

170 EX/INF.5
PARIS, 9 August 2004
Original: English

**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Hundred and seventieth Session

Item 9.6 of the provisional agenda

**NEW APPROACHES AND CONCRETE ACTIONS IN THE
DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILIZATIONS**

SUMMARY

This document is a background paper for the thematic debate at the Executive Board's 170th session on 13 October 2004.

I. INTRODUCTION

All civilizations celebrate the unity in diversity of humankind. The dialogue among civilizations has blurred the frontiers of different civilizations and led to an overlapping of cultures, which while rich in diversity preserves the uniqueness of identities. The term “civilization” can only denote a universal, plural and non-hierarchical phenomenon that is also interactive. It certainly does not separate civilizations in such a way that some are ranked above others and some are set in opposition to others. UNESCO’s constitution calls explicitly for the promotion of dialogue (Annex, Part I) and has been active in dialogue-related programmes since the mid-1950s (Annex, Part II and III).

Globalization, while offering great benefits, presents a challenge in preserving and celebrating the intellectual and cultural diversity of humankind and civilization. Globalization and the emergence of new threats to humankind make the need for dialogue more topical.

A broad sense of commonality has been reached with respect to an overarching framework consisting of universally shared values, which cut across all cultures and civilizations. The major challenge will be not only to pledge adherence to those values, but also to translate them into reality through concrete action.

Genuine dialogue based on openness towards others is vital in helping to dispel misconceptions, misperceptions and stereotypes, cherish differences, and generate trust.

Indeed, dialogue begins at home!

Note: Approaches and measures suggested throughout this paper are, of course, also building upon programmes and actions already in place or in planning.

II. THE PRESENT SITUATION AND CONCRETE ACTIONS

In 32 C/Resolution 47 of 17 October 2003, the General Conference set out the orientation for dialogue activities by the Organization, drawing on the results of previous events, especially the first-ever Ministerial Conference on the subject, held in June 2003 in New Delhi, India.

The relevance of the regional approach has been demonstrated by the August 2003 Ohrid Forum for South-East Europe. In that spirit, UNESCO has organized a series of regional and subregional events and will hold further meetings. They aim at formulating further concrete action proposals:

- the promotion of quality education integrating a dialogue-oriented values framework and accordingly;
- a revision of the content of textbooks, learning materials and curricula;
- the creation of scientific and research centres on other cultures and regional issues;
- the creation of regional cooperation mechanisms (e.g. the creation of “cultural corridors” or joint water management arrangements);

- concrete measures to highlight the role of cultural diversity and of tangible as well as intangible heritage as vectors of identity and reconciliation;
- the translation of more works in the social and human sciences, literature and arts (especially those from non-Western cultures);
- promotion of scientific collaboration and interaction (e.g. the creation and strengthening of UNESCO chairs and twinning arrangements among universities);
- an intensification of media coverage of dialogue-related issues;
- a broader use of information and communications technologies (ICTs);
- the promotion of virtual dialogues and engagement especially among schools and students (such as *Mondialogo*, the innovative public-private partnership between UNESCO and DaimlerChrysler, comprising a worldwide school contest and an engineering award built around intercultural dialogue);
- people-to-people exchanges, especially among women and young people.

III. ENTRY POINTS FOR FUTURE ACTION

The key challenge will be to design multi-thematic actions and translate them into sustained programmes, main lines of action and work plans with specific budgetary allocations so as to ensure implementation.

- (1) Broad agreement at the global level on values, concepts and methods needs to be translated into concrete and sustained action at regional, subregional and interregional levels, with lessons documented and impacts assessed.
- (2) Wide-spread education, also with respect to common values, is a critical component of any ongoing dialogue programme; shared values need to be re-affirmed, not least by succeeding generations.
- (3) A targeted and innovative use of existing mechanisms should be ensured, for example, drawing on and creating more UNESCO Chairs on cultural dialogue in the broadest sense, and encouraging the creation of additional UNESCO institutes and centres in various regions.
- (4) Any outreach must be targeted not only at decision-makers and the “elite”, but also to a broader audience, especially youth, women as well as the excluded and geographically disadvantaged. Such outreach should draw on the potential of ICTs. Action should include the involvement of multi-stakeholders, including new partnerships with civil society and private sector actors.
- (5) National activities should be given prominence and disseminated by inviting contributions from UNESCO National Commissions. UNESCO could assume the role of a clearing house for disseminating success stories and lessons learned as well as identifying obstacles to dialogue.

- (6) Future work plans need to be adapted. Emphasis should also be placed upon joint efforts with Governments and other international or regional organizations (e.g. those envisaged with ALECSO and ISESCO).

