

## The rationale for UNESCO's co-operation with Parliamentarians

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The article below outlines UNESCO's strategy for co-operation with Parliamentarians throughout the world and formed the basis on discussions at a round table meeting on "Then dialogue between UNESCO and the Parliamentary Community" the organization held in Paris in November 2001. On that occasion, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was represented by then Secretary-General, Mr Arthur Donahoe, QC.

The Paris meeting allowed for the redefining of the terms of dialogue between the organization and Parliamentarians and the participants formulated concrete propositions to reinforce the co-operation between the two sides. Following the contributions of all participants, it was felt by all those present that they had been sensitized to the concerns and goals of their respective organizations.

Parliamentarians as the elected representatives of their fellow citizens play a key role in contributing to the promotion of peace and development through areas which are the domain of UNESCO – namely, education, science, culture and communication. As national, regional or international Legislators, they are essential partners for attaining UNESCO's constitutional objectives.

UNESCO's latest Medium Term Strategy (2002-7) identified a number of strategic objectives whose attainment will be the leitmotiv of all future activity. The unifying theme contributing to peace and human development through education, science, culture and communication is sustained by three strategic thrusts:

- a) developing and promoting universal principles and norms, based on shared values, in order to meet emerging challenges and to protect the "common public good";
- b) promoting pluralism through recognition and soft guarding diversity with the observance of human rights; and
- c) promoting empowerment and participation in the emerging knowledge society through equitable access, capacity-building and sharing of knowledge.

The organization created the mechanisms to provide the permanent dialogue and collaboration with Parliamentarians from all member states. The Programme for Relations with Parliamentarians was launched in December 1994, with the express aim of creating strong links between UNESCO and parliamentary bodies. Today, some seven years after the launch of the Programme, UNESCO enjoys active co-operation with Legislators and their associations at national, regional and international levels. However, much remains to be done given the new orientations of the Medium Term Strategy for 2002-7. This document, which is designed to constitute the blueprint for the organization's action in the coming years, clearly articulates the complex challenges of the global setting in which it must operate.

Twelve strategic objectives have been identified for the main domains of UNESCO's competencies, while two crosscutting themes target critical development issues: the eradication of poverty and the contribution of information and communication technologies to the construction of a knowledge society

Very significantly, the Medium Term Strategy (MTS) places unprecedented emphasis on the importance of alliances and partnerships amongst all actors and groups crucial for the success of the development process. Realistically, due to the number, scope, and complexity of issues around the globe, UNESCO cannot attain all the objectives within its field of competence. UNESCO will therefore tighten the links with its sister agencies of the UN system, and more specifically UNICEF and UNDP, with whom it will co-ordinate and co-operate more closely in the future. Parliamentarians, as members of civil society, play a key role in helping to achieve UNESCO's objectives for the MTS.

These political actors will help consolidate a pivotal constituency for the organization through their capacity to provide essential linkages with the executive and legislative branches of governments with respect to the various aspects of UNESCO's mandate and activities.

#### The Rationale for UNESCO's co-operation with Parliamentarians

The last decade of the 20th century produced an unprecedented evolution in domains related to development – political, social, economic, cultural, and technological. This brought to the forefront the necessity of forging new alliances which would enhance the participation of civil society in decision-making processes. Given the complexity of relating national problem-solving to global trends, Parliamentarians have gained a new awareness of their responsibilities as lawmakers. As elected representatives of civil society and due to their interface with, the executive and judicial branches of their governments, they are able to introduce effective legislation and to oversee its application. Regional Parliaments, such as the European Parliament, with their ever increasing capacities, are also vital partners in the attainment of UNESCO's objectives, due to both their institutional role as well as their role as standard-setters for national Parliaments. In this regard, their role is unique and their effectiveness must be optimized by UNESCO.

Three main trends underpin the rationale for greater involvement with Parliamentarians:

- the increase in the number of democratic systems and of Legislative Assemblies worldwide;
  - the challenges presented by the global economy to national development agendas;
- and
- a common strategy for co-operation by the UN and other multilateral agencies.

Over the past 50 years and across all regions, the world has witnessed the emergence of newly independent states, most of which have sought to establish democratic governments and Legislatures. These fledgling democracies and their experiences of fundamental procedures and management have been fragile, and often, need very strong support in every sphere of social development.

