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# **Summary of the Retreat of the Members of the Executive Board of UNESCO held in Chantilly, France on 09/10/16**

**by**

**H.E. Ambassador Michael WORBS**

**Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO**

**UNESCO House – Room X – 10 October 2016**

I would now like to briefly summarize, as well as I can, the main outcomes of the retreat that took place yesterday in Chantilly.

First of all, let me express my sincere gratitude to the 48 representatives who managed to find the time to participate in this first-ever retreat of the members of the Executive Board of UNESCO. Though I suspect that it was the promise of visiting the Chateau de Chantilly – so graciously organized by Ambassador Laurent Stefanini of France – that initially brought so many of us together.

It was very reassuring to see such a large number of colleagues take up the call to meet together informally and to so openly share their thoughts on the future of UNESCO. I would also like to thank the President of the General Conference for his active participation in the rich and wide-ranging discussions we had.

This retreat would not have been possible without the support of certain Member States who helped ensure its success. Let me thank specifically China, France, Japan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the United States of America for their generous support.

Certainly our meeting yesterday would not have been possible without the careful preparations made by my Office and the Secretariat of the Governing Bodies (GBS) team.

I wish to take this opportunity to summarize the more salient points of our discussions, which I shall do under the watchful control of our colleague Ambassador Samira Mohamed Moosa Al Moosa of Oman, who so kindly agreed to act as Rapporteur. If, in my summary, I have missed any points, I will count on you Madam.

I think we can qualify yesterday's meeting as a resounding success.

While improvements can be made, the informal format provided an opportunity to literally and figuratively think outside of the box. One Member said, "What I am saying now I could not say in a formal session", so it was the format that helped us, I think.

As our meeting was informal, no decisions could be made but, as the Director-General asked me this morning, if there are direct consequences for the C/5 document exercise at hand, I informed her that that would be up to the representatives to mention during the formal discussion in the joint meeting of the Finance and Administrative (FA) and the Programme and External Relations (PX) Commissions.

Nous avons bénéficié de la présence lors de nos discussions de deux amis de longue date de l'UNESCO, qui ont agi à titre de personnes-ressources et qui nous ont fourni une analyse objective de leurs points de vue particuliers sur la réalité actuelle dans laquelle l'UNESCO est confrontée, afin de lancer nos débats.

J'aimerais bien ainsi remercier le Professeur Klaus Hüfner, ancien Président de la Commission nationale de l'Allemagne, qui nous a fait un impressionnant survol de l'évolution budgétaire de l'UNESCO dans le contexte du système des Nations Unies. Son intervention a démontré, comme l'a indiqué un participant, une organisation « marginalisée dans le cœur de son mandat », qui nécessite de manière urgente une réflexion de nos programmes afin que nos actions et activités redonnent de la relevance de l'UNESCO pour ses États membres.

Il a certainement réussi à lancer une discussion très ouverte et instructive entre tous les participants, ce qui a contribué à préparer le terrain pour le reste du travail de la journée. Le texte et les slides de son intervention seront circulés prochainement aux collègues, et j'invite d'ailleurs le professeur Hüfner à se lever. Je crois que beaucoup ici le connaissent depuis longtemps.

Je tiens également à remercier M. Daniel Janicot, le Président de la Commission nationale française pour l'UNESCO, dont l'intervention était sur : « Comment préparer l'UNESCO au nouvel agenda mondial ». Elle nous a donné un éclairage à la fois historique et tourné vers l'avenir, avec des pistes programmatiques qui pourront inspirer nos choix pour les années à venir.

As a first attempt for our Board, holding a retreat within Chatham House Rules gave us the forum for a frank and earnest conversation, during which we were able to share our thoughts and opinions for the genuine benefit of our Organization.

Now let me share with you some outcomes – or key messages – that are the direct results of the open and honest discussion that was facilitated by the utilization of polling techniques led by Ms Patricia Keays, a Canadian educator with more than 40 years of experience in training and facilitation, the last 18 years with many parts of the United Nations system.

