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THE ROLE OF UNESCO IN THE CHANGING PERSPECTIVE  
FOR INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

by

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## ABSTRACT

The growing awareness of the complexity and globality of social, cultural and ecological interactions of men, nature and society is creating a new and promising environment for international cooperation. The need for multilateral cooperation instruments - both institutional and political - is therefore leading the international community to re-examine the role to be played by the United Nations and daughter organizations within this new context. Science is an essential ingredient for the assessment, management and eventual solution of any of the outstanding problems resulting from the aforementioned interactions. In fact a good share of the currently existing and of the anticipated problems that do now, or may eventually, affect the human race - starting from the environmental problems of global dimensions up to the ethical implications brought forth, for example, by the manipulation of biological materials - results from the increasing use of science in our societies. This is true both for industrialized and developing regions of the world, despite the enormous differences in the intensity of usage that may lead, however, to generalized detrimental effects. To deal with these questions a broadly based science cooperation is urgently called for. Training at all levels and participation of the involved scientific communities in the enormous research effort needed to even start curtailing some of the most detrimental effects of men's activities, must be thoroughly planned and coordinated. It should be recognized that failure to accept this participatory role of the scientific communities, or the adoption of exclusively regulatory approaches to the global problems, will lead only to a reversion to sterile politicization of the U. N. agencies - a trend which - due to the very nature of the survival problems now faced by humanity - the international community is striving to avoid.

It would perhaps be worthwhile to recall briefly that the United Nations were founded 45 years ago as a consequence of the last World War, to guarantee peace through the establishment of an elaborate universal security system. This system is based, on one hand, on the Security Council, moderated by the veto power of the last war Big Five victorious countries and, on the other hand, by the "one country one vote" democratic principle, which is instrumental at all levels of the Organization, and more particularly in the deliberations of the United Nation's General Assembly.

This was followed by the creation of a number of specialized agencies, devoted to particular areas of International concern - such as Food and Nutrition, Health, Labour, etc. and almost immediately by the creation of UNESCO, in 1946.

To the multilateral cooperation fields originally limited in UNESCO to those of Education, Science and Culture - were added later, as a consequence of the tremendous expansion of modern communication techniques - the information and communication sectors.

UNESCO's Governing bodies are the General Conference of the Member States, which approves of the Bienial Program and Budget, as well as the Six Year Medium Term Plans; the 51 Members Executive Board chosen by the General Conference to oversee the implementation of the programmes as well as of other decisions taken by the Secretariat headed by the Director General; the Director General's name is appointed by the Executive Board for the approval of the General Conference every 6 years, reelection allowed.

The launching of an Organization dedicated to the fostering of intellectual cooperation in all realms of knowledge, was considered to constitute the royal road approach to the

promotion of peace and democracy. In fact the upsurge of different totalitarian ideologies in between the two world wars has convinced the international democratic community that ideas were important; that a lasting peace would thrive by the instillation in the minds of men - via education and cooperation - the principles of moral and intellectual solidarity of all peoples, which were thought to constitute the basis for the exercise of the individual freedoms and for the equality of rights of both individuals and of peoples, irrespective of their colour, religion, cultural and political options.

UNESCO's Chart, First Article, concisely sets forth its basic commitment: "...since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

The implementation of these lofty ideals has been however curtailed by the division of the world into two ideological confronting camps - which entailed the Cold War, the erection of the Iron Curtain and the entangling of the richer nations into a wasteful arms race. The democratic ideals enshrined in the United Nation's Chart, as well as in other important and generous normative documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have exerted considerable influence on the access to independence of a vast number of peoples living previously under colonial domination, peacefully or otherwise.

The contradictory nature of these phenomena - the wasteful arms race and the need to make available resources capable of responding to the developmental aspirations of two thirds of the human race have led to East-West and South-North tensions and conflicts, all detrimental to the implementation of the high principle and aims of the United Nation's Systems as a whole.

