



Celebration of the 200th session of the Executive Board of UNESCO

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Message from Michael Millward Secretary of the Executive Board of UNESCO (2008-2013)

The Executive Board of UNESCO

Like life itself, UNESCO is a human institution where paradoxes abound. Its Governing Bodies are no exception. With the General Conference being the supreme policy-setting body, the Executive Board is *technically* a 'subsidiary organ' (although I was vigorously told off once by a delegate for labelling it thus) but is actually seen, according to many knowledgeable players, as the more political, the more sensitive, of the two.

The 200th session is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the manner in which the Board has evolved over the last 71 years.

Having been involved with the Board over many years, I have seen a number of these changes. I had the interesting experience of being the PA of the Board's second ever lady Chairperson, Attiya Inayatullah, during the 94-95 biennium, when half of its members were still individuals, and the other half representatives of State members by virtue of the « Japanese amendment ». That constitutional amendment, although as this book shows by far not the first, was an important one, and has had repercussions on the Organization's governance ever since. The Board's role has never been crystal clear, but the wise - of which there have been many in its membership over the years - will say that clarity can sometimes spell immobilism and lack of reactivity. After all, the Governing Bodies of such a supremely human organization as UNESCO need to work flexibly as they deal with the huge variety of at times eminently political and sensitive issues that come their way. Basically, then, it all comes down to the interactions among the representatives of the Member States, and with the senior management of the Secretariat, and to the ability of one and all to sense the times and protect the interests of the Organization. This needs to be preserved, whatever improvements can still be made to the governance.

The Board's record is indeed quite remarkable. Observers can brush aside all the criticisms of what are more mundane features of the Board's work, and this publication helps to look at the big picture: one of a body that is human, with its entanglements, its tensions, its moments of solemnity, of history in the making, of wonderful unity and fellowship, and even of sheer hilarity, but at the same time, of course, a body that requires much hard work and personal commitment.

The Board's Secretariat has a very special place in the life of UNESCO, and it was a tremendous privilege for me to serve in it, including as its Secretary, from 2008 to 2013.