

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(Unesco)

to the Staff
of the Unesco Secretariat

Unesco House, 5 December 1988

Dear Colleagues,

I called you together for the first time in this hall a year ago almost to the day. I had just taken up my duties as Director-General. Standing here in front of you, I tried first of all to make a survey of the situation and then to describe, in broad outline of course, the plans that I had for Unesco.

The diagnosis was not very reassuring. The international situation was extremely tense; the credibility of the United Nations system was being challenged and its very survival was in doubt; our Organization was not well known and was misunderstood; and outside this building as well as inside, there was uncertainty and doubt about the usefulness of our work and our ability to do it.

The objectives which I was setting myself under the terms of the moral contract which was going to bind us for the next six years were summed up by me under three headings:

restoring a worldwide influence to the Organization;

improving staff motivation by a policy of equity, openness, firmness and greater responsibility;

modernizing the working of our Organization in order to restore to it the vigour and competitiveness expected of it.

Where are we now, one year on? I would like all of us together to try and see how things stand, and I mean all of us together. I recently sent you my second 'blue letter'. It is now for you, today, to voice your opinions and your points of view. For my part, I shall attempt to convey to you, quite frankly, my personal feelings and how I see the situation, in other words, the stages we have already completed; the obstacles and restrictions which remain; and short- and medium-term prospects. I shall then give the floor to you in order to hear your comments and answer your questions. If time runs out, I shall communicate my replies to you in writing.

The Organization's influence

This is, of course, linked to the quality of our programmes and the impact of our activities. We could, of course, reshape the Office of Public Information a hundred times and invest millions of dollars in public relations but that would be of no use if Unesco were unable to demonstrate that it not only serves a purpose but is vital. Our image will be that of our achievements, no more and no less.

To increase the effectiveness of our activities, as soon as I became Director-General I took two measures which, to more than a few of you, may have appeared paradoxical. I decided to make further savings and I ordered the discontinuation of the PADs.

Even though we were beginning the 1988-1989 biennium with a budgetary deficit, what the French elegantly call an 'impasse', of over 12 million dollars, I decided to make further savings of some 7 million dollars. This was certainly not in order to enjoy the bitter pleasures of austerity but because of my profound conviction that we have to make up for our lack of funds by the resources of creativity and by exercising our critical judgement. On arriving here, I was persuaded that we could do what we were already doing, and do it even more successfully, at less cost. It is still too early to judge the results and draw final conclusions. This we shall do next year. However, I do not think that the reductions made in the programme have weakened our action one iota. They have, on the other hand, made it possible to allot \$300,000 to reconstruction work in Afghanistan; \$100,000 to emergency aid in the Sudan; \$200,000 to Mozambique; \$150,000 to advanced research on viruses, particularly research into AIDS; \$300,000 to preparations for International Literacy Year, etc.

The PADs were abolished not as an instrument of budgetary control but as a straitjacket on programming, and their abolition stems from the concern to give us, to give you, that margin of suppleness, flexibility and invention which seems to me absolutely vital if we are to remain in touch with reality. Reality changes very fast. Needs, expectations and situations also change. In biology, adaptation is a condition of survival. Where action is concerned, adaptation is a proof of wisdom, a wisdom which assumes that one accepts risks or, in other words, that one accepts the right to make mistakes. A year ago, I said to you: 'I am ready to accept your mistakes in so far as they stem from an intention to serve the international community and the broadest intellectual co-operation better, and to strengthen the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the Organization'. That is a commitment which I reiterate today.

This is why I have begun to delegate authority and I am determined to carry on with this so that it bears fruit at every level. All of you must have the capacity for initiative which will enable you to carry out, to the best of your abilities, conscientiously and responsibly, the work allotted to you. I am aware that, in many cases the delegation of authority has come to an early halt. I am aware that the meetings which I wish for - open, weekly meetings with all the staff of each unit or division - are still held only very rarely. I am aware that this calls for a real change of attitude. I am aware that this is coming up against old-established habits and well-established balances of power. I am aware that it will take time, but we have to be like a long-distance runner, both persevering and tenacious.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that whatever improvements may be made to the current programme, they can, at the very best, be nothing more than simple adjustments.