For democracy to properly underpin national development, the role and powers of all branches of government must be robust. Thus, strong Legislatures must interact with efficient executives and impartial judiciaries. Moreover, Legislative Assemblies must be the driving force in all policy-making processes. At the country level, these can be national or, in federal systems,

representative of states or provinces. Among their essential interlocutors are municipal authorities which govern local body politics.

However, today, national development agendas are inevitably influenced by global trends which can be social, economic or cultural in character, e.g. peace and security, trade and wealth flows, information and knowledge management, environmental change, immigration patterns and health conditions. Consequently, national Parliamentarians face more complex perspectives as their own country policies are increasingly affected by much wider and more powerful forces.

This phenomenon, now commonplace, has produced a profound change in the priorities of the orientations of development agencies, both within the United Nations system and its partners. Since the United Nations Millennium Declaration of September 2000, the single common emphasis has been on poverty reduction. This is now tackled by each agency in accordance with its own specific mandate. Poverty still affects half of humanity to some degree. Certain social groups – the illiterate, the unemployed, women and youth - are especially vulnerable in this regard. Overall, the Poverty Index indicates that the wealth/poverty gap has virtually doubled in less than a decade. In contrast, 80 per cent of the world's wealth is concentrated among 20 per cent of the population. Given the dangers posed by this widening gap, nations are seeking to shape their destinies through a better balance between growth and equity – in the words of the new Medium Term Strategy, to humanize globalization.

UNESCO can contribute in significant ways to this challenge because of its special competencies. For example, education and knowledge have become a prime force of social transformation; scientific and intellectual co-operation have become critical for human security and progress; ethical reflection must be promoted in many new areas of scientific discovery; in the domain of culture, challenges include preserving the world's heritage, fostering dialogue between civilizations and promoting cultural diversity; communication, media development and broader public access to information and knowledge are priorities. In this respect, UNESCO provides five key functions: a standard-setter, a laboratory of ideas, a clearing house, a capacity builder and a catalyst for international co-operation.

In short, UNESCO holds an irreplaceable position on the international scene and as such can greatly contribute to globalization to work for all – an objective which engages lawmakers at every level of society and necessitates their outreach to other constituents in civil society.

#### Criteria for establishing linkages

UNESCO has four clear principal criteria for its approach to co-operation with Parliamentarians:

- linkages must be multiparty in character, whether they concern interface at the national, regional or international level;
- at the country level, this co-operation should be conducted in close consultation with the National Commission for UNESCO, and should reach out to the organization and other partners in civil society;
- co-operation should focus on UNESCO's areas of competence, and more specifically with the objectives of the new Medium-Term Strategy and Programme as these interface with the challenges of International Development Goals; and
- the overall outcome of co-operation should be the promotion of peace and development at the national, regional and international level.

#### Multiparty outreach

The emphasis on contacts with all parties reiterates the inextricable linkage between global and national issues as part of the current development dynamic. Today, questions related to peace and security, health and environment, education and knowledge and cultural diversity cannot be understood, let alone resolved, at the level of the individual state. There must be references to global trends, policy imperatives and best practices in terms of effective solutions.

These concerns are never limited to one political party or set of interests. Since they are nationwide in their impact, they require a multiparty approach to the processes of analysis, debate and policy formulation.

#### Role of National Commissions

National Commissions are the unique network of government-based entities responsible for the visibility of UNESCO in each member state and for outreach to all groups of civil society. They should co-operate with Parliamentarians in order to sensitize them to the mission, priorities and activities of UNESCO and to associate them with specific programmes and projects of the organization, particularly with their follow-up and impact at the national level.

To this end, national lawmakers should be invited to sit as members of each National Commission on a multi-party basis. This is the case when National Commissions are realizing their full potential as catalysts for outreach to civil society.

