

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

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Hundred and seventy-fourth session

**ADDRESS BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE OCCASION
OF THE OPENING OF THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE
EXECUTIVE BOARD AT ITS 174th SESSION**

Items 3, 4 and 5

3. Joint report by the Director-General on the implementation of the Programme and Budget (32 C/5), and on results achieved in the previous biennium 2004-2005 (Draft 34 C/3)
4. Report by the Director-General on the follow-up of decisions and resolutions adopted by the Executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions
5. Report by the Director-General on the reform process

Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,
Mr President of the General Conference,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As has become customary, and necessary, on these occasions, I would like to begin my remarks this morning with reference to the United Nations reform process and UNESCO's relation to it.

The World Summit last September was a crucial moment in the unfolding story of the United Nations. The Summit gave fresh impetus to the drive for United Nations reform, and reconfirmed the multilateralist mission of the United Nations. However, while there is a palpably stronger appetite for structural and management reform, there is no firm agreement yet on the menu of change or the specific direction to be taken.

In follow-up to the 2005 World Summit Outcome adopted by world leaders, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has launched a number of review initiatives concerning the mandate, management, governance and oversight of the United Nations system.

On 16 February 2006, the Secretary-General announced the creation of a new High-Level Panel on United Nations System-Wide Coherence to explore how the United Nations system could work more coherently and effectively across the world, including the possibility of creating "more tightly managed entities" in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. The 15-member Panel is expected to present its recommendations to the next session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006. An inclusive consultation process is promised.

Another significant development has been the Secretary-General's management reform report entitled "Investing in the United Nations for a Stronger Organization Worldwide", which was released on 7 March 2006. In the light of a fundamental shift in the scope and breadth of United Nations Secretariat activity since the establishment of the United Nations system, the report identifies several key areas for change. It calls for an adjustment of regulations, rules and systems required to support an increasingly field-oriented Secretariat. It stresses that there is a need to ensure that the Secretary-General has the management tools he needs to run the Organization efficiently and effectively. And it calls for an alignment with best practices in matters of accountability and transparency. More specifically, the management reform focuses on six areas: people, leadership, information and communication technology, services, budget and finance, and governance, and proposes setting up a Change Management Office.

Later this week, I shall be going to Madrid and Segovia for the two-day United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) meeting chaired by Kofi Annan which, as has been the case for the past two years, will have the United Nations reform as its main focus of attention. At the last CEB meeting held last October in New York after the World Summit, there was a very good discussion of the Outcome Document and its implications for the United Nations system. The forthcoming CEB meeting will provide another valuable opportunity to exchange views on the United Nations reform process, and I will certainly be sharing my own perspective on behalf of UNESCO.

As I am sure you know, the question of United Nations reform is attracting considerable debate and is the subject of a wide range of opinions. For example, the Group of 13, which is made up of various donor countries, has made known its views on the future direction that the United Nations system should take, as a whole and in terms of its constituent parts, through a phased approach with a number of clear benchmarks. Among the main proposals of the G13 are (1) a strategic coherent model of the United Nations system consisting of a small number of strong organizations in the area of development, humanitarian action and environment; (2) one consolidated representation at country level (namely, one United Nations team, one budget, one programme); (3) specialized agencies to be seen as “centres of excellence” concentrating on the development of normative and substantive policies in their respective fields and translating these into concrete programmes in close cooperation with the operational organizations; and (4) an operational focus on the provision of high-quality capacity-building and institutional development services.

Meanwhile, though supportive of United Nations reform, the G77 and China have expressed a number of concerns, saying that the reform should not lead to a change in the intergovernmental nature of the decision-making, oversight and monitoring process, nor reduce the budget levels, nor redefine the roles and responsibilities assigned to the various organs of the United Nations by the Charter. The voice of every Member State must be heard and respected during this reform process, irrespective of the contributions made to the budget of the Organization. Finally, these Member States wish to reaffirm the roles and mandates of some United Nations institutions and agencies such as UNCTAD, FAO, UNIDO, UNESCO, IFAD, HABITAT and UNEP.