The decisive stage and the real turning point can only be the next Medium-Term Plan. In this respect, I feel that something positive will have been achieved in 1988. We now have a fairly clear idea of what Unesco must do and what it can do in the next six years to carry out the most pressing duty facing the whole international community, that of gradually reducing the unacceptable gulf between the abundance and prosperity reigning in one part of the world and the poverty and uncertainty which are the common lot of so many nations.

The discussions of the Executive Board at its June and September sessions led to a political consensus, which I believe to be solid and sincere, concerning a number of objectives which are all destinations towards which Unesco should set its course:

combating poverty and destitution;

developing human resources of high quality, which means not just teaching knowledge or skills but developing genuine forms of learning enabling every individual to play an active part in his or her community;

defending cultural identities against all the forms of alienation or impoverishment that go with certain aspects of modern economic and technological development;

taking an even more active part than in the past in the defence of human rights by maintaining greater contact with civil society;

gathering and circulating, particularly to decision-makers, the fullest and most up-to-date information in all our fields of competence, making Unesco in this way a vast clearing-house, the biggest centre for the exchange of information about education, science, the social and human sciences, culture and communication.

There, described in a far too simplified way, of course, are what our priorities should be for the six years covered by the Plan and the fields in which we must show tangible, concrete achievements.

To do this, we have to make strategic choices concerning which, here again, there already seems to be broad agreement. For example:

to do less in order to do better, and to do better what only Unesco can do. Concentration is a theme almost as old as Unesco itself but the plan which the Executive Board has agreed on provides a solid basis for real progress in this field. The second Plan contained 14 major programmes whereas the new one will only have seven. In the second Plan, there were 54 programmes but there will be 17 in the third. I know it has been said that no genuine concentration took place and that all that was done was to make the plan more compact. This is not true. At the conclusion of a democratic debate, the Member States made their priorities known and we can now apply the principle that I mentioned just now: 'Doing less in order to do better'.

Another example is that of interdisciplinarity, which will form the bedrock of the third Medium-Term Plan through the intertwining, among the chain of programmes, of transverse activities and themes and through the mobilizing projects carried out by multidisciplinary teams on themes such as literacy work, young people, cities, etc.

Another principle of action is the search for better synergy within the United Nations system so as to replace by complementarity and collaboration the competition which has so far prevailed.

I should like to add that very active approaches have been made this year to the sister institutions of the United Nations and to the major sources of financing such as ILO, UNICEF, the World Bank and UNDP. New prospects for co-operation are opening up but we now have to be able to use them and meet the challenge. Closer contact was quite recently established with the International Olympic Committee and with communities of educationists, teachers, scientists and intellectuals. These communities and these millions of people throughout the world are our true wealth and we should not forget it.

I have gone on rather a long time about the Medium-Term Plan because it is this Plan which is going to shape our future. It was important for there to be fundamental agreement within the Board about what Unesco's purpose should

be in the next few years, about the nature of its action and about the forms that action should take. This convergence of wills was a vital preliminary. It is the foundation on which we can now build the Unesco of tomorrow. After all, even if we were able to prepare an absolutely perfect plan, we should still have to rely on the existence of political will to put it effectively into practice. Effectiveness should be our aim, but in order to be effective, we must also be close to the people and share their concerns. We must make them aware of the problems and challenges of the modern world by using a language which is clear and comprehensible to everyone. This, in the final resort, is the only way to influence those with the power of decision.

However, we must make no mistake about it: the hardest part is still to come. We must pass from principles to achievements and from the plan to the building itself. The coming months will be hard, very hard, even. There will be a heavy work-load for everybody, from ADGs to secretaries, from the programme sectors to the translation units and pools. The text of the C/4 must be ready by the end of February and the text of the C/5 by the end of March. The time available is short and the work is hard. We will only manage if we all roll up our sleeves, but what is at stake is worth the effort.

