

2016

# International Charter on Geographical Education

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# The Proclamation

In 1992, the International Charter on Geographical Education was endorsed by the General Assembly of the International Geographical Union at the 27th International Geographical Congress in Washington D.C., U.S.A. ([www.igu-cge.org](http://www.igu-cge.org)). The proclamation in the 1992 Charter is still a very important basis for Geography Education in the 21st century.

The 1992 Charter proclaims that the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union is:

**Convinced** that geographical education is indispensable to the development of responsible and active citizens in the present and future world,

**Conscious** that geography can be an informing, enabling and stimulating subject at all levels in education, and contributes to a lifelong enjoyment and understanding of our world,

**Aware** that students require increasing international competence in order to ensure effective cooperation on a broad range of economic, political, cultural and environmental issues in a shrinking world,

**Concerned** that geographical education is neglected in some parts of the world, and lacks structure and coherence in others,

**Ready** to assist colleagues in counteracting geographical illiteracy in all countries of the world, and

**Supportive** of the principles set out in:

- the Charter of the United Nations;
- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- the Constitution of UNESCO;
- the UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace;
- the Declaration on the Rights of the Child;
- the UN Sustainable Development Goals; and
- many national curricula and statements on geographical education.

**The Commission commends the International Charter on Geographical Education to all people of the world.**

In subsequent years, the Commission on Geographical Education, on behalf of the International Geographical Union, published further Declarations as follows:

**The International Declaration on Geographical Education for Cultural Diversity**, which was proclaimed at the 29th Geographical Congress held in Seoul, South Korea in August 2000.

**The Lucerne Declaration on Geography Education for Sustainable Development**, which was proclaimed at the IGU-CGE Regional Symposium in Lucerne Switzerland in July 2007.

**The International Declaration on Research in Geography Education**, which was proclaimed at the IGU Regional Conference held in Moscow, Russia in August 2015.

2 Since 1992 the world has continued to change and with it the discipline of geography and geographical education have continued to develop. Therefore the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union has drafted a new Charter. Compared with 1992 this new Charter is more concise and now includes an Action Plan. Geography educators seeking more detail are advised to consult the 1992 Charter and the Declarations and literature identified on the website of the Commission on Geographical education ([www.igu-cge.org](http://www.igu-cge.org)).

Girls school in Tunisia



# Affirmations

The 2016 Charter affirms the proclamations of its antecedents and asserts that:

- Geography is the study of Earth and its natural and human environments. Geography enables the study of human activities and their interrelationships and interactions with environments from local to global scales;
- While geography often bridges natural and social sciences, it is pre-eminently the discipline that deals with spatial variability, i.e. that phenomena, events and processes vary within and between places and therefore should be regarded as an essential part of the education of all citizens in all societies;
- Geographical education is neglected in some parts of the world, and lacks structure and support in others.

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This 2016 Charter specifically addresses policy makers, education leaders, curriculum planners, and geography educators in all nations and jurisdictions of the world to help to ensure that all people receive an effective and worthwhile geographical education, and to help geography educators everywhere to counteract geographical illiteracy.

## The Contribution of Geography to Education

When taught effectively, the study of geography can fascinate and inspire people. Ensuring the quality of geography in schools is, consequently, an essential duty of policy makers and education leaders internationally. Whether it is through appreciating the beauty of Earth, the immense power of Earth-shaping forces or the often ingenious ways in which people create their living in different environments and circumstances, studying geography

helps people to understand and appreciate how places and landscapes are formed, how people and environments interact, the consequences that arise from our everyday spatial decisions, and Earth's diverse and interconnected mosaic of cultures and societies.

Geography is therefore a vital subject and resource for 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens living in a tightly interconnected world. It enables us to face questions of what it means to live sustainably in this world. Geographically educated individuals understand human relationships and their responsibilities to both the natural environment and to others. Geographical education helps people to learn how to exist harmoniously with all living species.

