THE GCREAS QUALITY APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

(TRANSLATION OF ADDRESS BY DR. MARIO GONZÁLEZ TO THE GCREAS NATIONAL COMMITTEE, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)

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Distinguished Alberto Ramírez Cabral, President of the Federico Henríquez y Carvajal University, gracious host of this event; distinguished vice-chancellors and other academic authorities of the Dominican Republic; representatives of other institutions members of the GCREAS National Committee in the Dominican Republic; colleague engineers; ladies and gentlemen present, thank you for joining us today.

I want to take advantage of my visit to this beautiful country of yours and of the kind invitation you have extended me to share your table this morning to, first of all, congratulate you. You know that I have many "flight hours" in the field of engineering accreditation in my home country, the USA; where the importance of ensuring the quality of higher education is an issue that nobody doubts. But my experience dealing with the quality assurance of higher education in engineering on other countries of the Americas has taught me how difficult this trade is, when there are still no conditions in the surrounding culture and society to promote and sustain it fully. Experience has also taught me that facing the challenge of improving the quality of higher education is particularly difficult at the beginning of the efforts: when organizations struggling to meet this challenge are in their nascent phase. It is precisely at this stage - when they have not reached maturity yet - when they are more vulnerable to the lack of support and social recognition, which are the main causes of infant mortality of these institutions. So, you, who have been able to launch and still support GCREAS in the difficult conditions of the Caribbean, deserve my congratulations. You also deserve my respect and my word of encouragement, so you don't give up this fight. Those present at this breakfast, represent the social body on whose support depends that the present effort is not lost. It is because of your support that, on the contrary, it may continue to grow and strengthen, as GCREAS has done and does every day. You are the indispensable constituents of the organization: the base on which its structure rests and on which its future sustainability depends upon.

Only on account of the potential impact of engineers on the safety of society; on the well-being of citizens; and on their confidence in the use and benefits of technology, the engineering profession deserves the best possible social effort to maximize its quality. But you have already understood what is a growing
international consensus; namely, that engineering is more than only a profession. More than an essential branch of knowledge; more than an indispensable trade for the functioning of modern societies; engineering is an engine of economic development: a competitiveness factor, especially critical in the universalized markets of the 21st century. There is little doubt about this in the world today. Rigorous recent statistical studies show a strong positive correlation between the economic progress of countries and the strength of their engineering. In particular, the analysis show that a percentage point of increase in a country of the measurement called “Engineering Index” results in a 0.85% increase in the Gross Domestic Product per capita. On the other hand, the need for qualified engineers has never been greater as the world labor market demands increasingly better qualified engineers: engineers that can, in the words of Mike Milligan, the Executive Director and CEO of ABET: “… work with anyone, anywhere.” Ensuring the quality of engineering education is also, therefore, promoting not only the personal progress of engineers, or the institutional strength of the universities that educate them: it is, above and beyond all, no less than promoting the economic and social development of all our people. You have understood that, and this is why you deserve my congratulations, my respect and my encouragement to sustain the effort of GCREAS.

You have also understood that quality assurance is ultimately a matter of creativity and competitiveness. It is a goal to be pursued voluntarily, from the bottom up. It is not a matter to be compulsively decreed, from top to bottom. Of course, governments and other political superstructures have a crucial regulatory role to play in ensuring the quality of education as a “floor criterion”. That is to say: to enforce the minimal quality that prevents unfair competition between education providers. But the practice of quality accreditation does not seek to ensure a minimum necessary quality. It promotes the highest possible quality. It constitutes, then, a "ceiling criterion" which the actors are not subjected to by external imposition; but that they aspire to by choice: by their own choice, as corresponds to market agents who compete for quality freely and voluntarily. You have understood that, and this is why you deserve my congratulations, my respect and my encouragement to sustain the effort of GCREAS.
It is the voluntary, independent and non-profit agencies that respond not to government mandates, but to the spontaneous demand of the market for quality, such as GCREAS, the ones which are best aligned with the modern concepts embraced by the *Washington Accord*: the superior multilateral agreement in quality assurance of engineering education. The GCREAS assessment, evaluation and accreditation model is rigorous. It properly monitors the *education processes*, but places its main emphasis on ascertaining the *learning results* -the so-called “student outcomes”- that promotes critical skills for competitiveness in the professional life. The GCREAS model is also flexible, adaptable, multicultural and multilingual. It is models of this type the ones called to survive and prosper in the modern trade and business of the post-industrial economies and societies, as GCREAS has done so far in the Caribbean. Whatever it is that you do: do not let it fail in this critical stage, while it is still gathering strength.

Thank you, everybody