Staff policy

I shall be a little briefer on my second point, which is staff policy, because the two letters which I sent you in April and November contained a certain amount of information about the aims which I have set myself, the measures already taken and those which are being prepared.

The greatest obstacle in this respect is, of course, the budgetary situation. To give all those who deserve them their long overdue promotions; to bring into our ranks those 'permanent supernumeraries' who have devoted themselves for so many years to the Organization; and to develop opportunities for individual and group training - all this calls for financial resources which, for the time being, we do not have enough of.

During the last eight months, most of the Bureau of Personnel's energies have gone into the reduction and redeployment of the staff. This, happily, has now been completed and it is my wish that we shall never again have to do anything similar. I have decided never again to undertake moves which link the Organization's budgetary policy with the staff policy.

Of course, a number of measures have already been taken. One of my first decisions was to confirm the granting of some 250 indeterminate contracts and it is my intention to grant more indeterminate contracts shortly. The approval of the staffing table provided an opportunity to carry out a number of reclassifications and to award a number, very small, I know, of personal promotions to staff members who had for a long time been at the top step of their grade. I have just signed a green note setting up the Hammarskjöld Commission to see to the improvement of staff management and staff efficiency. I have laid down the principles for a new system of performance reports and I have revived the probationary period so that officials will not become staff members until nine months after they have taken up their posts and when they have proved that they are capable.

Other measures are being prepared. Some of these I mentioned in my last letter, such as the preparation of an overall training plan; the establishment of ideas groups; the improvement of career prospects for General Service staff; the rationalization of advisory committees; the revival of the trainee programme; the establishment within the Bureau of Personnel of a unit to see to the planning of needs and the organization of careers, etc. Now that this Bureau has been reorganized and expanded, it is my earnest hope that the pace

of reform where the staff is concerned is going to speed up and that 1989 will be the year of substantial achievements. That is my aim and that will be my priority.

I am, indeed, determined to do everything to improve the quality of Unesco's staff. To achieve this, the staff must be offered every opportunity for updating its knowledge and, at the same time, everything must be done to avoid mediocrity within the Organization. In this respect, it must be quite obvious that the staff of Unesco does not consist of administrators or bureaucrats alone but also, and most importantly, of programme specialists. We must put paid to the idea that Unesco is a bureaucratic institution because almost 60 per cent of its budget goes on staff costs. It is the same in all intellectual organizations, whether universities, research centres or academies. But within Unesco, the proportion of staff expenditure which goes on purely administrative functions is, in my opinion, quite reasonable since the bulk, I repeat, goes on programme staff. This being so, and I repeat this as well, our main objective must be to improve the quality and effectiveness of the Organization's staff. I want to be able to say in a few years' time that we have managed to eradicate some of the illiteracy in the world and mediocrity within Unesco.

Adapting the structures

A year ago, I also stressed the need to modernize our institution and improve its functioning, and stressed the change of attitudes which that called for. This is a topic which I have returned to over and over again since then.

Structures must be adapted to functions and not the reverse. Not only must structures be adapted but, most importantly, attitudes must be adapted too. I remember that when I met all the Directors of Unesco, I stressed, and I think that we were all in agreement, that it was not so much a question of establishing bodies, systems or procedures within Unesco as of encouraging a permanent transdisciplinary attitude. Unesco is 40 years old and cannot step out of its period. Now, comfortable bureaucracy and comfortable habits give you a feeling of security which, today, is a dangerous illusion. An institution which is unable constantly to question its aims and methods is now condemned to death or oblivion, whatever that institution is. This is why we must review both our functioning and our structures. Over the last year, several decisions have been taken regarding the functioning. These measures were commented on in the letter which I sent to you on 7 November and I shall say no more about this. I should like to say a few words to you about the structures.

