



*Worldwide International
Student Ministry Network*



*An issue network of
the Lausanne Movement*

NAIROBI NOTICE

Big 5 Calls to Action
from the Global ISM Leaders
Gathering in Nairobi, Kenya

NOVEMBER 2023

Preamble

The purpose of this Notice is to call the global Church afresh to work together in fulfilling the Great Commission leveraging the missional opportunities of International Student Ministry (ISM). In 2004, after meetings in Pattaya, Thailand, the fifty-fifth Lausanne Occasional Paper (**LOP 55**) was published highlighting the issue of international students as an important element in global mission and diaspora missiology. At Cape Town 2010, the global Church affirmed ISM's place in fulfilling the Great Commission as follows:

*We encourage Christians in host nations which have immigrant communities and international students and scholars of other religious backgrounds to bear counter-cultural witness to the love of Christ in deed and word, by obeying the extensive biblical commands to love the stranger, defend the cause of the foreigner, visit the prisoner, practice hospitality, build friendships, invite into our homes, and provide help and services. **The Cape Town Commitment II-C-5***

Today, the Nairobi Notice, compiled and written after the November 1-5, 2023 Global ISM Leaders Gathering in Nairobi, Kenya, reaffirms that ISM remains a 'great door for effective work'¹ in fulfilling the Great Commission. The said gathering brought together 85 ISM leaders representing 55 organisations from 25 countries and was themed *ISM at an Inflection Point: Imperatives and Indicatives*. Our desire is to share the Nairobi proceedings with the global church to move ISM forward.

In light of the fourth Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (September 22-26, 2024 in Seoul, South Korea), the Nairobi Notice addresses the current imperatives of ISM in a post-Covid and rapidly changing world by reminding all of immovable pillars of ISM, highlighting new dynamics of ISM and calling the Church to collaborative action in and through ISM.

This Call to Action is specifically to leaders of churches and denominations, mission organisations and networks who we expect will cascade information and implementation among their rank and file.

1 Cor. 16:9

Context—the ISM World Today

The world of ISM is not the same as it was at the turn of this century, let alone at the turn of the last century when J.R. Mott founded the first national ISM on record, the Committee on Friendly Relations Among foreign Students (CFR) in 1911. In 2000, there were 1.6 million international students globally, today there are 6.4 million of them.²

The last time the Lausanne Global ISM Leadership Network, now Worldwide International Student Ministry Network (WIN), convened in person was September 2017 in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. There were approximately 100 leaders from 25 countries, representing 70+ organisations. Since then, the world in general and the world of international education/international student ministries (ISM) in particular have changed a lot. Moreover, since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been increased use of digital platforms for education and there are other dynamics from the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. This time (November '23 in Nairobi), and it's a first, we had formal representation from all the Lausanne regions of the world including MENA (Middle East & North Africa) as well as Francophone Africa. Meanwhile, the Lausanne Movement is convening the fourth Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (L4) in 2024 and a regathering of ISM leaders to significantly make input into this vital process and event as part of the build-up, a whole year in advance, was strategic and divine.

One of the startling facts since Charlotte '17 is how Africa has now become the continent with the most Christians in the world^[1]. The strategic positioning of Africa, which will have 42% of all the world's youth by 2030 and double current numbers by 2080, makes it strategic for ISM, especially the centrifugal aspect of *sending* missionally-prepared African Christian International Students (ACIS) to unreached people and places globally.

In the near future there will be an even larger movement of African Christian International Students within and beyond the continent as "international students in Africa generally aspire for higher quality educational programmes and experiences than they would otherwise have access to in their home countries."^[2] Additionally, "many countries with rapidly growing youth populations are struggling already to educate their young people."^[3] Since Charlotte '17, China has become the number one destination of Anglophone African international students and France has hit 100,000 Francophone African students. Currently African students are 500,000 globally.

While there have been dramatic shifts in terms of where students are coming from as highlighted above, the fact remains that China and India are still the two dominant forces in sending international students by together contributing one quarter of the world's international students. Furthermore, students from Asia continue to contribute over 50% of international students globally and is projected to be the region that continues to provide the majority of international students globally through 2050.

Historically, 5 out of 7 international students have gone to Europe, North America and Oceania to pursue their studies. However, this trend may be changing as students seek more affordable options for higher education. Today, Asia and Africa are not only dominant sending countries of international students, but also emerging destination regions for international education. Add to this, Latin America, which has countries such as Chile and Mexico which had the fastest year-on-year growth in 2022, means that ISM is indeed an issue for the whole Church globally.

