



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

The Director-General

13/01/2011

Ref.: CL/3949

Subject: **Our joint responsibilities towards National Commissions for UNESCO**

Sir/Madam,

UNESCO is privileged to have a world-wide network of National Commissions, now established in all its Member States in accordance with Article VII of the Organization's Constitution. I consider them as one of our most faithful allies, whose role in maintaining the presence of the Organization's spirit and values at the national level must be cherished. With their thousands of dedicated members and numerous expert networks, the National Commissions offer a clear advantage to UNESCO in its outreach to civil society groups and multiple partnerships within and across countries.

We appreciate highly the participation of National Commissions in advancing our global priorities. Their added value is of equal importance to their governments, and to the educational, scientific and cultural communities they represent. By bringing governmental and non-governmental resources together, the National Commissions can galvanize intellectual and academic communities towards our common objectives. They are called upon to play multiple tasks within the Organization, being closely associated to programme elaboration and delivery. They are expected also to mobilize public opinion and contribute to increasing the Organization's visibility.

In order to implement their various duties efficiently, National Commissions need our sustained support. Yet, there exists a great diversity in their network and it is a fact that despite their genuine willingness, not all Commissions have the capacities necessary to assume effectively their core functions. Regrettably, many of them face challenges and have to endure chronic constraints stemming from an insufficient recognition of their status, limited outreach capacity, frequent staff changes and inadequate resources. It is imperative, therefore, that we take the necessary steps to improve this situation. To this end, UNESCO and Member States should honour their joint responsibilities in this regard, as stipulated in the 1978 Charter of National Commissions.

Practice demonstrates that whenever a Member State has an operationally-strong National Commission, the benefits of its membership in UNESCO have palpably increased. This can be observed in the case of large Commissions that benefit from considerable resources, as well as in smaller ones.

Over the course of the last biennium, UNESCO spent nearly US \$3 million in support of the global network of National Commissions. This investment enabled us, among other things, to train some 300 officials and provide equipment to numerous National Commissions that needed support. Moreover, we have multiplied communication tools and resources for the use of National Commissions.

In order to assist Member States further in strengthening their Commissions, the Secretariat will launch shortly an overall evaluation of National Commissions for UNESCO, as well as a comparative study of other United Nations sister agencies' national cooperating bodies, so that we can draw lessons from existing best practices and recommend optimal solutions and necessary structural adjustments. This comprehensive evaluation will help us obtain a fair assessment of the strengths of, and challenges faced by, National Commissions globally and will contribute to the review and revitalization of their role and capacities, as recommended by the Independent External Evaluation of UNESCO. This process will involve Member States and their National Commissions, whose close cooperation will be sought both to conduct the evaluation and to implement any eventual recommendations. The National Commissions also will be requested to submit reports to assess results achieved.

Unless a National Commission is fully-operational, it cannot participate ably in what our Organization is trying to achieve today in an increasingly competitive environment of international cooperation. In a reforming UNESCO, which is consolidating its presence in the field, engaging in the United Nations country-level reform process and expanding its outreach to new partners, we need strong, solid and operationally-efficient Commissions. This was reiterated once again at the 185th session of the Executive Board last spring. I am convinced, therefore, that Member States and the UNESCO Secretariat can work together to attain this crucial objective.

Please accept, Sir/Madam, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Irina Bokova

cc: Permanent Delegations to UNESCO
National Commissions for UNESCO
UNESCO Field Offices