The traditional organizational chart with which we are familiar is shaped like a pyramid. It is not only a damper on individual responsibility and initiative but it also fosters the formation of self-enclosed areas, isolated from each other, in competition rather than complementary and absorbed by their own internal problems of power and management instead of being able to devote all their energies to their intellectual and operational work. Out of this comes the mistrust and conflict which is an obstacle to communication and decision-making and out of this come the bureaucratic processes which mean that the highest officials in the Organization, beginning with the Director-General himself, are called upon to arbitrate on innumerable matters which should not be their responsibility. There is no point in quoting examples since you are all aware of them.

All this is precisely the opposite of what Unesco really needs. By their nature, our activities require an interdisciplinary approach in their planning and an intersectoral approach in their implementation. This is a vital

condition for their quality. We must also make sure that they are relevant, and that, perhaps, is the most important job of the Director-General. This was the aim behind the reorganization of the Bureau of Studies and Programming, the Bureau of the Budget and the Central Evaluation Unit which were recently merged into a new Office for Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation. We must, finally, draw a clearer distinction between functional responsibilities connected with action and administrative responsibilities which must be directed towards productivity.

Relevance, quality and productivity - these are the poles around which I have just reorganized the Directorate and which have led me to appoint two Deputy Directors-General. The Deputy Director-General for the Programme will now be the person responsible for quality, particularly by ensuring the necessary interdisciplinarity but also by ensuring closer links with outside partners. The task of the Deputy Director-General for Management, on the other hand, will be to improve our productivity, particularly as regards administrative organization, the methods and techniques of which must be modernized.

[The Director-General then described the new organizational chart of the Secretariat - see annex]

That, then, is the organizational chart but it is not final. This is not a question of dogma; it has nothing dogmatic about it, particularly for a biologist, but I wanted to show this new structure to everyone who had not yet had the chance to see it and describe the measures which have already been taken in the direction of this restructuring.

I should like to stress that all these decisions represent a first step away from our traditional pyramid. Other steps will be taken, particularly when we get to the implementation of the new Medium-Term Plan. Indeed, our structure should more and more resemble a network of independent and living units, each directed towards a precise task based on responsibility and initiative and maintaining multiple and rapid links with each other.

A network of this kind must also be based on a distinction between functional and administrative responsibilities so that best use is made of people's different skills. A programme specialist, and even an Assistant Director-General, must primarily devote himself to intellectual tasks. You know, though, how much the time of both is now taken up by bureaucratic tasks which leave no time for thought, for creative work or even for maintaining links with the intellectual community. This is what has happened to me.

The Director-General, the Assistant Directors-General and the Directors of Divisions must genuinely try to reduce the bureaucratic part of their work to the minimum. We cannot be absorbed in our offices by piles of urgent files. In any case, an 'urgent' file is, 90 per cent of the time, a file which has been delayed and that is the only reason why it is urgent. The people concerned with the programme should not, therefore, be burdened with administrative tasks which are not really their responsibility. On the other hand, they must be able to rely on a firm administrative back-up which must be organized separately.

It is to make this distinction clear that I have appointed two Deputy Directors-General. I also intend to place all the administrative units under the direct supervision of the Deputy Director-General for Management, as is the case at FAO for example. These units will, of course, continue to serve the Assistant Directors-General and will work under their instruction since their role will be to provide each sector with the administrative support

which is necessary and facilitate its administrative life, but real administrative responsibility does not lie with an Assistant Director-General. I therefore expect the Deputy Director-General for Management to devote himself completely to the rationalization and modernization of the administration.

This subordination of the administrative units has already been decided on in the case of our Regional Offices. I have, in fact, just reformed the organization of our Field Units since, hitherto, it did not enable Unesco to be present and active in its Member States as much as the Member States wished. This reform has been guided by three principles.

First of all, the Organization's presence in the Field must be more effective. Other international organizations, such as UNDP, are represented in every country. This is not true of Unesco. Of course, we do not have the resources to achieve this quickly, but from now on every Field Unit should have sufficient staff to make its influence felt in all the countries where it is active. We must be present where it is necessary to be present and when it is necessary. I therefore intend to strengthen the small units by drawing on the largest ones.