Finally, the impact of Covid-19 in terms of delivery of education to international students is only being discovered. The pandemic caused a major shift to online learning which has lingering effects with more and more universities offering online and hybrid options for students.

Call to Action | The Big Five

In line with the "Big 5" theme Kenya is famous for, here are Big 5 Calls to Action from the Global ISM Leaders Gathering in Nairobi, Kenya:

01 **Christ** - Keep Jesus Christ and the Gospel as the reason and aim of ISM

02 **Commission** - Disciple with the context in mind

03 **Collaborate** - Empower the whole Church to participate in their key role of ISM

04 **Change** - Adapt to the changing world with the unchanging Gospel

05 **Create** - Pioneer new ISM in uncovered places as an urgent necessity

1

CHRIST—Keep Jesus Christ and the Gospel as the reason and aim of ISM

How often in Scripture the Lord calls us to “remember” this, that or the other! And more than once, the New Testament apostles say the following, or its variant: “I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.”³ So let us remember: Christ Jesus is our reason and aim in ISM. He is the core of our ministry and because of this we depend on His Spirit through prayer. Through listening to Scripture, the word of Jesus, we recognize ISM is God’s mission—the work of Jesus by His Holy Spirit in, with, by, through and beyond international students⁴ to the glory of God the Father. While ISM may end up impacting nations, it begins with the personal, intimate walk with God of the ISM worker, be they staff or volunteer, abiding in Jesus.⁵ Then from this deep place of personal devotion, ISM and ISMers reach out to international students and scholars to bring them into the same fiery devotion to Jesus, prioritising the centrality of the gospel amidst a changing world by being Biblically-rooted and focusing on God’s glory among all nations.



While preparing to share Christ from our own overflowing core as ISMers, we need to be reminded also to live like Christ in our conduct. In the words of Lausanne leader Chris Wright, “God’s mission involves God’s people living in God’s way in the sight of the nations.” Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra add their voices: “Mission is not primarily about going. Nor is mission primarily about doing anything. Mission is about being. It is about being a distinctive kind of people, a countercultural... community among the nations.”

³ Philippians 3:1b, NLT

⁴ A modification of Enoch Wong’s definition of ISM

⁵ John 15:1-16

The need to keep Christ and the gospel, God and his glory, as the reason and aim of ISM, all in the power of the Holy Spirit, is well-captured in the vision of Lausanne's Worldwide ISM Network (WIN), and should always be kept front and centre by all, always: "That every international student from every nation in every nation will have the opportunity to encounter the Gospel and become a catalyst for a disciple-making church for every people and place, Christ-like leaders for every church and sector, and kingdom impact in every sphere of society."

2 COMMISSION—Disciple with the future context in mind

International students are people on the move, and as such we must disciple them accordingly. While the Cape Town Commitment focused on host nations bearing witness to international students and scholars, a holistic discipleship of international students expands to also include sending to nations missionally prepared Christian students before they go and host nations preparing returning students to go and bear witness to Christ in word and deed.

Many international students are in fact Christians, and the church in the sending countries must respond accordingly by preparing future international students to view themselves as 'sent ones'. Such work will be done most effectively when sending churches connect to ISM workers and local churches where the students are headed so that they are ready to receive them. Already, movements such as IFES and Kwiverr/Africa to the Rest are developing training curricular to prepare and disciple students before they leave their home countries.



International students must also be disciplined with a future context in mind. Already ISM recognizes the need to minister holistically to students, meeting not only their spiritual needs, but also physical and emotional needs through practical ministry and friendship; both at the individual and systemic level. As we disciple students we must display how Christ impacts every aspect of our lives, including our professional lives, in order to prepare them to be witnesses for Him in their future contexts. As international students graduate, they must be prepared to be witnesses where God leads them next be it the workforce, their home country or to further education. ISM workers can never contextualize the gospel enough for the students; the latter need to be given the head (right mindset and knowledge), heart (right attitude) and hands (requisite skills) to be able to do so for themselves as they go.



