

EDUCATION: THE KEY TO PROGRESS

The importance that the Americas attach to education is reflected in the commitment to broad-based reform. These reforms are based on a consensus with respect to the challenges confronting education. They rest on principles of equity, quality, relevance and efficiency. Equity ensures that all people have the opportunity to receive quality education services, thereby reducing the effects of inequalities based on socio-economic status or various forms of discrimination. Quality implies the achievement of high levels of cognitive development, capabilities and attitudes. Relevance means that an educational system can meet the needs and aspirations of society as a whole, taking into account all of its diversity. Efficiency is the provision of adequate resources, used optimally, in order to enhance educational achievements.

In this spirit, heads of states and governments agreed to make education a key priority at the Second Summit of the Americas held in Santiago (Chile) in 1998. In an effort to move toward universal access to education and to attain high-quality education across the Hemisphere, leaders endorsed several mandates.

In addition, governments entrusted their ministers of education to review the Santiago objectives and devise a strategic plan that would deliver access to quality primary education for all children and access to secondary education for at least 75 percent of youth by the year 2010. Ministers of Education from the Americas quickly took up the call and met in Brasilia (Brazil) in July 1998. They focussed their attention in the following areas: distance education; fellowships and exchange programs; development and use of information and technology in education; and educational statistics and quality evaluation. The result was a declaration on national commitments to education as a priority dossier and a plan of action, including:

- compensatory programs for vulnerable populations;
- education quality assessment systems;
- educational management, institutional capacity and decentralization;
- education for the workplace;
- professionalization of teachers;
- intercultural bilingual basic education; and
- information and communication technologies.