

Partnerships and Collaborations

Journeys with the Executive Director



Dr Carlos Lopes is the Executive Director of UNITAR, and Director of the United Nations System Staff College in Turin. Dr. Lopes was previously UN Assistant-Secretary-General and Political Director in the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General, in New York.

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Life for Dr Carlos Lopes, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director (ED) of UNITAR, inevitably involves much travel and time spent away from the Geneva headquarters. Whether visiting UNITAR's offices, building partnerships or meeting with heads of other international organisations, these visits are an integral part of the strategic goals of reinforcing the Institute's capacities to increase outreach and develop further its activities.

Extending partnerships in Africa

In early 2009, a round-trip visit was made to western Africa, with the goal of further cementing partnerships in the region. Through high-level meetings with key government officials and regional organizations, private sector entities and heads of UN agencies, a number of agreements were concluded and new areas of activity investigated.

As part of his itinerary in Nigeria, Dr Lopes also paid his first visit to UNITAR's project office in Port Harcourt. Agreements with Niger Delta States and the Federal Government have been extended concerning the strengthening of UNITAR's presence and the planned establishment of an affiliated training centre.

The ED's visit to Burkina Faso was the occasion to launch the implementation of new guidelines for the CIFAL network, and to sign an important Memorandum of Understanding with the African Capacity Building Foundation regarding cooperation by the two Institutes in the fields of Governance, the Environment, Conflict Prevention and Knowledge Systems.

Initiatives in Asia

Dr Lopes then visited UNITAR's office in Hiroshima, Japan, with the goal of reinforcing the Institute's strategic long-term partnerships with the Hiroshima's Prefectural Government, Municipality and University, and other academies. Two important new initiatives were discussed - on Nuclear Disarmament and Non Proliferation, and on Architectural and Urban Reconstruction - as well as the expansion of environment-related activities. During a roundtable event in the UNITAR office, Dr Lopes gave a lecture on the theme of "Power of diversity to create peace in a knowledge-based society".

In America - building ties with institutions

High-level meetings were held recently with the United States Congress to explore possible cooperation on climate change and human rights issues through virtual training programmes. UNITAR has also initiated discussions with the Organization of American States (OAS) on joint projects in areas such as migration and development, environmental governance, climate change, and e-learning partnerships in Spanish. A Memorandum of Understanding between the two Institutions is currently being negotiated.

In New York a landmark agreement was signed with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on issues including capacity development projects, use of satellite imagery, international migration law (IML), the advancement of strategic policy thinking and dialogue, and the strengthening of local networks.

High level brainstorming on the future of training and research at the UN

Dr Lopes participated in an historical high-level meeting convened by the UN Secretary-General on the Future of Training and Research. For the United Nations, facing numerous challenges on a broad canvas of issues, the ability to provide in-depth, independent and balanced research findings, as well as appropriate training and capacity development for its staff and for Member States, is indispensable. The seven UN training and research institutes (INSTRAW, UNICRI, UNIDIR, UNITAR, UNRISD, UNSSC and UNU) met in order to strengthen the learning network and maximize the collective contributions to the United Nations system.



United Nations Institute for Training and Research
Institut des Nations Unies pour la Formation et la Recherche
Instituto de las Naciones Unidas para Formación Profesional e Investigaciones
Учебный и научно-исследовательский институт
Организации Объединенных Наций
معهد الأمم المتحدة للتدريب والبحث
联合国训练研究所



unitar

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Palais des Nations
1211 - Geneva 10
Switzerland
T +41-22-917-8455
F + 41-22-917-8047
www.unitar.org



unitar

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Knowledge to lead

Newsletter Spring 2009

Editorial

By His Excellency Tõnis Nirk, Chairman of the UNITAR Board of Trustees



Ambassador Nirk has been serving as Permanent Representative of the Republic of Estonia to the UN Office at Geneva since 2004. He formerly occupied positions of Deputy Under-Secretary for Foreign Economic Affairs, and Director General at the Foreign Economic Policy Department, in the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As Chairman of the Board of Trustees of UNITAR, I have pleasure in presenting current achievements and emerging trends of the Institute.

