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UNESCO FACES CHANGES

»The UN is drowning in its own words and suffocating in its own documentation.«

This opinion, voiced by one of the former presidents of the General Assembly, vividly illustrates a problem that for years now has been confronting the organizations in the UN system. It is the lack of efficiency and a more effective implementation of decisions and recommendations adopted in numerous UN bodies and organizations.

All forms of inefficiency common to huge bureaucracies have emerged as a result of the expansion of activities of the UN system over the years. A recent report noted the following: in 1970 alone the UN spent \$ 29,287,840 to produce 773,086,990 pages of documentation (which meant that Member States had to digest some 600 pages daily in order to ensure a meaningful participation in decision-making and the debates); in the past 10 years 124 new groups, committees, commissions, etc., have been set up under the General Assembly (many of which have a tendency to remain in existence indefinitely); in the course of 1970 UN groups held 6,570 meetings (frequent complaints were lodged about coinciding schedules); the staff of the UN Secretariat had reached a figure of 4,200...

Corresponding enquiries into the operation of other UN bodies and organizations would undoubtedly disclose similar facts and figures.

The need to co-ordinate and reform the UN system of organizations, so as to enable it to respond to changing demands and ever-growing responsibilities, has been widely recognized in all UN forums in recent years. It constitutes part of a broader action designed to improve the effectiveness and strengthen the role of the United Nations and its agencies as a whole.

However, the outcome of these reforms will greatly depend upon several important factors. Firstly, the ability of the United Nations, as the

most suitable framework for concerted international action, to come to grips with the fundamental issues of peace and economic and social development facing humanity today. Unfortunately, the weakest points in the United Nations Organization are the lack of political will and failure on the part of some Member States to abide by the principles of its Charter. Secondly, there is a necessity for further democratization of international relations and of the Organization itself. Only through the full and equitable participation of all nations, large and small alike, will the United Nations Organization be able to gradually overcome existing differences and to act as a universal instrument for promoting international co-operation.

In light of these developments, the usefulness of UNESCO to the international systems was re-examined and re-assessed by the General Conference at its sixteenth session. It was widely recognized that, despite imperfections and limitations, UNESCO has rendered a valuable service to the world community in promoting peace and social progress within its spheres of influence. But in order to become a living reality in the Member States, the Organization should intensify efforts to adapt its structures and methods of work to the new changes, and to provide more effective ways and means to increase the participation of the international intellectual community in formulating, implementing and evaluating its programmes. The General Conference, consequently, endorsed a long-range policy of decentralization and reorganization, rationalization of activities and reduction of staff and corresponding expenditures.

Although differences in attitude exist concerning decentralization and the means to be employed to that end, there seems every prospect that this trend will continue to develop and broaden the the action of UNESCO in the Member States, in many of which, despite its capacity to adjust to changing needs and circumstances, the Organization seems to be detached and remote from the immediate interests and concerns of the governments or the intellectual community. This process will by all means require a flexible and diversified approach — and time to gain the necessary experience from which to draw the guidelines for further action.

UNESCO was created in London more than twenty five years ago with the ultimate purpose of contributing to peace and security, and the promotion of human rights, through co-operation in education, science, culture and communication. From 1946 to 1972 the number of Member States

of UNESCO has grown from 30 to 125, while its resources have increased from \$ 6,950,000 a year to \$ 89,898,650 for the present biennial period 1971—1972. Following the influx, between 1960 and 1962, of a large number of newly independent Member States from Africa and Asia, UNESCO increasingly turned to international action for the promotion of development and aid to development. As a result of these trends and the pressing needs of the developing countries, priorities were established in the programme by the General Conference for education in 1960 and thereafter for science and technology in 1964. In view of the problems imposed by the world crisis in education and the accelerated advancement of science and technology, this orientation of the programme is very likely to continue in the future, along with a gradual expansion of the remaining sectors i.e. those of communication, culture and the social and human sciences.