Geographical investigation both satisfies and nourishes curiosity. Geographical perspectives help deepen understanding of many contemporary challenges such as climate change, water management, food security, energy choices, overexploitation of natural resources and urbanization. Teaching geography serves several vital educational goals. Building on people's own experiences, learning geography helps them to formulate questions, develop their intellectual skills and respond to issues affecting their lives. It introduces them not only to key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills but also to distinctive investigative tools such as maps, fieldwork and the use of powerful digital communication technologies such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

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## **Research in Geographical Education**

Geographical education is vital to equip the next generation of people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices to value, care, and make reasoned decisions for the planet. How best to teach geography to a range of learners is a deep concern and will require significant and ongoing research. We encourage policy makers and geography educators to build capacity to conduct both theoretical and applied research. Specifically we encourage policy makers and geography educators to:

- invest time and resources to both research and its application to the classroom and beyond;
- value current research and knowledge building in the field of geographical education; and
- seek constantly to identify appropriate and relevant research priorities in the field.

Those who teach geography in primary and secondary schools, as well in further and higher education, must be supported by research intelligence. They need the best critical insights into, for example, the use of new technologies, problem based learning strategies and futures education. This is because teachers are the key to improvement in education, and good teachers need the best tools to work with.

Important research questions include:

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- What geography do students need to know? What are their misperceptions and preconceptions? How can we enhance their geographical knowledge, understanding and skills?
- How do we understand students' learning progressions in geography? How are these best calibrated and assessed?
- Which are the characteristics of effective teaching and learning materials and resources in improving the quality of geographical education?
- What teaching methods are efficient and effective in improving the quality of geographical education?
- How can the education of geography teachers be improved to raise the quality of teaching and the levels of achievement in geography in schools?

As a result of such research, curriculum developers and geography educators at all levels will be able to

- refine curriculum, pedagogic and assessment practices used in the teaching and learning of geography;
- develop a 'research orientation' amongst geography teachers and educators that enables reflective and critical engagement



with educational practices, and professional ‘habits of mind’ that demand improvement in the quality of geographical education; and

- clarify the purposes and goals of geographical education, no matter how the geography curriculum is expressed locally.

## International Co-operation

Geographical education, at its best, makes a unique contribution to the emergence of critical global perspectives in people. However, the status of geographical education varies between countries around the world: some people have less access to a quality geographical education than others. One way to support the global development and awareness of quality within geographical education is to promote and encourage international co-operation by sharing limited resources and assisting educators in different countries to learn from each other.

International co-operation amongst geography educators should be promoted and developed in the form of bilateral or multilateral exchanges of experience and research. This should include the exchange of students, teachers, teacher educators, and geographers. Such exchanges may usefully focus on teaching materials, and research-led developments in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Geography educators and teachers in all countries are encouraged to promote such exchanges through the work of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union and through many other geographical societies and associations.

Policy makers are encouraged to stimulate and facilitate international co-operation.

*View on Fuerteventura from Lanzarote, Spain*





# An International Action Plan

In order that all people can benefit from a high quality geographical education as explained above, the International Geographical Union proposes the following action plan for policy makers, curriculum developers and geography educators to improve the quality of geographical education and geography education research internationally.

## 1

**National and local education policy makers, as well as geography teachers at all levels, should make the focus and contribution of geographical education for society more explicit to encourage higher levels of public support for its place in the curriculum.**

Strong arguments for geographical education are:

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- As location is a key factor in life, especially in an era of globalization and the internet, geography with its focus on spatial variability provides a very practical and useful perspective on everyday life.
  - Geography is the discipline where knowledge about locations and regions has its base. The appreciation of unique contexts and circumstances in an interconnected world helps deepen our understanding of human diversity.
  - Geography is concerned with both the local and the global and the interconnections between these scales of human experience.
  - Geography is concerned with human-environment interactions in the context of specific places and locations and with issues that have a strong geographical dimension like natural hazards, climate change, energy supplies, migration, land use, urbanization, poverty and identity. Geography is a bridge between natural and social sciences and encourages the 'holistic' study of such issues.
  - Geography helps people to think critically about sustainable living locally and globally and how to act accordingly.

Geography is much more than learning many facts and concepts. Its focus is on the patterns and processes that help us to understand an ever-changing planet.