UNITAR is fully engaged in global issues: in 2008 the Institute formulated its new Carbon Neutral Policy and its Green Procurement Programme, contributing to the mitigation of Climate Change. The three key orientations of UNITAR's programme today are the Environment, to better address training needs in collaboration with MEA Secretariats; Human Rights, extending its collaboration with OHCHR; and Knowledge Systems, to increase the number of beneficiaries. The Institute has also been selected to chair the Global Migration Group (GMG) in the second half of 2009.

UNOSAT services have been expanded to include training on the applications of satellite imagery for development. Links between UNOSAT's research activities and other UNITAR programmes are being developed, for example in the domains of the environment and peacekeeping.

In the challenging context of the financial crisis, the Institute is performing well: as a result of the resource mobilization strategy, principal donor countries made commitments to support UNITAR in achieving its goals; with a 26% increase compared to last year's projections, the budget implementation exceeds expectations; and the Institute is continuing to exhibit steady growth in its activities. To further emphasise and reinforce our commitment to efficiency in this tougher environment, a finance committee has recently been created to oversee the Institute's spending.

I am therefore confident that UNITAR will continue to thrive despite the challenges posed by the rapidly evolving world situation.

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In Focus

UNITAR designated to lead the Global Migration Group

In June 2009, UNITAR will assume the chairmanship of the Global Migration Group (GMG) for a six-month period. This inter-agency body, comprised of 14 UN and non-UN organizations working in this field, aims to promote the wider application of migration-related international and regional instruments and norms, and to provide coherent and strong leadership to improve the overall effectiveness of the international community in their response to migration issues.

Working hand-in-hand with UNDP, subsequent GMG chair in 2010, the Institute is seeking to engage the Group on the basis of a one-year work plan. Currently being finalised, this plan is likely to include the following orientations:

- Engaging heads of agencies in concentrating on substance rather than procedures, focusing on the topic of the global economic crisis and migration;
- Streamlining efforts of the GMG on the basis of a joint review of the Group's mandate and working methods/objectives and modalities of operation;
- Raising the GMG's profile by opening up the debate with a public conference in the autumn of 2009.

During its tenure, UNITAR will also represent the GMG at the third Global Forum on International Migration and Development (GFMD) in Athens, Greece on 4-5 November 2009. The GFMD, a state-led process, continues the inter-governmental dialogue and practice-sharing on international migration and development which was initiated with the UN General Assembly's 2006 High Level Dialogue on this topic.

Special Guest

Sharing values on human rights and development

Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and UNITAR board member



Dr. Shirin Ebadi is a lawyer specialized in human rights, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her work. Dr. Ebadi also teaches at the University of Tehran. In the years 1975-1979 she served as the president of the city court of Tehran, one of the first female judges in Iran.

How do you see UNITAR's role?

SE: In my opinion, everything starts with education and research. By enhancing UNITAR's research potential, the results of future research activities will strengthen the educational capacities of the Institute. Furthermore, I believe that the way UNITAR encourages the sharing of best practices between stakeholders in round table events is an excellent way of operating, because people often do not have the opportunity for such exchanges of information. However, education should not be aimed exclusively at government representatives but rather at experts from civil society.

What is your dream ?

SE: My dream is to have a strong United Nations Organization taking the lead role in the world instead of giving power to governments who are often not elected by their populations. Therefore it would also be wise to give responsibility of electing the new United Nations Secretary-General to civil society.

According to you, what is the main human rights issue today?

SE: Through my own research I have established that poverty in the world has many causes. Among these, there is one which recurs systematically: military spending. In most countries in difficulty, military spending exceeds the entire budget dedicated to health and education. Therefore it is essential to take urgent measures to encourage the states concerned to reduce their defence budgets.

How would you improve the human rights situation?

SE: I propose to establish a Convention to fight against poverty, enshrining the following principles:

CORE VALUES?

By our guest Shirin Ebadi

Education, Limiting military spending, Human Rights

Firstly all countries adhering to the Convention should be prohibited from obtaining credit if their military spending exceeds the total education budget – the funds allocated to the military budget should be used first and foremost for humanitarian purposes.

A second aspect concerns countries with large foreign debts. There are many examples of states having given loans without subsequently asking for reimbursement. However, this has never really worked in practice because the debtor countries then tended to invest in military purposes. A solution would be to disband their armed forces and instead only have a police force for internal security. In exchange, the donating countries would write off the debt as a goodwill gesture. The key point is to encourage the disbanding of the military.