How, then, should UNESCO position itself in relation to these ongoing debates? What is or should be our strategic vision? Recognizing that “business as usual” is no answer, the United Nations system must be adapted to the new realities of the world. How should UNESCO seek to contribute to the debate, based on its experience? These are all important questions. I hope that, during this session, the Board will discuss the United Nations reform as this exchange of views will help me when I participate in the CEB meeting later this week. Meanwhile, let me offer several thoughts of my own for your consideration.

First, while recognizing that there will always be a gap between ideals and reality, we must keep things in perspective when it comes to the Organization’s strengths and weaknesses. UNESCO has many friends and we must not disappoint them by being faint-hearted in the face of a challenging environment. Our mandate and mission continue to resonate strongly with all those committed to building a better world. Our core values, our insistence on respect for human dignity, our universality, and our celebration of the full and varied richness of humanity – these are the basis of our strengths, our achievements and our virtues as an Organization. The 60th anniversary celebration process is most revealing for it is reminding us of many things we take for granted. It is enabling us to rediscover not simply past accomplishments but also the strength of commitment of our staff and their professional expertise and experience. There is much excellent work being done and we should not be shy in saying so.

Having said this, I acknowledge that there are deficiencies in UNESCO, just as there are in the wider United Nations system. Some of these deficiencies are manifest in the still insufficient impact of our action at the field level. Hence, UNESCO must strengthen its action at regional, subregional and country levels, especially in key areas and in key countries, and this means strengthening our decentralization policy. This direction is consistent with the United Nations Secretary-General’s view that the whole of the United Nations system should become more field-oriented. In addition, it is imperative that UNESCO strengthens its capacity for teamwork at country level so that we are increasingly an integral and active member of coherent United Nations teams.

Second, with regard to the management reform process envisaged by the United Nations Secretary-General, it needs to be recognized that UNESCO's reform process is well advanced in many of the areas under consideration. Indeed, I recently met with a consultant appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General to examine the functioning of the United Nations system's governance and oversight mechanisms; the consultant informed me that, in his judgement, UNESCO's oversight mechanism is in the vanguard of the United Nations system. While the reform that Member States, the Secretariat and I have been fashioning together for the past six and a half years is admittedly incomplete and we still have some way to go, we must stay true to our purpose, recognizing that much has been done which is in clear conformity with the direction of the wider United Nations reform process.

Third, UNESCO must be extremely wary of any tendency towards separating "operational activities" from normative, analytical and policy matters. This is a false dichotomy and is a recipe for incoherence, not coherence. This is why I cannot accept the G13's argument if this means that specialized agencies are no longer expected to involve themselves in implementation on the ground; the global and local roles of specialized agencies are inseparable in my view. In the case of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, for example, it would be ludicrous to argue that UNESCO should confine itself to the designation and listing of World Heritage sites and not engage in practical efforts of protection and conservation at country level, in particular in developing countries.

Thus, I believe that UNESCO's position must be that its own intellectual and ethical functions cannot be divorced from implementation and operational action. To be effective, the feedback loop between theory and practice needs to be direct, not mediated or second hand. Policy development is not an abstract, academic process but one that engages with real-world problems and is informed by actual needs and concrete situations. As you have just said, Mr Chairman, the question of the right balance between the normative and the operational is crucial. I am therefore cautious about any notion of turning the specialized agencies into "centres of excellence" if the effect is to cut UNESCO adrift from direct, operational, ground level activity in the service of Member States. I would like to strongly advise developed countries to think very carefully indeed about advocating an untested and, in my view, unworkable model for the specialized agencies.

Fourth, at the country level, UNESCO is equipping itself to engage more effectively with Common Country Assessment (CCA), United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) processes. However, this is not simply a technical exercise but one that is oriented to the proper purposes of the development process, namely, to ensure that countries themselves "own" the process and that the United Nations system and its partners align themselves with country-driven strategies. Our technical advice, our capacity-building programmes and our policy development functions must be geared to the empowerment of developing countries.

However, our best efforts in this regard will be severely constrained if common country programming is not fully inclusive of all United Nations system agencies and if donor funds are channelled exclusively at country level to so-called "operational agencies". We do not believe that such an approach can satisfactorily serve the diversity of needs of Member States.

