



Geneva, May 2002

A brief history of the Alliance of Youth CEOs

What was first called "The Big Six", then the "Big Seven", originated in late 1995 from a joint initiative of Dr Jacques Moreillon, Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, and Mr Paul Arengo-Jones, Secretary General of the International Award Association. A meeting was organized on 28 May 1996 at the World Scout Bureau in Geneva for the Chief Executive Officers of:

- WAGGGS (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts)
- YMCA (World Alliance of YMCAs)
- YWCA (World Young Women's Christian Association)
- IFRC (International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies)
- WOSM (World Organization of the Scout Movement)
- IAA (International Award Association)

to meet HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Founder and Chairman of the International Award Association.

While the original purpose of the meeting was to present the International Award and its youth programme to the other organizations, a general awareness emerged from the meeting that *these six movements had much in common that could and should be harnessed for shared objectives*. It was decided on the spot that another meeting would take place in London in December 1996 for the purpose of "addressing collectively and with one voice" some of the subjects related to "youth development and youth education." (Letter of 16 July 1996 from Paul Arengo-Jones to Jacques Moreillon.)

On 9 December, the same group of CEOs met at WAGGGS' headquarters in London and decided that it would remain an informal group, with no statutes, no chairman and no undertaking to continue beyond the first task which it had set itself: to write, publish and distribute a document on the *educational challenges existing on the eve of the 21st century* and on the answers which our respective movements could give to these challenges. Each CEO had noted a considerable educational deficit throughout the world, as well as a lack of awareness that education was more than just teaching and that the practice of non-formal education was a natural complement to school-based formal education and to family-based informal education. The CEOs felt that all those interested in young people should give stronger support to citizenship-building efforts to, among other things, instil shared values into tomorrow's decision-makers.

After further similar meetings and much correspondence, a text was adopted and distributed jointly in October 1997, under the title "***The Education of Young People. A statement at the dawn of the 21st Century***", in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. The document received a wide and warm welcome, especially from such bodies as UNESCO, from NGOs involved in youth education, and from intergovernmental entities such as the Commonwealth.

On the basis of this positive experience, the informal group re-examined its *raison d'être* in 1998 and decided that it could – and should – still play a role in a broader area than education, in particular in the area of *national youth policies*. Its members had found that many countries did not actually have any long-term, cross-sector national youth policies, and were of the opinion that their organizations' own independent, global, educational approach needed to have a state-supported vehicle to make it a stronger reality. It was noted that many countries lacked a national vision as to the kind of youth they wanted and how such objectives could be reached over a generation. The CEOs felt that their organizations' experience gave them something to say on the subject. In July 1999 the group published and widely distributed a new document entitled "***National Youth Policies - A working document from the point of view of non-formal education***" *youth organisations*", with, as a subtitle "*Towards an autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed youth*", which described the kind of youth to which all countries should aspire, and which the CEOs believe their organizations help give to society. The publication indicated how governments and society could and should go about achieving such results.

A representative of the International Youth Foundation was associated with the later part of their work on national youth policies, and its CEO was co-opted to the group in Paris in February 2000. Consequently, the grouping that outsiders had come to refer to as "The Big Six", became *seven*, namely the CEOs of:

- four worldwide youth movements (WOSM, WAGGGS, YMCA and YWCA),
- one worldwide humanitarian movement with a large youth component (IFRC),
- one worldwide youth programme (IAA), and
- the world's largest youth-focused foundation (IYF).

During that period, some of the CEOs had changed, but the departing officers had always passed the baton on to their successors and the group had remained the informal network that it had started out as five years earlier.

The group again considered its own future and decided that it still had some common causes to champion, the most urgent of which was that of girls and young women. Consequently, a new publication was prepared and again widely distributed in July 2001, entitled "***Girls and Young Women in the 21st Century – Recommendations for action***". The challenge is enormous, and it is too early to say what the publication's effects may have been.

This brief history calls for a few closing comments:

- Today, the notion of "non-formal" education, as part of a global educational approach that does not limit education to schools only, is becoming more and more accepted, including in government circles. But there is still a long way to go before it is universally understood that education is more than just teaching and that virtues such as citizenship or a sense of values are best acquired through methods that are non-formal and which youth movements are best equipped to practise.
- The importance of long-term, consensus-based, cross-sector national youth policies is better accepted by many governments, in particular thanks to the efforts of the UN and its youth division, as well as the Commonwealth and to the organisation of French-speaking communities (Francophonie). But, much remains to be done in many countries before papers become realities.
- As to the needs of young girls and women, they are so immense that the task of improving gender equity is formidable.

By undertaking these activities, there is no doubt that the Alliance of Youth CEOs has contributed to an environment that has enabled a significant level of trust and co-operation to be developed among some of the largest youth movements in the world. This mutual support has resulted in, and hopefully will continue to develop a far stronger global voice for the issues that affect young people. This can only be for the good.

Therefore, in the foreseeable future, the Alliance of Youth CEOs is likely to continue to coordinate their common efforts to try and contribute to a better world for youth, for instance through coordinated field activities to fight HIV/AIDS amongst youth. Each CEO, in his or her own sphere of influence and own way, separately or together, with no special or permanent infrastructure, will pursue common objectives to be determined by the Alliance together.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Moreillon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jacques Moreillon