

**International Scientific Committee for the UNESCO History Project**  
Report of the Third Meeting, 18 January 2008

1. The following participants attended the meeting:

Members: Mr. Robert Frank, Mr. Mohieddine Hadhri, Mr. Akira Iriye, Ms. Emma Rothschild, Mr. Jean-François Sirinelli, Mr. Ibrahima Thioub and Mr. Thomas G. Weiss

Observers: History Club of AFUS, represented by Mr. Georges Kutukdjian, ICPHS, represented by Mr. Maurice Aymard

Secretariat: Ms. Françoise Rivière, Mr. Philippe Ratte, Ms. Laura Wong, Ms. Caroline Michotte and Mr. Jens Boel

Ms. Romilla Thapar, Ms. Glenda Sluga, Mr. José Paradiso, Mr. Ilya V. Gaiduk and the observers from ICSU and ISSC were unfortunately unable to attend this meeting.

**Introduction and general information**

2. The meeting was opened by Ms. Françoise Rivière, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Culture. Ms. Rivière expressed her satisfaction with the advancement of the Committee's work and, in particular, with the fact that more than 100 replies to the call for expressions of interest in the three conferences on UNESCO's history due to take place in 2009-2010 had already been received. Many of these early proposals are of high quality. At the same time, the responses received so far also reflect marked inequalities with regard to geographical and cultural representation, an unbalance that the Committee should try to reduce. The purpose of today's meeting would be to discuss the contents and orientation of each conference based on these proposals and on the thoughts of the Committee members and observers. The Committee should also agree on the establishment of a follow up mechanism to allow for efficient planning and organization of each conference. She suggested that the dates of the conference "UNESCO and Issues of Colonization and Decolonization" should be advanced, possibly by reversing dates with the conference on "UNESCO and the Cold War". The reason for this suggestion was that such a change would facilitate financing by contribution from UNESCO's Member States. Ms. Rivière also told the Committee that she had suggested to the Director-General that an information meeting on the UNESCO History Project with the Permanent Delegations should take place in September 2008. This would be an opportunity to invite voluntary contributions from Member States to the Special Account for the project. At this stage, financing of the first conference (covering travel and accommodation costs of the speakers as well as simultaneous interpretation between English and French) was secured, but funding had to be identified for the other two.

3. Ms. Rivière proposed that for the sake of continuity and in recognition of his valuable work for the UNESCO History Project, Mr. Jean-François Sirinelli should be invited to

continue as Chair of the Committee. This suggestion was seconded by Ms. Emma Rothschild and subsequently endorsed by the whole Committee. Mr. Sirinelli accepted the invitation.

4. The Chair, Mr. Sirinelli, introduced the agenda of the meeting. After a brief overview of some activities carried out since the last meeting (23 February 2007), there would be three topical discussion sessions, one on each of the conference themes. The Committee should arrive at conclusions with regard to the general orientation of the conferences and the working methods to organize them. If possible, decisions should also be taken with regard to times and places. With regard to the length of each conference, two days with 15-20 speakers seemed reasonable, but for each conference the respective working group should reflect and decide on this matter. Mr. Sirinelli reminded the Committee that following the three conferences in 2009-2010, the essential findings will be presented at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Amsterdam (the Netherlands) in August 2010.
5. Mr. Georges Kutukdjian informed the Committee about meetings organized recently by the AFUS History Club, in particular on educational planning and statistics at UNESCO. The History Club has decided to organize a series of round table sessions with personal accounts of former UNESCO staff during 2008-2009 on themes that are directly related to the two topical themes of the UNESCO History Project, as identified by the Committee, i.e. colonization/decolonization and the Cold War. In 2008 the Club will organize meetings on gender, liberation movements, apartheid and on UNESCO institutes (such as CEPES in Bucharest) in relation to the Cold War.
6. Mr. Jens Boel displayed a video version of Ellen Wilkinson's speech when she presented UNESCO's Constitution for adoption at the founding conference in London on 16 November 1945. This is an example of the various types of documents that are being made available on the UNESCO Archives' history web pages. Mr. Boel informed the Committee that the French version of the proceedings of the November 2005 symposium were published and widely disseminated in 2007. The English version will soon be available. Among other recent activities relating to the UNESCO History Project, he particularly mentioned the drafting of a questionnaire for the new Guide to the archives of international organizations. This project has now been launched with the support of the archives and records management services of the Section of International Organizations within the International Council on Archives.
7. Mr. Boel also informed the Committee about the process leading up to the launch of the "Call for expressions of interest" in the three conferences. Three working groups, led by Ms. Glenda Sluga (Methodology), Mr. Ibrahima Thioub (Decolonization / Colonization) and Mr. Ilya Gaiduk (Cold War) and with the active participation of other members of the Committee, had prepared the wording. The text was finalized by the Secretariat in cooperation with these three Committee members and assisted by Ms. Laura Wong, who also helped disseminating it through the most important relevant international (or transnational!) research networks. The text invites scholars and students to reply before 12 January but sets 30 April 2008 as the deadline for replies. Early replies were encouraged in order to arrive at a situation where the Committee would have a first wave of replies as a basis for its work at this meeting. This goal was clearly achieved with the reception of more than 100 replies. The replies received also point to thematic gaps and weaknesses

that should be addressed by the Committee's working groups; gender is one striking example, since only one respondent explicitly proposes a paper on that theme.

8. Mr. Sirinelli wished to clarify one important point, namely the Committee's position with regard to partnership proposals that have been made from the ISSC and from various research centers and institutes. He pointed out that the Committee would welcome individual or collective proposals from any interested scholar, but that, in his view, the Committee should be solely responsible for the conferences it had decided to organize. Therefore, no conference will be organized in formalized partnership or jointly with groups outside the Committee.