In spite of these difficulties, UNESCO has indeed asserted its leading role in the field of international intellectual cooperation, by calling the attention of Member States to the global nature of the opportunities and challenges offered by the progress in international understanding and in the exploration of the geosphere, the biosphere and, for communications purposes, of outer space. For instance actions and studies have been effected on:

- The need to formulate and to implement major science programmes dealing with the marine environment, the water resources and on the geological correlations at the global scale; attention to the complex problem arising from the interaction of man and nature was initiated by setting up the Man and Biosphere Programme.

- The promotion of reflections on the strategy of integral development, as distinct from the traditional purely economic approach to national growth, including the launching of studies on the world problematics and on the future trend of social developments.

- The identification and the detailed description of the overwhelming role of science and technology in shaping the present and the future of our society, and, as a corollary, the need to formulate science and technology policies through appropriate institutional mechanisms at the regional and country levels; the role and the responsibility of the scientific community in establishing ethical standards commensurate with the safeguard of individual freedoms and rights, and with the very survival of the human species and of its environment. These aims were highlighted by the 1974 General Conference Resolution on the Civic and Ethical Aspects of Scientific Research, which stipulates in the paragraphs 14 and 15:

14. Member States should seek to encourage conditions in which scientific researchers, with the support of the public authorities, have the responsibility and the right:
- (a) to work in a spirit of intellectual freedom to pursue, expound and defend the scientific truth as they see it;
  - (b) to contribute to the definition of the aims and objectives of the programmes in which they are engaged and to the determination of the methods to be adopted which should be humanely, socially and ecologically responsible;
  - (c) to express themselves freely on the human, social or ecological value of certain projects and in the last resort withdraw from those projects if their conscience so dictates;
  - (d) to contribute positively and constructively to the fabric of science, culture and education in their own country, as well as to the achievement of national goals, the enhancement of their fellow citizens' well-being, and the furtherance of the international ideals and objectives of the United Nations;
- it being understood that Member States, when acting as employers of scientific researchers, should specify as explicitly and narrowly as possible the cases in which they deem it necessary to depart from the principles set out in paragraphs (a) to (d) above.
15. Member States should take all appropriate steps to urge all other employers of scientific researchers to follow the recommendations contained in paragraph 14.

In this connection one should recognize the leading influence of the triple AS Committee on the freedom and the responsibility of scientific researchers in the adoption of this resolution.

In fact UNESCO is contributing to dispel slogans voiced in statements such as: "Science is pure, while its application, decided by and commanded by politicians, may not be", stressing the need to recognize as widely as possible that scientific research expansion at all costs - the ethics of knowledge - is unacceptable, under all circumstances, and should be moderated and albeit carefully controlled by society at large.

- UNESCO's fight against the illiteracy; the promotion and planning of education at all levels;

- the creation under its patronage and in its field of competence of a large number of international non-governmental organizations;

- the formulation of curricula appropriate to the dissemination of human rights teaching. This long list of worthy activities and initiatives thus represents a considerable contribution by UNESCO to international intellectual cooperation.

Specifically in the Science and Technology sectors, the pioneering role of UNESCO in the dissemination of information and on the promotion of research and training on renewable energies, biotechnology and on informatics is well recognized.

In spite of these achievements the international political situation unfortunately has not been conducive to the expansion of intellectual cooperation. Firstly the ideological clashes between East and West frequently paralyzed the Organization, affecting the formulation and the implementation of its programme and actions. Mutual accusations of promoting the politicization of UNESCO and the profound difference concerning important and sensitive issues such as the concept of individual and people's rights; diverging attitudes towards information and communication policies, as well as the Organization's stand on apartheid and on

the Middle-East conflict, have all frequently led the majority of the developing countries (loosely organized in the so-called 77 Group and/or in the Non-Aligned Movement) to receive in the Executive Board, the support of the Socialist Group. The divergent evaluation of these issues further aggravated the political climate, leading the Organization to an unprecedented crisis dramatically epitomized by the withdrawal from UNESCO of two major founding nations - the United States and the United Kingdom - together with Singapore.

The consequent drastic reduction of the budget - which was further affected by the USA dollar devaluation - and, which strongly impeded program implementation and, still worse, the de-facto absence of the all important American and British intellectual communities has put UNESCO and the ideas and ideals it stands for in great jeopardy.

