

Speech to His Excellency Pierre Henri Guignard, Secetaire General de Paris COP21 - 14th October 2015

From Iain Patton, CEO, EAUC, representing a Global Alliance of the world's university, college and student sustainability networks.

Your Excellency, Mr Guignard,

1. Tonight I place in your hands the hopes and dreams of many millions of students and their university Professors. They dream of a better future. And they don't just dream of a better future, they want to be a part of making a better future.

2. The planet is heading towards a perfect storm of changing climate, population growth and migration, food insecurity, water shortage, an unstable economy and biodiversity loss. We need to find new ways to solve old problems.

3. Tonight I stand before you representing a new global alliance of most of the world's university, college and student sustainability networks. Already 44 networks from Africa, the Americas, China, India, Europe and Australasia, representing our members in 6000 universities and colleges, have joined the alliance, signed this Open Letter to you and have agreed that we are more effective when we collaborate and speak with one voice.

4. Tonight we speak with one voice and we want universities, colleges and students to be placed at the heart of the international challenge to address climate change and sustainability. With the help of COP21 we can have the leadership, policy framework and funding we need to unleash the full creative potential of our students and make our universities pioneers and demonstrators in modelling new climate and SD practices. The Open Letter remains open for more to sign up until the COP in December so you can expect our voice to grow louder.

5. Thanks to the dynamic of HESI and with its strong partnership of UN agencies and signatory universities - HESI now has the support of a global alliance of the world's university networks, EAUC in the UK, GRLI, IAU and many many other university, college and student networks - we reflect the new type of relationships and structures we now need between education, civil society, UN and Governments. We are part of a new way to solve old problems and avoid that perfect storm.

6. Education has the creative power to be the unique catalyst to help society better understand our changing climate and to lead on finding new solutions. We would certainly be very unhappy if education was moved to a non-binding part of the UN Framework convention on climate change agreement. This is what I heard only 1 hour ago.

Tonight, your Excellency, over 6,000 universities and colleges and many millions of students, through this Open Letter, are asking you, Ministers and Governments at COP21 to fully unleash the creative education power of our universities and students as your partners in action for a better climate and a better future.