Fifth, we have to insist that "development" is not the only agenda of the United Nations system. By virtue of its constitutional mandate, UNESCO has always had a broader vision that places development within the wider framework of building peaceful and harmonious relations between nations, including the promotion of dialogue among peoples, cultures and civilizations, on which I will later elaborate further. There is no automatic "peace dividend" of development. Of course they are linked but the connections are complex and situation-specific. The key point is that

the United Nations system serves several purposes and its reform and restructuring should not be predicated on just one of those purposes.

Last but not least, it is not yet clear what form the idea of more tightly managed entities might take or even whether the formulation of three distinct areas to be organized by such entities is acceptable to Member States. In UNESCO's case, we have contributed and are contributing to all three areas – development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

In regard to **humanitarian assistance**, of course, UNESCO is traditionally not a humanitarian agency but is now getting more and more involved because it believes it has a technical and ethical role to play and is regularly called upon by Member States to act during the earliest stages of post-conflict and post-disaster situations to address the human, more than physical, aspects of recovery and reconstruction. Education must be part of humanitarian action, helping to normalize communities and assist in psycho-social recovery; for UNESCO, since education is an integral aspect of the process of bridging from relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction, we must engage with early-stage processes so that solid foundations may be laid and planned for longer-term action. It must be recognized that the transition between humanitarian action and development is not abrupt but is a seamless process in which UNESCO should be involved. This is evident in other areas of our mandate too. Thus, UNESCO believes that media capacity-building is needed to help the delivery of emergency information in post-disaster situations. Similarly, we make early-stage interventions to protect cultural heritage, which has enormous symbolic value as a focus of identity, continuity and shared values, and for the building of social cohesion.

In the area of **development**, UNESCO makes contributions throughout its fields of competence, oriented by the global development agenda in general and the MDGs in particular. The 2005 World Summit Outcome document gave clear recognition to the vital link between education and development, and, in that context, gave support to UNESCO's priority of education for all (EFA). The Global Action Plan is designed to create a more coherent, strategic partnership among the five EFA convening agencies so that greater progress can be achieved towards the six EFA goals and hence to the whole Millennium Development Goals (MDG) agenda.

Let me emphasize here that UNESCO's contribution to EFA is not confined to coordination at the global level, but includes concrete programmatic action at country level in close cooperation with governments, civil society and international partners. In the follow-up to the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000, UNESCO's first priority was to assist developing countries to prepare national action plans so that they could better position themselves to receive the higher levels of financial support that had been promised. Please note that a recent external evaluation in this area gives high marks to UNESCO's action. Later, we shifted our emphasis towards key areas of educational action that are strategically vital for the EFA drive within countries. Hence our launch of specific EFA initiatives in literacy (LIFE), teacher training in sub-Saharan Africa (TISSA), and EDUCAIDS, the UNESCO-led global initiative on education and HIV and AIDS, along with an abiding emphasis on quality improvement.

With regard to **environment**, UNESCO's natural sciences programme has been a pioneer in devising and implementing scientific approaches to environmental and ecological questions. Today, as was abundantly evident at the Fourth World Water Forum in Mexico City last month, UNESCO is a major international actor in the field of water, which is at the heart of many sustainable development issues. UNESCO is recognized for its strong professional command of the technical and policy-oriented aspects of freshwater, grounded upon its much-respected International Hydrological Programme (IHP), the World Water Assessment Programme and its *World Water Development Report*, and the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft, The Netherlands. UNESCO's work is not narrowly normative in this field, let me add, but is deeply

engaged with practical aspects of implementation, lessons from which inform the further elaboration of technical advice and guidance.

A last comment on this whole issue. The full implementation of the decentralization policy is at the heart of the reform process under way. As I stressed earlier, our global role must be complemented and translated into concrete practice through operational work, especially at country level. However, our decentralization policy has been in place for only a few years and I cannot claim that the Organization has developed a strong implementation capacity everywhere in the world. This has been pointed out by various evaluations conducted by Internal Oversight Service (IOS) and by the External Auditor and therefore we must take appropriate action; indeed, some measures have already been taken to address this question.

Let us consider this question in context. In a budgetary situation of zero nominal growth, in past years UNESCO has increasingly turned towards acquiring extrabudgetary funds. These are an important way in which donor countries can visibly express their international solidarity and cooperation. Increasingly, not only developed countries, but also private sector enterprises are interested in working with UNESCO, drawn by our mandate and trustworthiness.