- Geographical knowledge and skills, especially when mediated through geospatial technologies offer unique opportunities to make sense of the modern world. Together they form an invaluable 21 century skill set for today and tomorrow.

## 2

**National and local education policy makers should set minimum requirements for geography teaching and the geographical literacy of those who teach geography.**

This requirement is based on the convictions that:

- All students at all levels in primary and secondary school need access to high quality geographical education as an important part of their curriculum.
- As teachers are the key to innovation and quality in education, highly qualified geography teachers should be present in all schools to ensure effective curriculum leadership and implementation. Initial teacher training regulations should specify a minimum requirement for teachers of geography at both primary and secondary schools.
- Geography teachers should be qualified in both physical and human aspects of geography in order that they may integrate both aspects of the discipline as appropriate for primary and secondary levels.

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## 3

**National and local education policy makers and geography teacher associations should develop processes to encourage (inter)national exchanges of meaningful geography teaching and learning practices.**

Enhanced co-operation and exchanges between geography teachers in local jurisdictions, nations and internationally have the potential to:

*Training geography teachers  
in the Netherlands*



- strengthen the position of geography in schools and institutions of higher education;
- clarify the purpose of geographical education for all students; and
- develop innovative and effective pedagogic practices in geographical education.

Comparison of geography standards and curricula from different countries and opportunities for international teacher exchanges should be encouraged in order to disseminate the knowledge, skills and values that are basic to all geographical education.

#### 4

**National and local education policy makers and the geographical education community should develop a relevant research agenda for geographical education and facilitate this research for the development of geographical education.**

Geography teaching in all jurisdictions may be enhanced by ensuring that all aspects of the geographical education enterprise are guided by evidence based on strong, peer-reviewed and relevant research findings. In order to achieve this:

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- Policy makers, curriculum developers and geography educators should review internationally published research in geographical education in order to determine identified best practice and where further research may be necessary.
- Where current research in geographical education appears to be lacking, policy makers and geography educators should develop supportive mechanisms.
- Policy makers, curriculum developers and geography educators should develop mechanisms whereby teachers in their schools can access international geographical education research in their own languages.
- Teachers should be encouraged to undertake quality research in geographical education as part of in-service higher degree study and such research may be enhanced through the work of international research groups that

enable researchers to draw upon the resources, intelligence and expertise which may be unavailable locally.

## 5

**National and local education policy makers and geography teacher associations and teachers should create and maintain a strong professional network structure.**

National and international professional network structures are necessary to open new horizons for geographical education. These networks need support from a large range of educational policy makers, geographical organizations and other stakeholders. In particular,

- Continued professional development in geographical education within and across networks needs to be encouraged and facilitated for all teachers; and
- The visibility of the discipline and appreciation of the significance of geography in education requires a higher media profile. Professional networks locally, regionally, nationally and internationally should be encouraged to engage the public in their work.

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The geographical education of all people should be designed to address local and/or national priorities but be based firmly on the five points outlined above. While it is acknowledged that school curricula around the world will differ in significant ways, it is important that all geography curricula are recognizable around the world as reflecting the best of contemporary geographical scholarship.



*This International Charter on Geographical Education, drafted by the International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education, was endorsed by the General Assembly of the International Geographical Union at the International Geographical Union Congress in Beijing, August 2016.*

*The International Geographical Union commends the principles and practices presented here as an International Action Plan whereby people in all jurisdictions around the world may receive the geographical education to which they are entitled. The International Geographical Union, at its Congress in Beijing in 2016, affirms and proclaims this Charter to all governments and peoples of the world and commends these principles and practices as the basis on which sound geographical education in all countries should be maintained.*

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*Signed,  
Beijing, August 24th, 2016*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kolosov', written in a cursive style.

*Prof. Vladimir Kolosov  
President of the International Geographical Union*

This *2016 Charter on Geographical Education* has been prepared by prof. Joop van der Schee and prof. John Lidstone (co-chairs) on behalf of the IGU Commission on Geographical Education. Draft versions of the 2016 Charter have been discussed with representatives of EUROGEO, EUGEO, AAG, SEAGA and others.

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