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REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE (SP)

The Special Committee (SP) met on 8 and 9 September 2009, to consider agenda items 26 (Parts I and II), 27, 28, 34 and 61 allocated to it. Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Pakistan's representative to the Executive Board who was elected at the 178th session of the Executive Board, chaired the meeting. H.E. Mr Kenneth J. Luis, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Malaysia, was unanimously elected as the Temporary Chairperson. The 18 members of the Special Committee and many observers attended the meeting. The Committee made proposals for draft decisions for all five items. Highlights from the SP debate on the five items are as follows:

Item 26 – Reports by the Executive Board on its activities and on programme implementation

Part I: Activities in 2008-2009, including its methods of work (182 EX/26 Part I)

The Secretary of the Governing Bodies, Mr Parsuramen, and the assistant to the Chairman of the Executive Board, Mr Edmond Moukala, introduced this item. They noted that during the biennium the Executive Board adopted many draft decisions on programmatic issues, and that document 182 EX/26 (Part I) provides the highlights. They emphasized the extensive consultative process undertaken in the elaboration of the document.

All SP members who took the floor commended the Chairman of the Executive Board and the secretariat for the report as it accurately reflects the work of the Executive Board during the biennium. The SP welcomed the concise nature of the report on the activities of the Board, and noted some important aspects, the inclusion of which will improve coverage and balance, including:

- (a) Priority Africa and Gender;
- (b) Delivering as One under United Nations reform;
- (c) additional achievements in Natural Sciences; and
- (d) more detail on the External Auditor's report on the renovation of the Fontenoy building.

The SP members noted with concern the increase in the number of agenda items in successive Executive Board sessions. This matter requires urgent attention.

Mr Parsuramen thanked the SP for their insightful comments and suggestions, all of which will be shared with the Chairman of the Executive Board and duly incorporated into the report.

The proposal for a draft decision was adopted with amendments.

Item 26 – Reports by the Executive Board on its activities and on programme implementation

Part II: Report on the implementation of document 34 C/5 with results achieved in the previous biennium (35 C/3) (182 EX/26 Part II)

The Representative of the Director-General, Director BSP/PMR, introduced the item, indicating that the report was conceived to assist the Executive Board in meeting its constitutional obligation to report to the General Conference on the activities of the Organization (Article V.B.10) and that the report responded to the request of the Board in 181 EX/Decision 23. He recalled that 182 EX/26 Part II was a preliminary draft report that was prepared by the Secretariat for consideration by the Special Committee and was not meant to reflect the views of the Secretariat but rather to contribute to the work of the Special Committee. He noted that the report draws on written submissions by the Members of the Executive Board concerning the three key achievements and challenges of the Organization. The representative of IOS, Mr Amir Piric, observed that a number of the achievements and challenges identified in the document were similar to findings of the evaluations carried out by IOS covering the Strategic Programme Objectives (SPOs) of the 34 C/4.

Members of the Special Committee unanimously expressed their appreciation for the high quality of the document prepared by the Secretariat. Members pointed out that the report would usefully assist policy-makers, as well as participants in the 35th session of the General Conference, to understand how UNESCO has been delivering on its programme. The view was nonetheless expressed that there was still room for further progress, notably with regard to the recommendations of the report which should also cover programme issues. In the ensuing discussion, several textual changes were proposed by the Special Committee.

At the end of the debate, the Special Committee of the Executive Board concluded that the draft report (182 EX/26 Part II) now forms an acceptable model for the Executive Board's report on programme performance to the General Conference, and recommended to the Executive Board to forward to the 35th session of the General Conference an updated version of the report incorporating appropriate suggestions made at the 182nd session. The Special Committee further recommended that the process adopted in completing 182 EX/26 Part II should be followed for future reports of the Executive Board to the General Conference on the performance of the programme.

The proposal for a draft decision was adopted with amendments.

Item 27 – Evaluation of the holding of thematic debates (182 EX/27)

The Secretary of the Governing Bodies, Mr Parsuramen, introduced this item, indicating that it responded to 180 EX/Decision 22 (II), which called for the Executive Board to evaluate the experience of holding thematic debates. He stated that the Chairman of the Executive Board had invited Members to submit their comments on the advantages and shortcomings of these debates, along with suggestions for improvement. Mr Parsuramen noted that replies were received from 8 members of the Executive Board and that the replies focused on the timing of holding such debates, the selection of the themes, the conduct of the debates and the outcomes of the debates.

