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United Nations University Announces Upcoming Departure of Rector Konrad Osterwalder

*His legacy includes UNU postgraduate degree programmes and the
“twin institutes” concept*

The United Nations University (UNU) announced today that its current Rector, Professor Konrad Osterwalder, a Swiss mathematical physicist, will complete his term of office as head of the institution at the end of February 2013. Prof. Osterwalder has served as UNU Rector since September 2007, following a 12-year period as Rector of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH).

UNU was founded some 37 years ago as the academic arm of the United Nations. Its mandate is to support the United Nations and its Member States through research, postgraduate education and capacity building and to serve as a think tank for the United Nations system. UNU is a truly global university, with its headquarters in Tokyo, Japan, and 15 institutes located throughout the world. The focus of UNU’s work is on pressing global problems that are of concern to the UN rather than along the lines of traditional academic disciplines.

During Prof. Osterwalder’s five-year tenure as UNU Rector, several crucial innovations were introduced at the University. Foremost among these has been the development of the University’s own master’s and doctoral degree programmes. In its first 35 years of its operation, the University did not have a mandate to award advanced degrees. This changed in 2009, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted an amendment to the UNU Charter authorizing the University to offer postgraduate programmes and to award master’s and PhD degrees.

Currently, stand-alone and joint postgraduate degree programmes are offered by UNU institutes in Bonn, Maastricht, Macao, Tokyo and Yokohama; several other programmes are under development. These degree programmes focus on key problem areas that are on the agenda of the United Nations, such as sustainability, development and peace; environmental governance and biodiversity; public policy, innovation and development; information and communications technology for sustainable development; environmental risks and human security; and development economics. Although still new, these programmes have generated intense interest among potential students worldwide.

Another far-reaching innovation has been a new approach for strengthening the global outreach of the University and its capacity to promote partnerships between the developing and developed worlds. The new concept, to be realized over the next decade, calls for all UNU institutes to become “twin institutes” — meaning that each institute will have at least two campuses, located in the developed and developing parts of the world, respectively. Both locations will have researchers, teachers and students, with the latter spending part of their study time in both locations so as to promote partnerships between the two groups and allow the students to have first-hand experience of learning and living in both developed and developing parts of the world.

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The first such twin institute involved the integration of the Tokyo-based UNU Institute for Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP) with the Accra, Ghana-based UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA). UNU's newest institute, the UNU Institute for Integrated Management of Material Fluxes and of Resources (UNU-FLORES), will have its twin locations in Maputo, Mozambique, and Dresden, Germany.

Prof. Osterwalder will be succeeded as UNU Rector by Dr. David Malone, current President of the International Development Research Centre, Canada.

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