UNESCO cannot act – and succeed – alone!

IV. POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL AREAS FOR CONCRETE ACTION AND NEW APPROACHES

Building on the lead role assigned to it in the United Nations system, the Organization will need to articulate more explicitly its focus, drawing on contributions from all sectors and intersectoral action. Dialogue activities should explicitly be linked to one of the principal tasks of UNESCO, namely promoting international cooperation. Concrete activities and practical measures can be envisaged in the following areas:

- (1) Agreement on universally shared values notwithstanding, there is a need to present and disseminate the contributions of great thinkers and social scientists from various regions with respect to the values underlying the dialogue.
- (2) As regards education, dialogue can be reinforced through the pursuit of the six Education for All (EFA) goals and, in particular, through efforts aimed at promoting quality education at all levels towards learning to live together. A revision of handbooks and teaching materials used in primary and secondary schools (public and private) will be an equally critical task so as to eradicate stereotypes and judgements. At the secondary-school level, the teaching of history and sociology of civilizations and religions should be included in curricula. Improving literacy will be critical for creating an equitable basis for dialogue.
- (3) Dialogue can help to promote scientific/technological exchange and the quest for sustainable development. Policy-makers must be aware of the scientific implications of their decisions.
- (4) Cultural diversity is a notion around which productive dialogues can be organized between societies and cultures as well as between different religions and spiritual traditions. It is imperative to develop a culture of preservation through dialogue. This may help to avoid cultural heritage from becoming a symbolic target of aggression and intentional destruction.
- (5) A greater recognition of the role and positive impact of intercultural dialogue in safeguarding cultural diversity can be promoted through projects like the Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Mediterranean Project or the triangular cooperation between UNESCO, ALECSO and ISESCO. Specific action is to strengthen social cohesion in specific regional and social contexts (e.g. in Central Asia, South-East Europe, Caucasus, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and through the “Plan Arabia”) and to foster mutual understanding between civilizations, cultures and religions by highlighting their interactions and mutual influences through the Roads/Routes projects, focusing in particular on the Silk Road, the Iron Roads in Africa, the Routes of El-Andalus, the Routes of Faith, the Olive Roads, the Great Volga Route and the Slave Route (promoting concrete projects between universities

from various regions to study the causes and forms of the transatlantic slave trade) as well as the Gorée Project.

- (6) Common heritage and shared values can be discovered by strengthening historical and contemporary processes, underpinned by UNESCO's General and Regional Histories documenting processes of interactions between cultures.
- (7) Cultural diversity put into practice may take the form of cultural cooperation (through cultural tourism, joint cultural projects among neighbouring or distant countries sharing distinct cultures or belonging to different civilizations) and the fostering of diverse talents and cultural creativity (promoting and strengthening "oral" heritage, arts and folklore festivals; joint cultural artistic work and partnerships; multicultural exhibitions in museums and regional cultural fora).
- (8) Objectives of dialogue should be linked to activities strengthening the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression serves as a driving force of intercultural dialogue as well as a mechanism for exchange of experiences between professionals, civil society and academics. Free press is a prerequisite for active participation by people in decision-making on cultural, political and socio-economic issues. Support to independent, pluralistic and professional media can be a concrete way to promote dialogue and transparency.

V. CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, Dialogue among Civilizations would mean the search for avenues and the means to eradicate poverty, to preserve biodiversity, sustain cultural diversity and share knowledge. This would also demonstrate the value of dialogue as an essential tool to improve the quality of life of people in general. It is a vehicle for diversity and pluralism – an instrument of transformation in the twenty-first century. To achieve these objectives, new approaches to be pursued must be all-inclusive in order to reach the most "marginalized" as well. For this purpose, global values have to be translated to regional and subregional levels; this ongoing process requires sustained implementation.

ANNEX

PART I

As regards UNESCO, its Constitution calls explicitly and implicitly for the promotion of dialogue:

“... ignorance of each other’s ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war;”

“... a war [i.e. the Second World War] made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of inequality of men and races;”

“... the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty...”;

“... peace must ... founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.”

“The Organization will ... collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples ...”

Cultural diversity, as stated in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) “is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations”.

PART II

The Organization conducted an intensive dialogue-related programme from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s. A programme on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, which included in particular the modality of cultural roads and routes, was initiated in the 1980s. UNESCO’s dialogue activities picked up again significantly towards the end of the 1990s when the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2001 the United Nations Year for Dialogue among Civilizations and designated – in the context of the *United Nations Global Agenda for a Dialogue among Civilizations* (adopted in 2001) – UNESCO as a lead agency for follow-up. For its part, UNESCO undertook a series of traditional and innovative activities. In October 2003, the General Conference adopted a landmark resolution, document 32 C/47, on *New perspectives for activities pertaining to the dialogue among cultures and civilizations*.