It may well be said that UNESCO would undeniably be incapable of fulfilling its function without the support and assistance of National Commissions in the Member States. As provided for by Article VII of UNESCO's Constitution, National Commissions, comprising representatives of governments and of national groups concerned with problems of education, science, culture and communication, have been established in 122 Member States as liaison and advisory bodies to their governments in matters relating to the Organization. Apart from their responsibility to governments and corresponding governmental bodies, the significance of National Commissions lies above all in their ability to spark off initiatives, to channel and translate them into action, by associating various professional groups, specialized institutions, non-governmental organizations, researchers or other suitable agencies, more closely with the main objectives and activities of the Organization.

To carry out a meaningful policy of decentralization, both UNESCO and the Member States will have to rely heavily on the National Commissions, their experience and spirit of imagination. The greater possibilities for action now open to them, place the National Commissions in a new position and necessitate the clarification and adjustment of their role to contemporary needs and demands. Apart from acting in advisory capacity and as bodies of liaison, the National Commissions have over the years, parallel with the growth of UNESCO's programmes in volume and complexity, assumed additional responsibilities, namely those of information and execution. This has given rise to a growing conviction among a large number of National Commissions

of the need to amend Article VII of the Constitution with a view to defining their role more precisely in light of the current practice and future requirements. The intention is to secure strong moral and financial support of governments and professional circles concerned for the National Commissions. The sad truth is that in a great number of countries, due to lack of staff and financial resources, the secretariats of National Commissions very frequently are not in a position to cope effectively with operational problems and ever-growing demands.

The process of an increased participation of Member States and National Commissions in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of UNESCO's programme will depend to a great extent upon the specific conditions and different preoccupations and priorities in each country. Not all National Commissions have developed on similar lines, nor are they all equally capable of undertaking the mounting responsibilities emanating from the new policy. Nevertheless, decentralization will imply a number of general modifications and changes of relevance to all Member States.

These problems were considered in detail at a restricted meeting of experienced members of National Commission secretariats, which was convened in Ljubljana from June 21 to 26 1971 by the Yugoslav Commission for UNESCO, in co-operation with the Director General of UNESCO, and in accordance with a special resolution of the Sixteenth General Conference to that end.

The report of the meeting contains a number of specific suggestions and recommendations on the practical means of more effective communication and co-operation between the Secretariat of UNESCO and those of the National Commissions. The results of the Ljubljana meeting were carefully studied and fully endorsed by the regional conferences of National Commissions of the Western Hemisphere (Ottawa, August 1971), Asia (Tokyo, March 1972) and Europe (Bucharest, May 1972).

The importance of an improved and continuous dialogue between the National Commissions and the Secretariat was underscored by these conferences, as well as by the Executive Board of UNESCO at its 88th session. At the present stage, the dialogue is expected to include a mutual exchange of information and consultation on problems, such as those related to missions of UNESCO expert and Secretariat members, participation of national consultants and experts at inter-

national meetings, association of National Commissions with UNDP projects, information on activities in UNESCO and corresponding UN bodies and agencies, etc.

However, if the Member States and their National Commissions are to play a more dynamic role than in the past in framing the policies of UNESCO and linking its programmes with the problems and efforts of their professional communities, then this dialogue should be significantly extended and deepened in the future in the area of programme formulation, implementation and evaluation. This would require a new relationship in which the National Commissions would be involved in a higher degree in activities that matter to them, whereas the work-load of the Secretariat would be lightened by enlisting the best national talent and experience from the Member States. The National Commissions should, therefore, mobilize a wide range of highly qualified experts who would render specialized service to the Secretariat in short and medium-term programming, in working out criteria for evaluation, so as to concentrate on projects of genuine interest to Member States and eliminate others of minor significance, in elaborating measures for a more rational use of the Organization's manpower and finances, etc. This should be shared by a Secretariat of the highest competency, of a rotating composition, enjoying freedom for enquiry and independence in the expression of its ideas.