Furthermore, National Commissions can help articulate guidelines for national policy makers in areas related to UNESCO's competence. This should be especially effective since the impact of globalization is felt most acutely at the national and local levels. A special advocacy role can and should be played by the Presidents of National Commissions who are often present or past Ministers and so well placed to sensitize governments to issues related to UNESCO's domains of expertise,

#### Attainment of the International Development Goals

The last decade of the 20th century saw the emergence of a worldwide consensus on key challenges for humankind on social, economic and cultural issues. These resulted from a series of global conferences on major development issues. UNESCO's own strategy towards these issues is stated within the United Nations Millennium Declaration (September 2000) which defined a set of International Development Goals to be reached by 2015. These include the reduction of extreme poverty and of infant and child mortality rates, the achievement of universal primary education and of gender equality, wider access to reproductive health, and the reversal of the loss of environmental resources.

In order for such international goals to find their national equivalents, Parliamentarians must clearly articulate this list of priorities in the national development policies of their own states. This interaction further reinforces the linkage between domestic and global strategies for development.

#### National peace and security as components of global development

A new world order, to be based on the concept of the global public good which ensures more equitable participation in democracy and development, cannot be attained unless these same objectives are being pursued at the level of each nation state.

Parliaments are the guardians of national order, notably of its democracy, peace, security and social development. Even if the new millennium has its share of uncertainties it has also brought several encouraging indicators. One particularly important factor is the increase in the number of democratically elected Parliaments. This trend is noticeable throughout Eastern and

Central Europe, Latin America, Central and South-East Asia. Democratic governments, supported by their elected representatives, lead a significantly greater number of countries. As they make their first steps as independent and democratic states, they require support from their counterparts worldwide. Many of the problems faced are those which lie within UNESCO's areas of competence and are encountered by all other states worldwide. Since these issues impact on development policies, each state seeks a common avenue of access to information, one which is open to all national decision-makers, regardless of their partisan political views.

The Parliamentary Friends of UNESCO Leagues, as well as parliamentary associations at regional and international levels, exist to promote multiparty debate and co-operation in order to ensure that the importance of national peace and security is recognized as a *sine qua non* of global development and of its capacity to benefit each nation state.

The scope and levels of UNESCO'S co-operation with Parliamentarians

The main axes of UNESCO's co-operative action aim at:

- sensitizing Parliamentarians to UNESCO's mission and strategic priorities via information campaigns, exchanges, and direct interface;

- mobilizing Legislators as advocates of UNESCO's mandate and activities in national, regional and international forums;

- providing technical advice on UNESCO-related issues during the legislative process (i.e. the review, drafting and adoption of laws); and

- monitoring the impact of legislation and resulting projects related to UNESCO's priorities (e.g. budget allocation, design and effectiveness of policies, dissemination of results, assessment of long-term social change).

International bodies such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), act as focal points for worldwide parliamentary dialogue and provide the setting for collaboration on common projects. In so doing, they also facilitate co-operation among peoples and lay the foundations for the establishment of representative democracy.

Regional parliamentary associations, eg. the Parlamento Parlatino or the African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (APNAC), are inspired by and formed through a spirit of regional solidarity. Member states of those associations are actively striving to address the concerns and objectives that are common to the region. However, they also play an important role in their ability to address global issues from regional perspectives. They are particularly valuable partners for the development of projects that focus on specific issues.

Since questions pertinent to UNESCO's areas of competence fall mainly under the auspices of national Parliaments, they remain UNESCO's most important collaborators. National Parliaments are presently the type of governing body most knowledgeable about UNESCO's objectives and activities. UNESCO helps Legislators review their government policies and assists them in designing and adopting new ones.

With regard to local Legislatures, representatives elected to regional executive and/or legislative bodies are well disposed to taking innovative initiatives which can prove most useful. It is therefore particularly interesting, in countries structured along a federal model (such as Australia or Nigeria), to associate parliamentary partners at the sub-national level (provinces, territories, states, regions, districts) with projects designed to develop local capacities, participation and empowerment.

Civic bodies are the complementary interlocutors of national lawmakers. Mayors and municipal authorities, with their vast network of social actors, guarantee and defend the exercise of the right to good neighbourliness and citizenship in everyday life. Municipalities form the fundamental framework for participatory democracy because citizens live in towns and villages and it is at this local level, that they can participate in local communities and act on their own initiatives.

#### Mapping UNESCO'S co-operation with Parliamentarians

UNESCO enjoys national interaction with Parliamentary Friends of UNESCO Leagues in 32 countries and in member states with a federal structure there is co-operation with state and provincial Legislatures.