The second principle is the comprehensiveness of the Organization. When a country turns to a Regional Office, it turns to Unesco. It cannot accept that the office is there only for culture or for science but not for Unesco as a whole. We must therefore take steps so that Regional Offices are not the property of any particular sector but of the whole Organization. This is why Field Units will now come, for the purposes of administration, under the Deputy Director-General for Management who will have to try to improve their functioning and, indeed, much has to be done. This is also why an office whose programme activities concern education for example, must, in addition to its present activities, represent the whole of the Organization, which means to say that it has to tell its opposite numbers what they can expect from Unesco in fields other than education.

The last principle is that of the independence and effectiveness of Field Units. I have often been asked why I wished to cut Field Units off from the sectors and why I intended to place them under the Deputy Director-General for Management rather than under the Deputy Director-General for the Programme. Here again, we find the difference between administrative responsibility and functional responsibility. It is not my intention to cut the Regional Offices off from Headquarters, indeed, quite the contrary. We must develop more efficient means of communication and make relations with Headquarters more flexible and simpler. This is why I want such relations in the future to take place directly with the Directors of Divisions and that, I think, is one of the most important aspects of the green note concerning the Field Units. In future, contacts will be at the level of those who are the functional pillars of this Organization, that is the Divisions and their Directors. The Field Units must also be in close communication with all sectors. In a word, no unit must in future be a distant satellite but must be a fully fledged part of Headquarters. The fact that the Deputy Director-General for Management is now responsible for these units is not an obstacle in this respect. In fact, the contrary is true since he is the one who must establish and develop this new type of relationship.

I must stress that all these changes are based on management principles which are well proven but which, so far, have been completely foreign to our work and habits. I can perfectly well understand that they are surprising, that they lead to questions being asked and even that they lead to resistance, which is only to be expected. A solid effort to inform and to train is thus vital. The training plan now being drawn up will, in any case, give

considerable prominence to the principles and techniques of management. We must also explain, inform and persuade. What is at stake is nothing less than a change of attitudes and practices, but it is a gradual change since we cannot hope to bring it about in one, two or six months, yet the renewal of Unesco calls inevitably for it.

Dear Colleagues,

As I said, I should now like you to take the floor and put to me questions of a general nature that you would like to see tackled today. If you have any more specific questions, you could let me have them in writing and I will do everything I can to answer them rapidly.

First of all, though, there is one thing that I should like to stress. It is that this new page in the life of Unesco that it is for us to write all together is intimately linked with the future of the whole United Nations system. We are an integral part of a body of nations which have united together because there existed, in their opinion, certain things on which general agreement could be reached, among which are progress in education, science, culture and communication. Despite their different views of the world, these nations agree on the fact that we must place every woman and every man at the centre of development. This new approach to development is vital for human dignity. It is with this in view, and in co-operation with all the other agencies, funds or programmes of the United Nations system, that we can, perhaps, move forward towards the achievement of our ultimate aims.

The ultimate aims of Unesco are not of a technical kind. Of course we must assist Member States in their development efforts but our purpose and our message is one of solidarity and of interdependence in equity. This is the message that we must deliver to all peoples. As I have said to you, our wealth is not to be assessed in terms of money. Our wealth are those millions and millions of men and women, teachers, artists, journalists, scientists and intellectuals, who are our special partners and our intermediaries. We are an intergovernmental organization. This is something which I never forget and which you must never forget. We must, however, also know where our strength lies. This is why we must work hand in hand with the institutions of the United Nations system and with the non-governmental organizations, which are also working to spread this message of solidarity that must be our banner and our faith.

This message must be the message of every one of you, whatever your nationality, culture or particular characteristics. I am sure, in this respect, that if we all work together, we shall be able to overcome the obstacles in the way of change. These obstacles are many and varied and they are serious ones, as was demonstrated by the symposium which we organized recently in Grenada on this topic. Some of these obstacles are connected with economic interests, others are of a cultural nature while others, still, have their roots in bureaucratic procedures, the weight of habit and the force of inertia. However, if we are able to practise internal democracy and if we are able to practise the free flow of information and ideas within this House in the same way as we are attempting to promote it outside, then I am sure that we shall manage to overcome the obstacles to change. We shall, all together, write this new page in the history of Unesco at a time when our Organization seems even more necessary than at the time when it was founded.