My third suggestion is to give more influence to local and international NGOs. Until now, governments have reported directly to the United Nations. In this situation, how could you expect a state to criticise itself? Strengthening the position of NGOs vis-à-vis the United Nations would guarantee that these reports are not influenced by political views.

What position should the United Nations adopt towards Human Rights?

SE: Personally, I strongly believe in the mission of the United Nations. I think that everyone should contribute in order to strengthen the position of the Institution, because in my opinion the UN does not currently have enough power. Furthermore the theme of economic rights has not yet been explored in sufficient depth, in particular the issue of the civil and political rights in the context of human rights.

Nevertheless, we should not infer from this fact that we should abandon or ignore the United Nations. On the contrary, we should remember that being commonly involved would help the Organization to improve its efficiency.



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Trends & Activities

Environment@UNITAR

By Achim Halpaap, Associate Director, Training Department and Head, Environment Unit

UNITAR organized its first environmental training course on Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in the late 1980's, jointly with UNEP. At the time, questions were raised concerning the relevance of this training for developing countries. Two decades later, programme alumni hold key positions in government and research institutions and play an instrumental role in fostering the application of modern information technologies for protecting the environment. Times are gone where the applicability of GIS in a developing country context is questioned. Knowledge sharing and training matter!

Fast forward: Over the past two decades, UNITAR's environmental programmes have diversified significantly. In 2008 alone, the Institute supported country-driven projects in more than 80 developing and transition countries, benefiting some 4500 individuals. Activities focus on training and capacity development concerning multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs) in the areas of climate change, chemicals management and environmental governance. Throughout this evolution, the early-day principles of sharing cutting-edge knowledge and ensuring country ownership have consistently been adhered to. Joint partnerships have also been developed with more than 10 UN organizations.

Conceptualising and pilot testing of innovative methodologies has become an increasingly important aspect of programme design and implementation. Peer-reviewed methodologies offered through UNITAR's environmental programmes in 2009 include capacity self-assessments and national profile development, priority-setting and action plan development, knowledge-sharing and management, and train-the-trainers capacity development that empowers regional, national and local centres of excellence.

With this track record, where is Environment@UNITAR heading? At least four openings are emerging. First, the Institute is planning to develop, in partnerships with MEA Convention Secretariats, a series of e-learning courses on MEAs. Second, successful methodologies will be adapted for other environment areas, such as biodiversity. Third, integrated approaches are being developed, for example on climate change and local development, drawing upon expertise available across the Institute. Finally, the Institute is increasingly providing services to the UN family in matters of environmental training within a One UN context, such as hosting the One UN Training Service Platform for Climate Change. Watch out for new developments in future Newsletters!

Knowledge to lead

Becoming climate neutral

On 2 December 2008, UNITAR promulgated its first generation 2008-2009 Climate Neutral Policy and Strategy. The initiative is a swift response to the call of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and the 2008 decision of the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB), to move the UN System towards climate neutral operations over the next years. The policy was adopted at a time when more than 150 governments are negotiating a new international framework agreement on climate change at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, Poznań, 1-12 December 2008.



UNITAR's climate neutral policy seeks to systematically reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHS) without compromising the ability of the Institute to meet the increasing demand for its training services. When releasing the policy, Carlos Lopes, Executive Director of the Institute, emphasised that "enhancing the use of technology-supported learning, such as e-learning and video-conferencing, is an important dimension of our strategy to become carbon neutral and can be an effective complement to traditional learning approaches, such as face-to-face training". The Institute will monitor and prepare annual inventories of its GHG emissions, take systematic steps towards reducing its emission, and offset remaining emissions by purchasing offsets under the UN approved Clean Development Mechanism.

Towards Green Procurement

In pursuit of the goal to ensure environmentally sustainable management practices, UNITAR has taken an important first step by adopting environmentally friendly procurement procedures. By analysing goods and services frequently purchased and matching them with green procurement principles, a group of preferred products and goods is being identified. UNITAR is also using green procurement networks in order to obtain knowledge on best practices, working closely with the Issue Management Group on sustainable procurement in the UN, managed by UNEP.