Admittedly the states that remained within UNESCO have exercised great efforts to satisfy both the United States and the United Kingdom in responding to their grievances. The adoption of a profound reform programme prepared on the recommendation of a Temporary Committee created to that effect, as well as the appeal addressed to the countries concerned to remain in the Organization were regretfully of no avail. A 30% cut in all expenses was adopted by the Executive Board and by the General Conference assembled first in Sofia and later in Paris, in 1985 and 1987.

Ironically the limited resources put at the disposal of UNESCO both well before, as well as after the departure of the aforementioned states, instead of producing the desired concentration of efforts have on the contrary led to a greater



pulverization of the activities. It appears that the sheer disparity between the remaining resources and the means necessary to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the poorer Member States, together with the growing demands for the solution of problems of a global nature which faces humanity as a whole, were so big compared to the very modicity of the financial resources put at the Organization's disposal, that a serious planning exercise became extremely difficult.

In fact this situation added to the disarray and to the deep disappointment provoked by the inaction that followed two imposing United Nation's InternacionaI Conferences on Science and Technology held at Geneva (1963) and Viena (1979).

The urgency of the problems already raised at Geneva and later the increasing awareness that the social, political, economic and cultural impacts of the use of Science and Technology calling for determined action have led the international community, through a United Nations General Assembly Resolution, to organize in 1979, the Viena Conference. This meeting which resulted from careful and lengthy preparation, led to the formulation of the Viena Plan of Action, the results of which will shortly be analyzed by the United Nations Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development. This Committee is constituted no less than by the full United Nations General Assembly itself.

As I have pointed out above, the favourable expectations placed on the Plan of Action approved at this Conference have revealed to be unjustified. Appart from the creation of the New York based United Nations Centre for Science and Technology for Development - again assisted by a high level Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for the Development - to which I had the honour to belong for four years - little has been

done. Firstly because of the paucity of the financial resources ascertained at Viena, and which have never been put fully at the disposal of the System envisaged by the Conference; secondly, because most of the conclusions arrived at a number of high level pannels organized by the Centre have not been effectively implemented; neither by the United Nations' Sister Organizations, nor by the Member States themselves.

The verification that no truly important problem could be tackled with the resources presently available to UNESCO - like the prevailing illiteracy that affects a billion of human beings, and like those problems affecting the global environment, to cite only a few at random - leads inevitably to a temptation to spread-thin the existing funds, in dealing with the all and sundry problems affecting education, science, culture, information, communication, technology and the physical environment, which are only superficially touched upon to placate one's bad conscience.

While there is little doubt that this diversity and disparity of approaches called for the corrections that are currently being applied at the Organization by the Executive Board and by the Director General, the fact remains that UNESCO's budget is ridiculously small to face the immense task set forth for it by the International Community.

The present Administration has coined the motto "do less to do better" which certainly meets with my approval, as far as it constitutes a realistic administrative prescription adequate to the existing resources. However the gauge of our resources must be our needs, which demand, from all of us, human beings - men and women of good will - a new spirit of cooperation, based on novel moral and intellectual solidarities indispensable to deal with this truly menaced planet of ours.

A planet where indeed prevails the solitude, the anonymousness and despair of individuals in the urban environment; the drug abuse and criminality; the wiping out of the cultural identity and the uniformization of life under the impact of new communication technologies; the imminent dangers originating from the genetic manipulation of living matter; the loss of individual privacy; the disorder and the instability of the world economy; the prevalence of scientific research devoted to war; the pollution of the atmosphere, of the land and of the oceans; the prevailing inconsiderate energy production and consumption patterns; the destruction of the forests and the drastic reduction of the world genetic pools through human actions; the ignorance, mal-nutrition and the sheer poverty and misery of two thirds of the earth population - which through the greater fertility of the poor, shall soon enough attain an still increased share of the humanity.

Thus we need to do more and do better. To this end we need increased resources. We must resolutely try to convince all countries to shun away from the present situation where the richer countries do not wish to cooperate, locked as they still are, into their mortal divisions, while the poorer, needier countries desiring to cooperate, cannot afford to do so.

Suffice it to say that the present debt burden of some of the most advanced developed countries attain, percentwise of their GNP, the double of the war reparations imposed on Germany after World War I.