PART III

Past activities – a flashback

At its 9th General Conference (New Delhi, 1956), UNESCO launched a *Major Project on Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values* (called the East-West Major Project), which was to run for 10 years (January 1957-December 1966). This aimed at rectifying a perceived imbalance in knowledge and awareness throughout the world between Western and Eastern cultural values. Action was envisaged in four main areas:

- (i) studies and research on cultures (through the creation of five regional institutes for cultural studies; and the establishment of an Oriental Languages and Civilizations Programme, in Mexico);
- (ii) school and out-of-school education for international understanding (including several textbook review conferences, a focus on teaching methods and curricula and launching projects with Associated Schools);
- (iii) promoting general knowledge of other cultures among the general public (production of films and radio programmes, theater exchanges, architectural conferences, art exhibits and production of musical anthologies); and
- (iv) exchange programmes (students, teachers, youth camps, study tours).

The Major Project also arranged for the translation of seminal works particularly of Eastern into Western languages and, to a lesser extent, the reverse (more than 100 titles published and 140 titles translated, among them the novels of Yasunari Kawabata which led to him becoming the first Japanese to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968). International round table discussions and hundreds of publications (among them a bi-monthly bulletin: *Orient Occident* and several issues of the *UNESCO Chronicle* and the *Courier*) complemented these activities.

After 1966, an evaluation showed that the Project had indeed brought about a deeper mutual understanding between cultures and a more informed selection of methods of combating ignorance and prejudice concerning other cultures, with an invaluable role played by non-governmental organizations. But: the Project was assessed to have been a juxtaposition of activities rather than an integrated whole inspired by an interdisciplinary approach. Above all, the Project was found to be more effective in reaching scholars and specialized audiences than in reaching the general public. Subsequently, UNESCO set up a new programme of cultural studies, without explicit East-West focus. It sought to promote knowledge of works of culture as well as to foster an understanding of the process of cultural creativity in general.

While UNESCO engaged in the 1980s and 1990s principally to develop the roads and routes approach to intercultural dialogue, the international debate – also on the heels of the discussion on *the clash of civilizations*, triggered by Samuel Huntington in the mid-1990s – began to focus on the *dialogue among civilizations*, advocated by Iranian President Mohamed Khatami. The United Nations General Assembly and UNESCO's General Conference endorsed this approach in 1998 and 1999, culminating in the designation of 2001 as United Nations Year for the Dialogue among Civilizations, which was launched – by UNESCO and the United Nations together with the President of Iran – on the eve of the United Nations

Millennium Summit in September 2000. New impetus was provided by 31 C/Resolution 39 of the General Conference on the fight against terrorism by which the General Conference affirmed that dialogue “constitutes a fundamental challenge based on the unity of humankind and commonly shared values, the recognition of cultural diversity and the equal dignity of each civilization and each culture”. The principal objective of the dialogue among civilizations is to bridge, worldwide, the gap in knowledge about other civilizations, cultures and societies, to lay the foundations for dialogue based on universally shared values and to undertake concrete activities, inspired and driven by dialogue, especially in the areas of education, cultural diversity and heritage, the sciences and communication and media.

(Following the launching event of the International Year in New York in September 2000, UNESCO organized or co-organized a series of conferences, symposia, and international meetings, including two UNESCO-EPHE Conferences on “Civilizations in the Eye of the Other”, Paris, France, December 2001 and January 2003; the UNESCO/UNU International Conference on the Dialogue among Civilizations, Kyoto, Japan, July 2001; the International Conference “Dialogue among Civilizations”, Vilnius, Lithuania, April 2001; the International Conference “How to counteract Xenophobia and Intolerance in Countries with Multi-ethnic populations”; Conference on Indus Valley Civilization, Islamabad, Pakistan, April 2001; International Ministerial Conference on the Dialogue among Civilizations: “Quest for New Perspectives”, New Delhi, India, July 2003; UNESCO/UNU International Conference on Globalization with a Human Face – Benefiting All, Tokyo, Japan, July 2003; Regional Forum on Dialogue among Civilizations – Ohrid, August 2003; Seminar on the Culture of Innovations, Moscow, Russian Federation, November 2003; Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations, Sana’a, Yemen, February 2004; International Conference on the Dialogue among Civilizations, Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, June 2004).