

**Mr. Kari Anttila, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland**

**Written Statement by Finland on occasion of the 2014 UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, 10-12 November 2014 in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan**

## **Education for Sustainable Development - Best Practices from Finland**

The United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) has been implemented in Finland through various activities involving a wide spectrum of actors. The decade was the inspiration for designing the national strategic framework for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

This written statement shares two best practices that are central in boosting the implementation of the ESD in Finland, as well as the future within the Global Action Programme. In order to truly achieve the ESD goals, ESD needs to be integrated in the relevant national policies and programmes. The purpose is that ESD is and will be implemented in the everyday life of educational institutions and the wider community.

### **Inclusion of ESD in the core curriculum for basic education**

In Finland basic education consists of nine years of compulsory education free of charge provided for the whole age group in comprehensive schools. Nearly all children complete their compulsory schooling, which makes an ordinary classroom an excellent example of the whole society in mini-scale, offering an inclusive learning environment for all pupils.

The national core curriculum for basic education is a very important guiding instrument to boost sustainable development (SD). The main goals (for subjects that are important in terms of culture and society) and the distribution of lesson hours between the subjects in basic education is determined by a government decree. The Finnish National Board of Education formulates the national core curriculum for basic education on the basis of the government decree.

The current core curriculum (2006) includes the objectives and core contents of different subjects, as well as the principles of pupil assessment, special-needs education, pupil welfare and educational guidance. The education providers, usually the local education authorities and the schools themselves, draw up their own curricula for basic education within the framework of the national core curriculum.

SD has been one of the seven topics emphasized in the core curriculum for basic education since 2006. The curriculum is now under revision and the new version will come into effect in 2016. There will be even more emphasis on SD in the revised curriculum. The need for a sustainable way of living and eco-social understanding will be emphasized in the value basis of education. The working culture of all schools is expected to be developed so that the school itself is a learning community which exemplifies responsibility for the environment and futures orientation. The goals and objectives of education will be defined for transversal competences and for subject-based competences. One of the seven transversal competence areas is described as "Participation, influence and building a sustainable future". It will be included in all subjects so that each subject can promote this competence in its own specific field. The aim is to support all students to develop their knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, which promote their ability to understand the importance of a sustainable future and to act as responsible citizens from individual, local and global perspective.

## The Society's Commitment to Sustainability

The national strategies for SD and ESD are other important guiding instruments. Finland's national strategy for sustainable development, originally entitled "*Towards sustainable choices - A nationally and globally sustainable Finland*" (2006) was revised in 2013 into the new form of "*Society's Commitment to Sustainability*".

The Commitment includes a vision, shared objectives, indicators and a mechanism to present and report on individual commitments and actions on the web. ESD is integrated within the objectives of the Commitment. In order to reach the eight objectives, the idea is that operational commitments are established on the voluntary basis by all stakeholders in the society, such as administrative sectors, companies, municipalities, NGO's, educational institutions and local operators as well as individual citizens. The operational commitments need to include concrete measures, changes in operating procedures and habits and/or innovative trials to promote the shared goals. The commitments should also be new and measurable. By far the biggest share, around 30% of all the operational commitments are currently related to the education sector (situation in October 2014). This indicates that the education sector is delightfully interested in sustainable development.

Examples of ESD-related operational commitments:

- A challenge for all educational institutions

The *Trade Union for Education in Finland (OAJ)* and the *OKKA Foundation for teaching, education and personal development*, together with a wide range of actors, have challenged all educational institutions to make their own operational commitments for SD. The commitment may include creating an SD plan, a goal to achieve a sustainability certificate or other activities and models that enhance ESD.

- *LUMA\* Centre Finland* promotes ESD

LUMA actors have pledged to choose topics related to sustainability in the research and development activities of the universities involved. LUMA actors will develop a minimum of three new operational models for ESD, targeted especially towards early-childhood and basic education by 2019.

\*LUMA is abbreviated from "luonnontieteet", the Finnish word for natural sciences and mathematics. *LUMA Centre Finland* is an umbrella organization for the LUMA network. The aim in LUMA activities is to inspire and motivate children and young people to become interested in mathematics, natural sciences and technology using the latest methods and activities in science and technology education. The aim is also to support the life-long learning of teachers working on levels of education from early childhood to universities, and to strengthen the development of research-based teaching.

More information on *The Society's Commitment to Sustainability*:

[http://www.ym.fi/en-US/The\\_environment/Sustainable\\_development](http://www.ym.fi/en-US/The_environment/Sustainable_development)

More information on *OAJ*: [http://www.oaj.fi/cs/oaj/public\\_en](http://www.oaj.fi/cs/oaj/public_en)

More information on *OKKA Foundation*: <http://www.koulujaymparisto.fi/sivu.php?id=1820>

More information on *LUMA*: <http://www.luma.fi/en>