On the regional level, UNESCO has agreements or ad hoc relations with bodies which include the Parlamento Amazonica, the Parlamento Parlatina, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the OSCE Parliamentary Association. International linkages exist with, inter alia, the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

A strong emphasis is given to specific areas of concern: education, preventive health, environmental concerns, the preservation of cultural pluralism, regional development, gender and youth issues, peace and security issues, urbanization and technology.

To date, regional examples of action in these areas have included the following:

- in Africa, Parliamentarians from Senegal and Mauritius are promoting a region-wide campaign in favor of Education for All;

- in the Arab States, Parliamentarians have joined forces to support a Young Leaders Network;

- in Asia and the Pacific, the Cambodian Senate has collaborated with UNESCO to halt the illicit trafficking of artifacts;

- in Europe, British and Canadian Legislators supported legislation on HIV/AIDS education in schools;

- in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Argentinian League has worked with UNESCO in the field of water conservation and sanitation.

Joint inter-regional ventures convened under UNESCO'S auspices include the holding of the World Youth Parliament, the second Quadrilateral Meeting of Parliaments of Four Ancient Civilizations, and a Conference on Small Mediterranean Coastal Towns.

#### Decentralization and the Field Network

In view of the current reforms and UNESCO'S decentralization process, Parliamentarians will be fully informed of the development of UNESCO'S new field office network. This consists of 27 cluster offices which will commence operations to coincide with the start of the Medium Term Strategy. The objective of this structure is to make UNESCO'S presence at national level considerably more relevant and effective because issues which are common to a group of countries will be addressed with clearer focus.

As Parliamentarians become more knowledgeable about the presence and the roles of various UNESCO cluster offices, regional bureaus and national offices, it can be expected that,

in due course, Parliamentarians will seek to strengthen regional interparliamentary co-operation and try to develop new initiatives.

From 2002 onwards, co-operative action related to Parliamentarians will include:

assuring more effective service and support to the UNESCO Secretariat, including the Field Network to foster interaction with Parliamentarians at all levels; to this end, guidelines such as a Handbook for Co-operation with Parliamentarians and Examples of Good Practice will be prepared.

reinforcing advocacy for UNESCO's priorities and programmes at all levels,  
providing practical advice to the International Commissions for UNESCO regarding the involvement of Parliamentarians in their outreach to civil society;

expanding the network of the Parliamentary Friends of UNESCO Leagues, which can provide assistance as focal points for discussions on UNESCO's priority issues,

strengthened networking with regional and international parliamentary associations and with other international bodies which collaborate with Legislators,

fostering dialogue already in progress between Legislators and the private sector so that UNESCO's priorities will be supported by both groups;

reinforcing communication capacities for interaction notably via website and E-Forum facilities.

By the end of the Medium Term Strategy, the expected impact expected of this action will be:

A more comprehensive and effective internal approach to UNESCO's co-operation with Parliamentarians;

enhanced awareness among national lawmakers worldwide regarding the organization's aims and programmes;

stronger advocacy by national Legislators and parliamentary groups in support of UNESCO;

more regular dialogue between Parliamentarians and UNESCO, including interaction via ICT facilities;

an increase in national legislation which reflects UNESCO's priorities, objectives and activities.

The co-ordination of these services and interface with other sectors of the UNESCO Secretariat is the responsibility of the Division for Relations with National Commissions and New Partnerships in the Sector for External Relations and Co-operation.

From 2002 onwards, UNESCO Programme for Relations with Parliamentarians should contribute to the strengthening of the organization's interaction with its member states in order to help meet their priority needs.

Since they are viewed as indispensable and complementary partners, co-operation with Parliamentarians at all levels should be enhanced through the concrete strategies outlined in this paper, so as to promote and facilitate the attainment of UNESCO's objectives identified in the Medium Term Strategy.

The long term benefits of this co-operation are obvious with regard to raising UNESCO's profile in its Member State – hence, its potential must now be fully explored. For this reason,

much remains to be done to enhance the networking capacities of Parliamentarians – both at the national level itself, as well as across borders,

UNESCO, through its vast array of networks in its domains of expertise, can link Parliamentarians with more powerful alliances at various levels, thereby facilitating the contribution of this rich repository of social capital to the attainment of the organization's goals.

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