A number of very specific proposals were made, which I shall not quote in detail, but will summarize more synthetically what we concluded.

1. We are at a critical juncture in UNESCO's life. It is clear that things must change. It also means that we should not continue in a "business as usual" way. As some said, there are many holes in our Programme and the cracks are being exposed.
2. It is our Programme that must continue to define UNESCO's work and not its Budget, as another Member said, and many others agreed. The Budget should follow the Programme, and not the other way around. With clearly established priorities, UNESCO will be able to prove its added value, thus better able to generate the funds it needs.
3. The current unsustainable financial situation will in any case need to be addressed in some way.
4. It is high time that we undertake an appraisal of the impact of our programmes and policies, so that we may concentrate on the essentials that define our core mandate, with a view to ensuring that we provide premium services to the Member States in these areas alone.
5. Our mandate encompasses education, the combined sciences, culture, and communication. It includes, amongst others, foresight and prospective studies, capacity building through literacy education, lifelong learning and global citizenship education.

6. UNESCO's mandate should not be limited only to the execution the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It can nonetheless help to concentrate our work in areas where we clearly have the capacity to add value.
7. An earnest evaluation – including an assessment of purpose, presence and number – of the field office network is urgently required.
8. A broad spectrum impact assessment must be made in order to clearly identify niche areas where we have the lead. Efforts must be made to increase our visibility in them, to clearly demonstrate UNESCO's uniqueness. Such an assessment must also provide objective analysis of those actions and activities that have little impact within the Member States. New programmes, projects and activities must clearly incorporate sunset clauses.
9. We must identify and avoid overlaps with our United Nations sister agencies, accepting that they may do things better than we can, thus allowing us to streamline our efforts and avoid duplication. We must decide to leave to our partners those actions and activities that they do better.
10. Intersessional meetings could, as proposed by one Member, be an opportunity for a longer-term review of programmes, which would necessarily need to take place between now and the coming 201st session of the Board.
11. A rationalization of conferences and meetings – including purpose, duration and impact – must be made.
12. Missions and travel, as well as the number and quality of documents should be assessed, to identify smarter ways of doing things.
13. UNESCO's soft power role in promoting the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind cannot be evaluated or quantified only in monetary terms. It should remain a laboratory of ideas and a hub for normative instruments in its areas of common attendance. It should improve upon its current networks namely the National Commissions by delegating and devolving projects to them as outlined in our Constitution.

In a word it is clear that “less is more”, that is to say, let us rationalize our programmes, make our activities have more impact, and improve our work so that we are more efficient.

Let me end by quoting from Sigmund Freud, the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis. This year is the 160th anniversary of his birth. While astonishingly, it is not included in the anniversaries with which UNESCO could be associated, I think it is appropriate in the current circumstances to quote from his wisdom. He said, *“Being entirely honest with oneself is a good exercise.”*

I think our discussions yesterday are the epitome of that sentiment. Thank you very much. I would like now to invite Ambassador Al Moosa of Oman to make any additional comments she wishes.

**Intervention by: H.E. Ambassador Samira Mohamed Moosa Al Moosa (Oman) (in extenso):**

*I wish first of all to thank you, Mr Chair, as well as the Member States, who are trusting me with the function of Rapporteur. I also wish to thank all of the participants at the retreat, including the speakers and the sponsors that made it happen. I believe the Chairperson summarized the points well and gave a fair overview of the discussions at the retreat. If you allow me, I would like to briefly add to the conclusion that every cloud has a silver lining. Let us keep in mind that each and every problem carries within it an opportunity, and working through the budget constraints we successfully examine our Organization in depth and with a critical eye. To convert our challenges into opportunities we have to adapt a different mind-set, a fresh one that permits more adaptability and conceivable improvement. Thank you.*