3

COLLABORATE—Empower the whole Church to participate in their key role of ISM

i. Collaboration and connection organizationally

As we have seen before there is already a vast number of international students and numbers keep rising. Countries that were historically more sending countries now have also become receiving countries and

international students can be found even in the smaller towns nowadays. If we want to reach them with the gospel we need the whole Church to come alongside and take ownership. Collaboration among churches and organizations is needed not to reinvent the wheel but to help one another. First step would be to spread the vision for ISM to as many churches on the globe as we can. Many churches don't seem to see the importance of students. "They only stay for a short time. Why invest in them?" is sometimes their attitude. Students are in a very important stage in their lives. Decisions are made that will determine the rest of their lives. And international students are in a unique position. They are open to new connections, open to explore worldviews. They need hospitality and friendship. Every church member from old to young can participate in the mission. Thankfully there are churches and organizations that have grasped the vision. They should make an effort to reach as many (other) churches as they can so that the whole church can be empowered to participate in their key role of ISM. E.g. how can they train, empower and commission their youth to go study abroad with ISM mission in mind? We heard a beautiful example of a church in Malaysia that sends their youth out with a commissioning prayer in a Sunday service. The Lausanne WIN team has been able to connect the IFES ISM and the Anglican churches network and other ISM organizations like Cru but still many more connections can and must be made. So this is a call to action for the whole Church and all ISM organizations to share the vision for ISM and to empower and train people on how to put this vision into action.

ii. Among us we have the resources and connections - they must be made known

Already for many decades ISM has been developed resulting in a wealth of resources and connections. What we need is to share them with as many others as possible. A big step forward is the website www.thewinhub.org where we can gather all the resources and connections and make them available to eg. the churches. The website should actively be promoted to direct people to it. This could be done through the Lausanne and partner networks. Another available resource is the Lausanne Global Classroom, which was developed in 2017, and offers vision and training for ISM, and is available on the WinHub (www.thewinhub.org).

iii. **Highlight available Training/Resources/Courses**

As stated above, there is a wealth of resources, training and courses available. How can we highlight them and bring them to the attention of as many partners as possible? Through the WIN team we have representatives of almost every region of the world. Here we share what we have developed and we also did that with the participants of Nairobi 23. Now we call people to share within their regions and countries as much as they can. This can be supported by the use of social media. Another good option would be to work through the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and so reach all the regional and national Evangelical Alliances.

Another area yet to be explored more fully is what is available in universities all over the world. Many interesting studies have been carried out but how can we get hold of them and share them? Again, the WIN Hub is a place where we could gather this information and share it with everyone interested. Also, how can we engage with the universities to study even more topics relevant to ISM e.g. the needs of international students, creating new tools? We call the academic workforce to action to help solve this question.

iv. **Utilise/Leverage intergenerational resources**

We stand on the shoulders of significant others. As stated before, in some regions we have experience for quite some decades now. We should utilise these intergenerational resources. Also, encourage the older generations to write things up, to make resources for social media and to train and mentor the younger generations. We need humility to learn from one another.

4

CHANGE—Adapt to the changing world with the unchanging Gospel

Models and modes of ministry must keep up with the changing world in which we live. Covid-19 served as a catalyst towards increased online and hybrid learning environments which were already being adopted by universities. How we minister to students who are less physically present is a question that will require innovation, discernment and perseverance.



Like all missions and ministries, learning how to use technology for purposes of evangelism, discipleship and community must be learned by those in an ISM context. Some examples within ISM include the ability to connect and meet with students before they come to our countries, or on the other end, the ability to walk alongside 'returnee' students who have moved on from their studies.

There is an urgent need for ministries and churches to resource scholarship and research to better understand the landscape and trends in ISM.

5

CREATE—Pioneering of new ISM is required

Unreached/underdeveloped and special training in intolerant contexts

As we have seen, numbers of international students have been growing and growing and the expectation is that this phenomenon is not yet over. Even in countries where ISM has been developed we still feel that we are scratching the surface and reach sometimes max 1% of the total number of international students present. Moreover, even in those countries there are still campuses and cities unreached or underdeveloped. There are also complete countries where we are unaware of any ISM going on. Mostly it is either a lack of vision and/or resources that underlie these dynamics. Jesus' call to prayer for more workers is still valid today. Open your eyes and look at the fields, they are ripe for harvest. Let's continue to pray for more workers and also partner with them through finance, training, coaching and mentoring. We would like to mention, especially here, the situation of intolerant contexts. In many parts of the world, sadly, there is less freedom to spread the gospel. These contexts need specific training to see how the work can be carried out in the best way possible.



CONCLUSION

Making Christ known among the nations remains the heartbeat of ISM and we believe that international students play a key role in the fulfilment of the Great Commission. Our call is to collaborative action in the global Church to minister through ISM for the Glory of God.

Oh, "That every international student from every nation in every nation will have the opportunity to encounter the Gospel and become a catalyst for a disciple-making church for every people and place, Christ-like leaders for every church and sector, and kingdom impact in every sphere of society."

www.thewinhub.org



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