The role of National Commissions in programme formulation and implementation needs also to be strengthened through a closer association with UNESCO's regional activities. Although the conclusions and recommendations of international and regional governmental conferences (in the 1971-1972 biennium alone, UNESCO convened 214 such conferences) constitute one of the bases of the Organization's short and medium-term programmes and the National Commissions are asked to give effect to them, co-ordination and mutual information are frequently lacking in this respect. The objectives, programmes and activities of regional centres or institutes for teaching and research that have been established at the initiative of UNESCO, also need to be reexamined in light of recent decentralization measures. Over more than 20 years, UNESCO has invested \$ 27,000,000 into the work of 59 such centres and institutes in various parts of the world. In some areas, these regional institutions are faced with serious financial difficulties, their programmes are inadequately geared to the current development needs of res-

pective regions, and they have little or no contact with National Commissions and corresponding agencies in the Member States.

Much scope for useful regional and multilateral co-operation is also provided by the large multidisciplinary programmes of international scientific co-operation (e. g., "Man and the Biosphere", World System of Scientific Information, International Geological Correlation Programme, etc.), which have been launched in recent years by UNESCO and corresponding agencies. To what extent and in what way the scientists, specialists and their professional associations will be involved in this collaboration, will depend a great deal upon the capability of National Commissions to animate the national authorities and the scientific community for action, aimed at establishing national objectives and programmes and linking and harmonizing them with international programmes.

As envisaged in the UNESCO Draft Programme and Budget for 1973—1974, one of the major means of involving the National Commissions in the implementation of UNESCO's programmes will be to entrust them, under contract, with the execution of projects that will fall within the scope of their interests and capabilities. The ultimate responsibility for the intellectual quality and international character of projects to be implemented would rest with UNESCO. Provision is also made to conclude contracts with some of the 277 international non-governmental organizations with which the Organization maintains relations in varying degree. In view of the important part that international nongovernmental organizations play in the diffusion of UNESCO's ideas, this policy is designed to improve and intensify their contacts with the National Commissions and the corresponding national organizations in the Member States.

National Commissions and international non-governmental organizations will be able to conclude contracts for the following types of projects in the different sectors of UNESCO's programme: studies, monographs, research projects designed to meet the needs of one or more Member States; symposia, seminars and other meetings of specialists and dissemination of information on the results of these gatherings; the preparation of various information materials for the general public. A variety of solutions are offered to the manner in which these projects could be carried out by the National Commissions — individually or collectively, in collaboration with one or more specialized institutions, groups of researchers, non-governmental organi-

zations, or National Commissions from other Member States. Although the forthcoming biennium will be an experimental period, it may be expected that this form of participation of National Commissions in the implementation of programmes will produce a wealth of ideas and possibilities for future courses of action.

It has been stated that "all organizations grow arithmetically but increase their output of paper-work geometrically". Without exception, the organizations in the United Nations family seem to be afflicted with the same disease, in a lesser or greater degree: documents and reports are produced in immense quantities to reach a very limited number of reading audiences, while a multitude of resolutions are shelved away as soon as they are passed.

There is, fortunately, a growing awareness in the United Nations Organization of the rising need to seek improvements in the system and to ensure efficiency and an effective implementation of decisions and programmes. The methods and means of action will undeniably depend upon the character and activity of each organization.

Thanks to the National Commissions, as its main channels of information and execution, — associated with a broad number of professional groups in the intellectual community, universities and specialized institutions, non-governmental organizations, and state authorities concerned with its specific field of action, — UNESCO is in a position to be heard far and wide, and to open its ears to the trends and needs in Member States, which should define and permeate its work and activity.

It remains to be seen how far-reaching and how deep an effect these changes will have on the Organization. The aims and objectives that it stands for and the machinery at its disposal to translate them into reality, are an assurance that UNESCO should be able to meet the challenge, provided the will and firm determination of all the partners in the undertaking.