Before giving you the floor, may I again wish you a happy 1989 and wish peace and happiness to you, your families, all those you love and even those whom you love somewhat less.

Thank you.

At the Director-General's prompting, the floor was taken by various staff members. Their questions and the Director-General's replies are summarized below.

Question from the President of the Staff Association

I should like first of all to salute the Director-General's courage and to congratulate him on this encouraging innovation. The Association did indeed take note of the proposed moral contract mentioned by the Director-General when he spoke to the staff a year ago. Since then it has kept a close eye on the way things have been developing and it has been consulted on a great many problems that have been causing concern to the staff as a whole. The one comment that the Association would make is that the diagnosis was correct but that the treatment was probably too mild. There is, undoubtedly, a genuine desire for change. But the expected changes are taking too long. You yourself stressed the need for things to move faster, adding that it always takes time to alter people's attitudes. But when attitudes cannot be changed, would it not be wise to change a few faces first of all? You have spoken of mediocrity: can this mediocrity be overcome without drastic changes? We need only look at the way the delegation of authority you instituted has been put into effect. Delegation was supposed to flow freely downwards: in actual fact, only a few drops of water have reached the bottom, and have, for the most part, involved extra work without the corollary of more responsibility. In other words, once you have identified the main 'bottle-necks' that are holding up change, will you be able to get rid of them? Will you really be able to draw all the inferences, such as they are, from the evaluation you intend to carry out with the assistance of the Hammarskjöld Commission? Will you be able to stand up to the pressures of Member States and see to it that in future all recruitment is carried out on the basis of fair, open, transparent competition, with due regard not only to the necessary technical knowledge but also to the moral authority essential to the international civil service?

The Director-General

I am pleased with the ongoing dialogue with the Staff Association, a dialogue I have always found to be extremely instructive. When it comes to the treatment applied, the question is not whether it is too mild or too harsh, but whether it is the right or the wrong treatment. I, for my part, intend to fulfil my task with as much humanity as possible, and to refrain from sanctioning today shortcomings for which those concerned were not necessarily to blame.

We must see exactly how things stand. For many years, what has occurred in all national civil services has also been occurring within the United Nations system, that is, the development of a process aimed at continuously improving staff protection without the parallel establishment of a system to protect the Organization's interests, and it is this latter system that needs to be established today: it must be done smoothly and by all of us together. We hear over and over again that certain people must go. But who are these people? And how can they be replaced under the system of performance reporting that has been in force until now? The first step was to improve the system of performance reporting and this was the subject of a recent green note. The second is to give everyone, wherever the need is felt, every opportunity to retrain, and to upgrade and update their knowledge. Perhaps, when all is said and done, it may still be necessary to dismiss certain people, but not before they have been given a chance to improve their performance. This is the purpose of the Hammarskjöld Commission: not to sack people, but to find ways of improving staff efficiency and management.

Further savings need to be made by the end of the biennium; how can this be done? Certainly not by applying an economic policy that would adversely affect the staff: that will never happen again. It must be done by working more efficiently: which means that everyone must undertake only those activities that they consider absolutely vital for the attainment of our objectives. It also means that each and every one must enjoy all the necessary autonomy. If we manage this, the waterfall will no longer drown the staff, but will restore its capacity for initiative. It is a long and arduous process, but we must make it work.

When it comes to the so-called pressures exerted by Member States, let us get things quite clear. Of course, all Member States seek to emphasize their own candidates' outstanding qualities, and in this they are doing no more than their duty. But so far none of them has exerted pressure on me to obtain or bargain for an appointment to a post in the Organization. I have always been completely independent in this regard. If I have taken decisions of which some people disapprove, it is I and I alone who am to blame (maybe I've made mistakes?) and certainly not any Member State. We are all aware that this House is a hive of rumours, each more improbable than the last. Wasn't there a rumour that Mr Shevardnadze's brilliant address to the Executive Board was a 'trade off' against the firing of an Assistant Director-General? Well, let me assure you that the selfsame Assistant Director-General is still in his post and enjoys my fullest confidence.

