

World University Service

THE LIMA DECLARATION

ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Preface

During the past two decades there has risen an alarming tendency to undermine, restrict or suppress academic freedom and autonomy of institutions of higher education. This has a direct relation to a contracting system of higher education justified most often in terms of economic austerity and/or political expediency. The most alarming effect of this has been the increasing violations of human rights of teachers, students, researchers and educational writers irrespective of socio-political systems throughout the world.

The original idea of a Declaration emerged out of a WUS workshop held in Nantes in 1984 which launched a new WUS programme — 'Academic Solidarity and Cooperation' — under the responsibility of a special commission. The Commission, after organising an international workshop in Madrid in September 1986, requested Manfred Nowak, now Director of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights, to propose a draft Declaration. The idea of a Declaration sprang out of the realisation that although there were extensive international instruments and guidance in the field of human rights in general, there was a lack of it in the field of higher education which covered academic freedom and autonomy.

The first draft of the Declaration was written by January 1987, and the Commission took on an arduous process to discuss, test and revise it in consultation with the international network of WUS national committees both at a national and regional level. The draft was also sent to over fifty specialist organisations for comments and their suggestions proved very useful for the final formulation of the Declaration. The draft was revised three times before it was approved by the WUS

International General Assembly in September 1988.

There have been commendable attempts by university communities both at the national and international levels to respond to the various challenges emerging from the erosion of academic freedom. However, many attempts have faced problems without having a clear concept about academic freedom, its various dimensions and implications. This Declaration, WUS hopes, could pave the way for more understanding, more discussion and more action towards defending academic freedom and autonomy of institutions of higher education.

Academic freedom is a human right of special importance to the higher education sector. It is not the privilege of a small elite. The concept derives from the right to education and relates to the right to freedom of thought and freedom of opinion and expression. Autonomy is the institutional form of academic freedom and is a necessary precondition for higher education institutions to fulfil their proper functions. They must be protected from undue pressures from the state and business interests.

WUS has resisted the temptation to proclaim the Declaration as International. The 'Lima Declaration' allows the international community to move in the direction of proclaiming an International Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education through a process of discussion and consultation at a higher level and taking the present Declaration as a starting point. For this purpose we offer some suggestions for action of the back page of this leaflet.