Needless therefore to evoke the similitude of the present chaotic state of most of Latin America with that of the Post War I Germany. This engenders of course great difficulty for Latin America to continue to actively participate, as it did in the past, in the necessary renewal of UNESCO.

The evolving international situation however offers some gleam of hope as a result of the present abatement of East-West tensions. According to some apparently competent evaluations, the prospects for the First and Second World economies seem favourable, should the on-going disarmament initiatives gain momentum. This analysis actually identifies considerable savings accumulated in the Soviet Union as a result of a market characterized by long-standing scarcity of offer. It is estimated that these savings could reach up to 8 hundred billion dollars. The impossibility of injecting this liquidity into the domestic market would prompt the Soviet after joining the IMF, the World Bank and other multi-lateral financial organizations, to promote the ruble convertibility. These measures would offer the Soviets the opportunity to proceed to considerable investments abroad.

Likewise the reduction of tensions between the superpowers would lead to considerable improvement of the American economy.

According to this scenario a new dynamic, epoch-making, development era would ensue, affecting the world at large. Development would however take place mostly under the auspices of and following the rules established by international multilateral institutions. National governments choices would lose their relative weight entailing accordingly a double danger for the developing countries options. Firstly the reduced roles of national governments might entail the temptation to compensate this loss by an increased control of individuals and of institutions representing their interests and rights. Secondly control by multilateral international institutions might generate patterns of growth detrimental to the cultural diversities and identities of countries and regions.

Finally the style of growth - sustainable and environmentally sound - as described by the current jargon - would certainly call for competent, expert, objective and neutral advice to avoid

confrontation and political tensions between developing countries and the international development agencies. Should this scenario indeed shape the world in the coming years, then UNESCO's role should become prominent in:

1. Asserting itself as the privileged forum for the formulation and the coordination of actions to deal with the geosphere and biosphere global issues. In this context, the energy options both for the developed as well as for the developing countries, will become especially relevant.
2. Strengthening of its normative role on the acceptable ethical constraints on the use of Science and Technology, particularly as regards the possible limits to be imposed on the manipulation of genetic material; and on the implications of informatic and communication on the exercise of the human rights.
3. Safeguarding the cultural and natural heritage of mankind.
4. Promoting the access to knowledge through education at all levels, as human resources of the highest quality constitute the key element in the fostering of development and of international understanding.
5. Reinforcing the social and human sciences and their articulation with the natural sciences.
6. Promoting the free flow of ideas and of individuals, particularly via young people with a view to stimulate the exercise of and the respect for the human rights, values and cultural diversities.

Admittedly UNESCO is already concretely engaged in the promotion of all these endeavours. However what it does is still too little in a world in which the accumulated needs of the majority are simply fantastic.

It should also be recalled that UNESCO is not alone. It should further reinforce its links with the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, with UNICEF, with the World Labour Organization, with the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development and, last but not least, with the United Nations University, bearing however in mind that UNESCO is the thinking head as well as the moral guardian of the whole United Nations family. Reflexions and actions should catalyze the will of the states and of every thinking man and woman to effectively create the defenses of peace in the minds of men.

In short, to achieve the many tasks that will ensue the new international political environment referred to above, coordination of all United Nations agencies involved with Science, under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development is essential. It seems to me that the decade evaluation of the Vienna Programme of Action will reveal its basic and lasting validity. It is to be hoped that the reconsideration of the whole financing system which has proved to be infelicitous, will be carried out.

The closer involvement of the World Bank as well as of the regional banks with the implementation of Science and Technology cooperation activities would be instrumental in giving new impetus to the role of the United Nations.

As regards UNESCO, I venture to say that a new medium term plan, whose principles have been set by the Executive Board and the Secretariat, to be submitted next near to the General Conference, shall offer a good basis to start rebuilding confidence on the Organization.

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The plan is delineated to meet, in the fields of competence of the Organization, the three main challenges of our time: peace, development and the protection of environment, with a view to reduce the gap which separates industrialized and the developing countries.

I should think that the time has come for the American and the British communities to help us, intellectuals of the rest of the world, to construct the defences of peace in the minds of men through a reinforced and generous intellectual cooperation.