* * *

Question

Is it really possible to get Unesco's message across to the public as you would like? Unesco is a community of intellectuals; Unesco is cosmopolitan; all of which makes it very hard for it to be understood by most people...

The Director-General

It is true that one of the obstacles to change is language. We all know that Unesco's language is very difficult to understand, even for the Director-General. As a scientist, I prefer statements to be precise and brief and to go straight to the point. But it would be wrong to believe that intellectuals cannot understand people or make themselves understood by them. I myself experienced this at the University of Granada, where philosophers and scientists worked in isolation in their ivory towers without really bothering about the problems besetting those around them. In particular, health problems. That was when I devised the idea of a national plan for the prevention of mental retardation. Intellectuals are often very arrogant and believe that they have all the answers, without bothering to discover whether those answers really suit the people for whom they are intended. One of the dangers to the intellectual community is the fact that it is withdrawing into a 'language ghetto'. What it ought to do, in fact, is find the words of ordinary people in order to create the kind of public awareness that is essential if in the long run, our methods are to influence the decision-makers.

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Question

The staff as a whole is keenly aware of the efforts you have made regarding Unesco's image and the message that Unesco is trying to get across to the world. This message of 'excellence' contains the moral requirement to place women on an equal footing with men, in practice as well as in theory. But what is the situation in Unesco? I have some statistics quickly gleaned

from the green notes that have been issued over the past year, and I see that out of 35 appointments or promotions of staff in the Director category and above, there were 32 men and only three women. Are we not in danger of transmitting an inaccurate message and conveying an image of Unesco on which it will, in turn, be judged?

The Director-General

I fully share the concern just expressed: there are far too few women at the top of the hierarchy. It is a fact that strikes me at every meeting of the Directorate, where we are all men. It was my wish, to be quite frank, to appoint a woman as one of the DDGs, and I searched in vain for the ideal woman candidate for nearly eight months. But where the problem lies is not so much in the selection procedure but in the very small percentage of women candidates for posts in Unesco. But everything necessary must be done to change this situation.

* * *

Question

As you yourself have said, you spent most of your first 12 months in office determining the Organization's general policy - gauging Member States' expectations during your Field missions and preparing a sketch and later an outline of the Medium-Term Plan, which is considered by some to be sound, concentrated and innovative. From that point of view, you have said, the year that is coming to an end has been favourable. It is true that a year is probably too short a time in which to make any judgement: most leaders are given a longer period of grace. But the really hard work still lies ahead: adapting the structures to the new functions set out in the Plan. As far as this is concerned, will it be possible to hazard a prognosis? In other words, will the Secretariat be abreast of the Plan by 1990?

The Director-General

In any attempt at reform, the first step is essential, for it is the one that determines the thrust and direction. It is pointless to have a powerful car if you take the wrong turning. Therefore, what was needed first of all was to change the thrust of our programmes and find the right direction. We have made a good start there. Now we must improve the performance of the vehicle or the machine. It is a hard task and it will necessarily be a slow one. That is why we cannot talk of good results in the absolute, but only of some encouraging aspect of the overall result. Likewise, we cannot reasonably talk about a honeymoon period, whether it lasts 100 days or six months or a year. It would be ridiculous to expect one person to change an Organization as complex as ours in a few days or a few months. It must be a task in which everyone pulls their weight. Rather than seeking approval, it is efficiency that we must seek, the efficiency of collective and concerted effort, which does not necessarily mean identical points of view. We must not be afraid of differences of opinion: only through differences can new solutions, new diagnoses and new treatments be arrived at. As for the future outlook, although scientists usually refuse to commit themselves, it cannot be bad: the Secretariat possesses a fantastic potential for action at Headquarters and - this I must stress - away from Headquarters, where our colleagues are working with great dedication. What we must all learn is not only to adapt to circumstances but also to foresee them. We must anticipate events so as to acquit ourselves of our duty as observers of the future, which the United Nations system has entrusted to us.