However, this trend towards dramatically increased extrabudgetary funding has not occurred within the framework of a fully developed global strategy, which we now see clearly to be imperative. As a result, while more and more extrabudgetary funds have been going to the field at a time of putting the decentralization policy into effect, our field units have not been able to cope either with the volume and complexity of extrabudgetary work, or with achieving the right balance between that work and the activities coming under the regular programme and budget. In short, some field offices have become overstretched.

Let me turn briefly to the example of the Brasilia Office, which accounts for a large proportion of the increased volume of extrabudgetary funds, because this is a special case. I can assure the Board that the Brasilia Office case does not deserve to be characterized as the tip of the iceberg; this metaphor is quite inappropriate. The situation in Brazil is distinctive because, even though its ministries have the necessary expertise, they face many constraints under Brazilian law to undertake large-scale projects directly. As a result, they must have recourse to partnering with relevant outside agencies, including UNESCO. In other countries, ministries are lacking in expertise and experience in certain areas and this is where UNESCO's expertise is needed. Thus, the specific weaknesses identified in Brazil are not, repeat not, typical of a universal trend.

Having said this, in the general area of extrabudgetary funding, we readily acknowledge certain weaknesses to which the External Auditor has drawn critical attention, but we are already taking appropriate measures along the lines given in document 174 EX/INF.4. There is scope for improvement, and improve we shall - I am confident that when I make an interim report to the next session of the Board in the autumn, our performance regarding extrabudgetary funds will already show improvements in terms of delivery, management, monitoring and reporting, including the integration of extrabudgetary activities with our regular programme and budget. Appropriate management tools are being designed and will be in place by October, enabling us to automatically check where things stand. In addition, extrabudgetary funding issues will be regularly reviewed together with regular programme and budget matters through established in-house mechanisms.

I would like to remind you of our achievements during the last biennium, and that we have done well in completing our programme of activities, as your positive response to the C/3 document testifies. UNESCO has many assets, including its name and image, and these are recognized by those who wish to be associated with various areas of our work, and here I refer not only to governments but also civil society and the private sector.

I am very pleased to inform the Board that on 31 March 2006, in accordance with our rules and financial regulations, we have sent to the External Auditor the financial report (that is, the closure of accounts) related to the period 2004-2005. This is an important achievement, which has been attained for only the second time in the recent history of the organization – the first time being when we closed the accounts of the 2002-2003 biennium, as was recognized in writing by the External Auditor. I congratulate and thank all the staff involved in this achievement.

Mr Chairperson,

It is in this spirit that we must look ahead to the new cycle of preparing the next Medium-Term Strategy and the Programme and Budget for 2008-2009, which should, as I already had occasion to say at the information meeting we held last January, be closely linked with broader reflection on UNESCO's future role, as called for by the General Conference at its 33rd session.

The questionnaire that will constitute the initial basis of this consultation has been completed and will soon be sent to Member States, National Commissions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and also to field offices and category 1 and 2 institutes. It was distributed to all of you at the beginning of this meeting, and is available in the six languages at the entrance to this room. It will form the basis for the consultations of the National Commissions – which will take place from the end of May to the beginning of July and will be preceded by consultations at the country cluster level. In parallel, the Member States will be invited to provide a written response to this same questionnaire which should reach the Secretariat by mid-July.

The questionnaire will be supplemented by a discussion paper which will present the issues, trends and challenges of relevance to the future role of UNESCO, as requested by the General Conference. This document is expected to be distributed towards the end of the Executive Board session. The purpose of this combined process is to secure genuine feedback, covering the widest, best documented range of opinions possible, for the strategic reflection on UNESCO's future. The conclusions from the consideration of Major Programmes II and III currently under way will also be crucial in this regard. This vision will then be open to further refinement and development over the months to come, so that I can make preliminary proposals to the Executive Board at its October session. The consultations that the President of the General Conference intends to hold with the permanent delegations will also be conducted along these lines and will provide further substantive input to these proposals.

On the basis of all this background information, the Executive Board will draw up a number of guidelines at its October session for the drafting of the C/4 and C/5 documents, which will be issued simultaneously one month before the April 2007 session.

The document on the future of UNESCO will also serve as input for discussions in other forums, such as the United Nations University (UNU), and will be discussed in depth at the next session of the General Conference.