An active debate ensued during which SP members shared their views and experience with thematic debates. Overall, the SP recognized the usefulness of thematic debates and agreed that they should be continued, noting that the conclusions from thematic debates could be valuably utilized as inputs for the Board's decisions in policy formulation and programme development.

The draft decision to item 27, paragraph 6, proposes that the holding of thematic debates be improved by:

- (a) ensuring that the timing and the frequency of the debates is decided in a flexible manner according to the needs of the Executive Board;
- (b) choosing more focused themes with clear objectives linked to UNESCO's programme priorities and to major upcoming items on the Executive Board's agenda;
- (c) limiting the number of keynote speakers and ensuring equitable geographical representation in their selection;
- (d) ensuring that the debates are interactive and efficiently conducted.

The proposal for a draft decision was adopted with amendments.

Item 28 – Follow-up to 33 C/Resolution 92 and 34 C/Resolution 88 concerning relations between the three organs of UNESCO (182 EX/28)

The Chairperson of the SP noted that document 182 EX/28 contains a total of 24 recommendations from 33 C/Resolution 92. The Chairperson then called upon the Secretary of the Governing Bodies, Mr Parsuramen, to introduce the item. Mr Parsuramen stated that this item has been on the agenda of the Executive Board for the past two biennia and that noticeable progress has been made in implementing several of the recommendations.

Many members of the SP, drawing from their experience with this item from previous Board sessions, made contributions to the debate. Consensus was reached on the fact that most of the recommendations have been appropriately implemented. Several of the recommendations however are of an ongoing nature, and are to be kept under review and closely monitored by the Secretariat. Further, several of the recommendations have been debated under separate Executive Board items such as item 27 dealing with thematic debates. Finally, it was suggested that in future, recommendations should best be formulated in a manner that lends them to an objective ascertainment of the completion of their implementation.

The proposal for a draft decision was adopted with amendments.

Item 34 – Rules of Procedure concerning recommendations to Member States and international conventions covered by the terms of Article IV, paragraph 4, of the Constitution: proposed amendment to Article 10 of the said Rules (182 EX/34)

The item was introduced by the Secretary of the Governing Bodies, Mr Parsuramen. He highlighted the fact that there has been overall interest from Member States wanting to participate in the formulation of conventions and other standard-setting instruments. The SP agreed that the Rules should therefore facilitate wider participation than in the past.

The issue was debated extensively and an informal Working Group volunteered to draft appropriate language to clearly reflect the recommendation of the SP. After further consideration the SP proposed that the text of Article 10, paragraph 4, be amended, to make it clear that the Director-General's reports should go to a special committee comprised of technical and legal experts appointed by Member States, unless the General Conference decides otherwise, in which case the Director-General shall report directly to the General Conference.

The proposal for a draft decision was adopted with amendments.

Item 61 – Revision of Rule 59 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board (182 EX/61)

The item was introduced by the Secretary of the Governing Bodies, Mr Parsuramen. The Director of the Office of the Director-General, Ms Liz Longworth, contributed to the debate highlighting that the Director-General has consistently consulted with the President of the General Conference and the Chairman of the Executive Board on issues of HR policy.

Concerning the criteria for holding private meetings, the SP reached consensus that:

- (a) the number of private meetings be kept to a minimum; and
- (b) the frequency of private meetings should not be pre-determined.

The SP unanimously felt that the Director-General should consult the Executive Board when necessary regarding important changes envisaged in the structure or on questions of policy. Such consultations should not be in private meetings. The SP agreed that the Director-General should continue informing the Board about appointments to senior posts in the Secretariat.

The proposal for a draft decision was adopted with amendments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as Chairperson of the SP, I would like to express my appreciation for the cooperation and support I received from all members of the SP and, in particular, for their very valuable contributions to the deliberations of the Committee. I also appreciate greatly the overall spirit of consensus demonstrated by each and every member of the SP. I thank the Chairman of the Executive Board for his continuous support. Special thanks go to Mr Parsuramen and the Secretariat of the Governing Bodies for their able guidance. Finally, I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to Mr Alaphia Wright, Secretary of the SP, and his dedicated team for their excellent work and assistance in facilitating the work of the SP.