* * *

Question

In the first few months of your term of office you visited staff members in their offices. These visits were later dropped and replaced by 'working breakfasts'. Why is that? Was it because of your frequent absences from Headquarters? Or because this direct contact encouraged remarks that were considered to be a little too 'free'? Or was there some other reason?

The Director-General

These visits have not been dropped, although it is true that their frequency has diminished. I have already visited approximately half of the services and certainly hope to have done the entire rounds of the House - before the end of the honeymoon period. As far as missions are concerned, they allow me to meet Field staff, who must not be neglected, but I certainly have never been taken aback by anything I have heard during my visits; quite the contrary: I have every reason to welcome the freedom and frankness of the talks. The working breakfasts serve a different purpose: they allow more detailed exchange to take place with a number of colleagues.

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Question

Mr Director-General, you speak about efficiency, about excellence, about eradicating mediocrity, about collective effort and about communication. Isn't this all a pipe dream when we know that secretaries and even Professionals never have access to the division directors, let alone their ADGs?

The Director-General

It is extremely difficult for a Director-General to conceive of the kind of situation you mention if it is never brought to his attention. I hope that the machinery now being put in place to develop internal communication - the quality circles, for instance - will help to remedy this situation. There is, of course, also the Mediator, who is precisely the person to whose attention a matter of this kind may be brought in confidence. But I am determined to put an end to situations such as those just mentioned, and I shall do so in close collaboration with the staff representatives. I must point out here that, in future, account must be taken of the representativeness of the staff associations, which is necessarily in proportion to their membership.

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Question

A staff member, Mr Lhuillier, who was a painter, died two years ago as a result of culpable negligence. The Director-General has had the courage to acknowledge the Organization's responsibility. But what does he intend to do to avoid similar negligence in future and to ensure that the staff, particularly in the workshops, enjoy normal conditions of hygiene and safety in their work-place?

The Director-General

Safety at work is a matter in which I am keenly interested and which is being reviewed. No effort will be spared: but, there again, it is quite clear that no measure can be really effective unless it is thought out and then implemented with the collaboration of the staff as a whole and its representatives in particular.

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Question

Mr Director-General, you have just set up a Commission of independent counsellors to improve personnel management. In 1973, Mr Maheu set up a round table for the same purpose; most of its recommendations have never been implemented. Mr M'Bow set up a number of working groups, including one in 1984, also with a view to improving staff management; most of their recommendations were never implemented either. It would seem that people are well aware of what reforms are needed; the real problem lies in implementing them. How do you see the creation of this Committee changing matters?

The Director-General

This question of the gap between intention and action, a plan and its implementation, is indeed a crucial one. The establishment of the Hammarksjöld Commission is meant precisely as a response to this concern and dissatisfaction. It is not a Commission of wise persons (although it is to be hoped that they will, in fact, prove wise) but a Commission of technicians, specialists in administration techniques and personnel management. Its remit is to find ways of making staff management efficient and to ensure effective implementation of the reforms. Unesco's staff has valuable qualities and it has potential, some of which is unfortunately still untapped. It could doubtless be extremely productive: I am seeking the Commission's advice in locating the 'bottle-necks', to use a previous speaker's term. Where exactly do the forces of inertia and the factors of inhibition come into play?

Our action must be informed by two major principles. An ethical principle, that of solidarity; and an operational principle, that of efficiency. It is not enough to have the best Medium-Term Plan, the best programmes and the best staff policy. Even if we have the best plan for eradicating illiteracy, nothing will be achieved unless Member States show the political will. Even with the best policy and the best personnel strategy imaginable, if the Director-General and his closest collaborators are alone in being willing to implement, then nothing will be achieved. The practical and effective implementation of such a policy calls for a concerted effort by all staff at all levels.