I hope that this will provide an opportunity to take stock of the challenges faced by our Organization, and also of the support of our prime beneficiaries, the Member States, and their wish to see its specific role maintained within the United Nations system.

Events in recent months, with the publication in a Danish newspaper on 30 September 2005 of a number of cartoons representing, more particularly, the Prophet Muhammad, which unleashed grave acts of violence in a number of countries, might provide an illustration of this.

We need to learn the lessons from this complex crisis, which involves issues relating to both respect for beliefs and freedom of expression, and has undermined the often precious gains secured through dialogue in recent years.

As you know, on 2 February 2006 I made a statement in order to restate publicly how important it was to UNESCO, in keeping with its mandate and Constitution, to reaffirm the equal and absolute pre-eminence of the principles of respect for moral and religious convictions and freedom of expression.

As I said during an interview I gave to the Al Jazeera Television Network, on 10 May last year, I belong to a generation that painfully experienced the cost of flouting such principles. Allow me, once again, solemnly to declare that those are two principles on which we cannot compromise and there can be no question of pitting them against each other, or trying to establish any form of hierarchy between them, because they constitute the *fons et origo* of human dignity.

Nor must we fall prey to a confusion of issues. We have to acknowledge that the crisis that the publication of these caricatures started worldwide goes well beyond the oversimplified opposition of West and East that some people claim is self-evident. Much more at stake in this crisis is the way in which each society distinctively negotiates and delimits the boundaries of what can be said and what not, of what can be represented and what not, and of irony and blasphemy. These boundaries are not synonymous with divisions between geopolitical, cultural and religious blocs. I need hardly remind you that a number of newspapers in countries with Muslim majorities chose to publish the caricatures, while other newspapers, in western countries, chose not to publish.

These boundaries are in fact very fluid spaces in which the complex relationship that each individual, group and community has with history, culture and the sacred finds expression. Here, again, we have to acknowledge that there is no consensus as to the positioning of these boundaries and that now is precisely the time for us to gain a better understanding of their contours, shifts and changing patterns. This is a discussion that should be carried out now, bringing together all concerned. This is the precondition for reopening the way to dispassionate, peaceful dialogue, with due respect for all parties.

This entire debate has reminded us of the great challenges that still lie in store for UNESCO in its task of fostering dialogue. With these challenges ahead, the interdisciplinary character of our Organization is a real asset for anyone wishing to address them and all their complex aspects.

The Organization, for its part, will pursue the activities it has undertaken in order to promote discussions among media professionals from all the world's regions on the media codes of conduct and professional charters, and on mediation mechanisms, in order to ensure that individuals and civil society as a whole will always be in a position to engage in a peaceful and constructive dialogue with the media. Through these activities, UNESCO will at the same time continue to foster an awareness that, in its critical examination of the world, journalism of a high standard cannot disregard the importance of questions relating to different cultural and religious sensitivities.

It is also for this reason that I welcome the inclusion in document 33 C/5 of a large number of activities concerning dialogue in all our fields of competence, with the addendum to document 174 EX/5 providing a good example. It is indeed through quality education, stronger scientific cooperation, better knowledge of philosophical traditions worldwide and the demonstrated beneficial effects of cultural diversity that this dialogue should take shape and find concrete expression.

A dialogue would certainly not be fruitful without tolerance, understood, as so aptly described in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance adopted by UNESCO in 1995, as “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human”. We must, therefore, make every effort to combat these new emerging conflicts of ignorance and develop an active attitude prompted by the recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others.

UNESCO will, on the basis of its mandate and long experience, continue to offer a forum for all those who take active steps to renew the process of dialogue. My personal resolve is to take account of all the ongoing initiatives in the different countries and regions, to participate actively in them, to publicize them and to launch new ones. The objective is to arrive at a renewed understanding, with no exceptions made of such dialogues in terms of form and practice in order to reach out, beyond the small circle of the initiated and the convinced, to ever greater sections of the world’s populations. The challenge is immense, and it is up to us to join forces and take it up.

Mr Chairperson,

These are the remarks that I wished to make at the opening of this session of the Executive Board, bearing in mind that I have given a more detailed written account of the main activities carried out over the last few months in the introductory document that was distributed to you last week. During the course of your discussions, I shall no doubt have the opportunity to go back to some of them or to add to them.