

Supporting Higher Education in the Developing World

Dear VIU community,

I am writing to seek your financial support for **Academics for Higher Education and Development (AHED)**, for which I am a Representative. **AHED**, based in Montreal, is an international development organization, which was incorporated in 2007 and received charitable status in 2008. Its mission is to support developing countries as they seek to build capacity in higher education. Strong universities and colleges are key institutions in a society; they are critical components needed to educate leaders and professionals to improve the levels of human development.

The Millennium Development Goals, agreed to by 189 governments in 2000, has as its central objective the improvement of human development throughout the developing world. The Millennium Declaration calls for improvements in nutrition, health, the environment, universal primary education, and gender equity. If these goals are to be met, developing countries need to strengthen their universities and colleges, to produce citizens able to address the objectives laid out in the Millennium Goals.

It is of little use to build hundreds of new primary schools if there are no teachers to staff them, or new health care centres without nurses and doctors to run them. The need for trained professionals in the developing world is enormous. Ethiopia, a country with 80 million citizens, has only 1500 doctors; Rwanda with 9 million inhabitants has only 250. This story can be repeated in countries throughout the developing world.

Institutions of higher education provide the trained personnel

- to teach in the schools, to treat the sick, and to prevent diseases through immunization
- to administer the school system, the health care services, and immunization programmes
- to connect through the internet to the world and access its limitless fund of information
- to design and build the roads, dams, water systems, schools and airports
- to start and run the businesses that are the foundations of a country's economic life
- to improve the quality of life of the marginalized, including women, aids victims, the disabled, and minorities
- to improve agricultural capacity and sustainability
- to protect the environment

AHED's approach is to provide volunteers to support projects initiated by colleges, universities, and ministries of higher education in developing countries. **AHED's** volunteers are working and retired professionals and academics, including, faculty, staff, and administrators, from universities and colleges in developed countries. They offer developing world colleges and universities expertise on matters relevant to improving the quality of these

institutions. Although **AHED** has only been in existence for two and a half years, we have already completed one project, have another underway, and have several more projects in various stages of development. Without your support, we will be unable to implement these projects, or to send qualified volunteers to work with institutions of higher education in developing countries.

One such project is with the University of Liberia.

Liberia has recently gone through two devastating civil wars and is now trying to put itself back together. The country has a per capita income just over \$130. 64% of the population lives on \$1 or less a day. 46% of the population does not fulfill its daily caloric requirements and 19% of children are underweight for their age, both signs of malnutrition. Rice is the staple for the country and Liberia imports 95% of it. The UL before the civil war had 1400 faculty members; it is now down to 370. Many of the young people from the militias that fought in the civil war have flooded into UL. Enrolment has burgeoned from 9500 before the civil war to over 16,000 today. During the civil war, UL was destroyed. The books in the library were burned; the chairs and tables in the classrooms were destroyed; and the computers and laboratory equipment was stolen. UL has no one full time to teach mathematics, English, and political science, among other subjects.

AHED has begun to work with UL to support efforts to rebuild the institution. At the request of the president of UL, Dr. Emmet Dennis, **AHED** sent two consultants to the University who did five year, senior management, and visiting academic plans for the University. Dr. Dennis intends to use these plans to reanimate the University. UL's most pressing need, according to Dr. Dennis, is for an Information Technology consultant, who would do a report on the IT needs of the University. There is no internet connection and hardly any computers on campus. **AHED** has just received foundation support to provide UL with the necessary IT specialist. **AHED** will work with UL in the future to provide it with a range of visiting academics to help it get back on its feet so that it can provide Liberia with the agronomists, doctors, engineers, information technologists, etc that it needs to rebuild. **AHED** has committed itself to work with UL over the next several years.

AHED is currently involved in a project in Indonesia.

We have sent a volunteer, Marion Steff, to work for a year with the Centre for Disabilities Studies and Services at the State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The University is a leader in Indonesia in providing disabled students with access to higher education. Currently, the Centre for Disabilities is only able to accommodate blind students. One of Marion's tasks is to support the Centre in providing services for a greater range of disabled students to make it more inclusive. Another of Marion's tasks is to work with the Centre to publicize its work so that it can serve as a model for other institutions of higher education in Indonesia and that it can show how the disabled can play a useful role in Indonesian society. In Marion's own words,

*As the first volunteer of **AHED** sent abroad, I am extremely thrilled that both higher education and disability are now further organized and promoted in Indonesia. The Islamic University UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta had the will to support their students with disabilities to reach their academic potential. They simply needed some guidance for the first steps as no Indonesian universities has systematically facilitated the inclusion of students with special needs. **AHED** has been there to facilitate this original initiative and the model should be extended in the coming years to other academic institutions. I hope **AHED** will be capable of continuing its important work because it makes a difference in the life of many people with its important mission, committed members, and great projects. Your support is needed to continue this work.*

There is much more on the **AHED** [website](#) about Marion's wonderful work in Indonesia.

There are additional project requests that **AHED** is working to implement. Projects in the planning stage include partnerships with the University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine, working at the Faculty of Medicine at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia and with the University of Western Ontario's Faculty of Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine, working at the National University of Rwanda. **AHED** is also working on possible projects at the Material Science Program at Addis Ababa University and at the Medical School at the University of the Gambia.

The cost to support Marion Steff in Indonesia is less than \$10,000 per year. With your support AHED can send many more volunteers like Marion who can make a significant difference working with AHED's overseas partners. Your donation will allow these volunteers to help meet the need in developing countries for educational institutions crucial in building capacity to fill basic needs.

AHED is a charitable organization and can issue tax receipts for donations. Make your cheque payable to "Academics for Higher Education and Development" and send it to me at **Audrey Hansen**, Building 255, Education Abroad office (VIU, 900 Fifth Street, Nanaimo, V9R 5S5). I shall send the cheque and your address to **AHED's** treasurer, who will send you a tax receipt.

AHED was founded and has grown thanks to the passion and dedication of all of those involved. If it is to continue to function successfully, it needs your support now more than ever. I thank you in advance for your financial support for **AHED**.

For additional information, check **AHED's** website at: <http://www.ahed-upesed.org/> or call Audrey at 740-6312 or David Robinson at local 2491.

Regards,

Audrey Hansen & David Robinson, VIU Representatives
Academics for Higher Education and Development