

Speech delivered by Geert Bourgeois, Flemish Minister for Foreign Policy and European Affairs, during the 34th session of the UNESCO General Conference, on Monday, 22 October 2007

Dear President, Dear members of the General Conference,

In my capacity as Flemish Minister for Foreign Policy and European Affairs, it is an honour for me to attend this General Conference and to take the floor on behalf of Belgium. Before considering the challenges UNESCO is facing, I would like to lend my support to the speech Portugal made on behalf of the **European Union**.

UNESCO is faced with a few major challenges:

1. “One UN”

One of the most important tasks now facing UNESCO is the “One UN” initiative. I hope UNESCO will seize the “One UN” challenge as an opportunity to improve and restructure itself. Without any doubt, this will call for wide-ranging internal adjustments. Probably, a review of UNESCO’s presence on the field - in regional, cluster and national offices is needed. We think it is important to have a clear definition of UNESCO's responsibilities in relation to the activities of other specialised agencies at field level and that the activities are consistent with the priorities of the countries involved.

2. Visibility and UNESCO Commissions

For UNESCO’s legitimacy, it is essential to create a broad (er) social basis. Therefore, we welcome the comprehensive communication plan for UNESCO.

A clear link with Civil Society is crucial in this respect. The national UNESCO Commissions are a trump card that is not played often enough. The Commissions

are of particular importance in countries without a UNESCO office. Therefore, I would like to see the ties with the UNESCO Commissions to be strengthened. UNESCO Commissions also play a key role in Belgium.

The Flemish UNESCO Commission, one of the UNESCO Commissions in Belgium, is also active within the network of UNESCO Commissions of Group I. I am proud to announce that our young Commission will collaborate with the Dutch and Luxembourg UNESCO Commissions to organise the regional consultation and statutory meeting of the UNESCO Commissions of Group I in Antwerp in 2008.

Apart from the “One UN” initiative and the visibility of the organisation, I would like to consider some **sector-specific challenges**:

1. Education:

Reaching the six ‘Education for All’ goals is the major global challenge for the Education sector. If we, as world community, want to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in every Member State by 2015, more efforts will be needed. Concentrated and coherent actions which focus on the Least Developed Countries and the weakest elements of educational systems will ensure efficiency and efficacy. The three ‘flagship programmes’ on Literacy, Teacher Training in Sub Sahara Africa and HIV/AIDS Education are good examples of such initiatives. Belgium supports the continuation of these actions, although more should be done to make them more visible.

Belgium values the importance of the global dimension of education and training and therefore particularly welcomes the initiatives taken by UNESCO in the field of international quality assurance. In this context we have taken the necessary steps

towards active implementation of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education by including them in our national quality assurance legislation and practice.

Ensuring the quality of education is a global issue. With UNESCO's support, all Member States should be enabled to provide high quality education on all levels. UNESCO should also assist Member States in establishing the necessary policy instruments to monitor and regulate education provided both by the public and the private sector, so that it maintains the standards set by the government.

2.Culture:

The World Heritage Centre is faced with a key restructuring process to increase its visibility, boost its impact and enhance its efficiency. In the light of the Centre's importance, we call for a swift implementation of the recommendations adopted during the World Heritage Committee meeting in Christchurch (New Zealand).

The importance we attach to a timely and comprehensive implementation of the "Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage" is reflected in the active role our experts play in the Intergovernmental Committee. Belgium eagers to make an active and effective contribution to implementing the international dimension of this Convention. We attach great importance to the development and support to projects and activities that reflect the Convention's principles and goals most effectively, with due attention being paid to the needs of developing countries.

Similarly, we welcome the decision that the Commission for the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of cultural expressions will give priority to the

articles relating to development cooperation while formulating the operational guidelines.

3.Sciences

Over the last decade UNESCO has received several new tasks and transferred them to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), the UN agency for promoting cooperation in the study of the seas and oceans. However, the IOC has never received any additional financial or human resources, even though extra funding is required to carry out these tasks. Therefore, we plead to offer the IOC this additional funding within the existing budget of UNESCO.

We also value the activities being developed within the social sciences sector concerning “tolerance and peace”.

4.Communication and Information

I would like to emphasise the importance Belgium attaches to following up the commitments UNESCO has made in the context of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Other challenges for the “Communication and Information” sector include; narrowing the “knowledge gap” in terms of communication and information between the South and North and lending support to independent media and freedom of the press.

- Our commitment

We would like to stress the commitment of Belgium in financial terms. During the years, we became an important extra budgetary donor. The Federal Government and the Flemish Government set up UNESCO Trust Funds and the French-speaking

Community supports individual projects. Apart from the existing Trust Funds, I will sign a new general Flemish UNESCO Trust Fund with Mr Matsuura, today.

As a key extra budgetary donor we look forward to the way UNESCO's extra budgetary activities can fit into the UN activities on the field under the "One UN" initiative. We are also supporting UNESCO's efforts to link the extra budgetary activities to the priorities and activities within UNESCO's regular budget.

- Regional representation

To conclude, I would like to return to the issue of UNESCO's presence on the field. As you know, UNESCO does not have a general regional presence in the European countries belonging to group I. With all due respect, I think I can say that we do play a key role within UNESCO. The European Commission, too, is a major player. In order to strengthen the visibility of UNESCO in the EU and to continue the cooperation between UNESCO and the EU, I would like to suggest UNESCO to have a permanent presence in Brussels.

Finally, on behalf of all the authorities in our federal state, I would like to re-emphasise our faith and confidence in UNESCO. We regard it as a continuing commitment to contribute to its ongoing mandate, because we are convinced that the organisation's credo "to create the defences of peace in the mind of men" is still as relevant as ever.

Thank you for your attention, Mr President.