



**International Association of Universities 2009 Conference**

## **The Role of Higher Education in Fostering the Culture of Dialogue and Understanding**

**4 – 6 November, 2009  
Beirut, Lebanon**

### **Presentation**

The beginning of the 21st century has witnessed the eruption of serious social, cultural and political unrest and conflict worldwide. The almost unprecedented economic crisis is likely to increase the turmoil and compound the complexity of finding solutions. Today's society seems more fragmented and unstable than ever. This is very true in countries with multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional societies, as is currently the case in Lebanon, where violence has often replaced dialogue and understanding. However, it is only through dialogue, that in Lebanon and elsewhere we may manage to reconcile.

Given Lebanon's diversity and the country's need to find a harmonious way to life for all its citizens, Notre Dame University – Louaize is pleased to host the IAU international conference that will focus on "The Role of Higher Education in Fostering the Inter-Cultural Dialogue and Understanding" on November 5-6, 2009 in Lebanon. The theme is in line with the IAU's goal to promote cooperation and understanding at the international, regional and national levels and contribute to freedom and justice, human dignity and solidarity through teaching and learning, research and service.

Given the diversity of cultural communities in Lebanon which is mirrored in its educational institutions, the country serves as a microcosm for exploring issues of inter-cultural dialogue and understanding. The conference will bring together higher educational leaders, scholars and students to discuss how higher education today, contributes or could contribute to creating a culture of dialogue at the institutional, local, regional and international levels.

The IAU International Conference will explore and offer a forum for sharing ideas, examples of good practice as well as innovative ways by which higher education can foster dialogue and understanding in the context of diversity.

### **Rationale**

For the IAU and Notre Dame University – Louaize, the reasons for co-organizing this conference are as follows:

- The issue of dialogue and understanding across cultures is a matter of institutional, local, regional and international importance.
- Higher education institutions are increasingly called upon to engage in fostering dialogue and understanding in all aspects of their mission.
- The continuous development of a ‘global spaces and interconnections’ in all sectors – economic, social, political, health and environment-related - poses challenges that will only be met through dialogue and understanding among future leaders and citizens, most often graduates of higher education institutions worldwide.

The issue of diversity, in part due to mobility and internationalization in higher education, is becoming central for consideration when developing higher education curricula, pedagogical and teacher training and extra curricular activities for students with the aim of enhancing inter-cultural dialogue.