

## AFRICA: Pan-African University to launch in 2010

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The Pan-African University, envisaged as a continental network of institutions training postgraduate students and promoting research, is set to open its doors next February.

Supported by the African Union, the **Pan-African University** (PAU) will not construct a new higher education infrastructure - at least not for now - but will use existing universities as satellites across the continent to train masters and PhD students.

It will eventually comprise a main campus linked to a network of five regional centres, chosen for their academic and research strength and the relevance of their work to Africa's needs. The centres will be located in North, West, East, Central and Southern Africa.

A second satellite centre, focusing on energy and water research, will be launched in Algeria next year. The other regional centres - in the fields of life and earth sciences, basic science and engineering, and governance and social sciences - are expected to open in 2011.

Professor Jean-Pierre Ezin, Commissioner of Science for the 53-member African Union, said during a visit to South Africa recently that the new university was born out of the need to strengthen higher education in Africa and capitalise on the performances of strong universities.

"The major work we are doing is to raise the standards of scientific research and development on the continent," Ezin told *University World News*. He had been speaking at the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) in Cape Town.

The aim is to create a specialist science and technology university that contributes to Africa's development and helps to reverse the continent's under-achievement in science by training scientists, supporting research and encouraging collaboration between scientists in Africa and the diaspora. It will also promote greater collaboration between universities and industry.

The Academic Ranking of World Universities, produced by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, lists only five African universities among the top 500 in the world - four of them in South Africa. The PAU, said Ezin, would hopefully improve Africa's presence in the ranking.

It is expected that the PAU project will cost US\$66 million. Ezin said funding would be obtained from the AU, international partners and host institutions, and would mainly be spent on bursaries for students. He encouraged students to apply for bursaries.

The Pan-African University is growing because of recommendations by the AU that higher education and research in Africa needs to be revived and strengthened.

Since 1979, when African intellectuals recommended that African governments commit 1% of gross domestic product to science and technology, nothing much has changed. Subsequent meetings in 1981, 1987 and 2007 revealed that almost all countries were far from meeting that target due to lack of commitment and a host of other problems.

Rather than wait for African government, said Ezin, the African Union has taken up the task of developing science and technology through the PAU.

The university "must be challenged to produce African-centred knowledge with global appeal and reach, which together with carefully selected knowledge developed by non-African sources should form the basis of education at all levels and fields in Africa," said a June project summary report to establish the PAU.

The new university is emerging on the scene at a time when other pan-African initiatives, such as the African Institute of Science and Technology initiative launched by the Nelson Mandela Institution in South Africa, are doing related work. That project - launched in Nigeria in 2007 and funded by the World Bank - will operate science and technology campuses and affiliated centres of excellence around Sub-Saharan Africa.

The two initiatives should not clash, said Professor Fritz Hahne, director of AIMS in Cape Town. "There is

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no room for competition. There is only room for collaboration. The task is so huge," he stressed.