes?)
- b) Cultural identities, cultural diversity and intercultural relations (how are identities and intercultural relations forged, and how may evolve the potential cooperation and tensions among them?)
- c) Cultural heritage (what are its scope, function and meaning?)
- d) Boundaries and migrations (how are these two dimensions interlinked through time and across cultures?)
- e) History, memory and politics (how do memories and history interact and how are they impacted by political contexts?)
- f) The humanities in a world in transition (what are the new scope and function of the humanities today, notably in relation to technological digital advances?)

### **Who is who?**

The Conference is organized by UNESCO, CIPSH and LIEGE TOGETHER.

The presidency is entrusted to H.E. Adama SAMASSEKOU, former Minister of Education of Mali, former Executive Secretary of the African Academy of Languages, Past President of CIPSH, President of the MAAVA network.

An Honorary and Policy Committee will be composed of noted names of international science ('hard sciences', social sciences, humanities, Nobel Prize) and politics.

The Scientific Programme Committee is co-chaired by Professor CHAO Gejin (China), President of CIPSH, and Professor Jean WINAND, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Liege.

A Local Organizing Committee is co-chaired by André GILLES, Deputy-President of the Provincial College of Liege, Willy DEMEYER, Mayor of the City of Liege and Albert CORHAY, Rector of the University of Liege.

The global coordination core group is composed of Adama SAMASSEKOU, Chairman, Luiz OOSTERBEEK, Secretary-General of CIPSH, John CROWLEY, Chief of Section, Sector for Social and Human Sciences at UNESCO, Robert HALLEUX, Chairman of the CHST-ULG and Secretary-General of the Conference, Michel COPPÉ, representative of the Province of Liege, Rosi BRAIDOTTI, from CIPSH, and Satoko Fujiwara, from CIPSH.

### **How?**

It is highly relevant to stress that, to date, not only academics, but NGO's and the private sector are intervening in the process (this is also the case in the framework of the International Year of Global Understanding).

The current decision and public open preparatory process is already the result of a long debate involving all scholarly fields of the humanities, but also contacts with natural and social scientists, with artists, NGOs and many other relevant stakeholders.

Very important are the participations, beyond scholars, of artists, NGOs, policy makers. Special attention will be devoted to promoting the unique relevance of knowledge diversity, countering ethnocentric bias, fostering inclusion and preventing gender or other discrimination.

A major chapter will be the participation of youth in the World Humanities Conference, several projects being already in preparation.

The Conference will be available online as well.

### **Role of the Media**

The media is always crucial in the dissemination of any project. Yet, in this case, outreach is the keyword for what needs to be accomplished. Media, from journalists to editors and publishers, involving from writing reporters to photographers or marketing experts, all are invited not merely to "produce news" but also to be part of the news. The media field is a core field of the humanities, and UNESCO and CIPSH thus invite professionals from this sector to participate in the debates, to comment, to criticize and to intervene in the project as a whole.

In this sense, CIPSH and UNESCO also welcome proposals and challenges from media experts, because it is with them that it will be effectively possible to engage in the process not only an abstract notion of society, but specific citizens.

### **For further information:**

[www.humanities2017.org/en](http://www.humanities2017.org/en)

<http://cipsh.net/htm/>