### **Discussions on the three conference themes**

9. The discussions on the theme "Towards the Transnational History of International Organizations: Methodology / Epistemology" were introduced and chaired by Ms. Rothschild. In her opening remarks, Ms. Rothschild emphasized that the term "transnational" is only "modestly satisfying" as a title. She also remarked that at least three different approaches can be identified as part of the theme: UNESCO as a case study; UNESCO's own interest in the epistemology of history and the whole issue of materials of history – including but not confined to UNESCO. Finally, Ms. Rothschild raised questions with regard to the methodology of the Committee's work: Can the Committee (or its working groups) commission papers from specific researchers, including those who have not replied to the "Call"? May the working groups, or organizing groups for each conference, co-opt scholars from outside to join?
10. Mr. Sirinelli and other members of the Committee answered in the affirmative to these two questions. However, the Committee and its working groups always remain in charge. The co-opted scholars are most welcome but the final responsibility for the contents and programmes of the conferences must remain with the Committee or those of its members who constitute the working group for one particular conference.
11. Mr. Akira Iriye and Mr. Robert Frank commented on Ms. Rothschild's reflections on the term "transnational". Mr. Iriye agreed that the term is rather vague, but it does clearly imply transcending themes, such as gender, science, education, diseases, communication, globalization, and transcending nations and relations between nations. Mr. Frank recalled that for Pierre Renouvin relations between and among peoples were part of the "international" and that "Nations" are more than "States" or "Governments". Mr. Frank said that the transnational approach should first of all be understood as a method (which would be based on specific ways of selecting and using the sources, in particular the archives); this approach would also relate to topics that could be best be analyzed from a transnational perspective (such as gender). Finally, transnationalism could also be seen as a political objective and could have political significance. For example, the emergence of the "Third World" changed the very nature of the Cold War. This first conference would bring together reflections related to all three themes by highlighting the fact that UNESCO in itself is a forum for transnational relations. Mr. Philippe Ratté added that in the creation of UNESCO, a whole array of "transnational" issues can be detected – shifting weight from the emphasis on uniting peoples in 1945 on to the coming together of governments in 1946 and later.

12. Mr. Thomas Weiss stressed the issue of selection criteria; on what basis shall the papers for the conferences be chosen? An answer to this question should come out of the meeting. Ms. Rothschild thought that the main criterion should be scholarly excellence in relation to the themes and approaches chosen. If necessary the Committee should solicit such contributions that it believes could be of outstanding quality.
13. Mr. Maurice Aymard and Mr. Ibrahima Thioub commented on the ambivalence of the title – is this about international organizations in general or is it about UNESCO? Mr. Thioub thought that focus should be on UNESCO and was backed up in this view by other members of the Committee. Such a focus could well be combined with a wider view of methodological issues relating to historical research on international organizations in general. UNESCO creates the transnational, in a way, by lifting an issue that initially is local or national up to the universal level. Mr. Kutukdjian emphasized the need to keep the conference clearly focused on methodological and epistemological issues, not on broader thematic questions.
14. Mr. Sirinelli pointed to the importance of ensuring that this conference and the other two become reference points. The working groups should have freedom to develop the form and contents of the conferences in order to achieve this goal. Mr. Hadhri thought that more speakers than the 20 mentioned earlier might be preferable in order to allow for more diversity in the panels.
15. Ms. Laura Wong presented a number of sub-themes that emerge from the proposals received. An overview of such possible sub-themes for all three conferences is annexed to this report.
16. Mr. Iriye introduced and chaired the discussion on the theme “UNESCO and the Cold War”. A basic assumption is that UNESCO has not been central to the Cold War, but the Cold War has been central to UNESCO. Mr. Iriye noted that UNESCO is never mentioned in Cold War-literature. The role UNESCO had played during the Cold War was clearly to build bridges. Several interesting proposals not exclusively related to the Cold War (such as those concerning disease and apartheid) had already been received. The Committee should also consider whether or not proposals for papers focused mainly on single nations and their relations to UNESCO should have a place in the conference.
17. Mr. Weiss mentioned a number of key approaches that should be included in this conference, in particular the various stakeholders (such as the role of National Commissions), the idea of UNESCO as a “special place” and the issue of UNESCO possibly having a kind of “comparative advantage” in playing a role during the Cold War.
18. Mr. Frank said the UNESCO perspective could help giving another definition of the Cold War that would be neither teleological nor simply represent the viewpoints of the victors. He also emphasized the need to include the impact and significance of “détente” during the Cold War. Ms. Rothschild added the interest of micro-history, in the sense of looking into how the Cold War affected the life of some people in UNESCO. She also thought that science topics could be particularly interesting to study from a Cold War perspective, for instance environment issues, including climate change.
19. Mr. Ratte remarked that UNESCO’s history is also about the construction of a new intellectual space in the midst of the Cold War. Mr. Ratte highlighted the interest and

importance of paying attention to the links and interactions between the three conference themes.

20. Ms. Wong informed the Committee that the Heidelberg Center for American Studies at Heidelberg University (Germany) could possibly host the conference on “UNESCO and the Cold War”. Mr. Iriye, who has had positive experiences with conferences at this university, seconded Ms. Wong’s proposal.
21. Mr. Thioub introduced and chaired the discussions on the theme “UNESCO and Issues of Colonization and Decolonization”. He stressed that the topic is of great interest as it allows for the examination of both the impact of decolonization on UNESCO and on UNESCO’s role and impact on decolonization. The background document dispatched before the meeting provides an overview of the orientations and sub-themes relating to this topic which he would propose furthering. Mr. Thioub quoted some of the key issues at stake, such as the question of UNESCO’s stance on armed liberation movements in relation to its advocacy of a culture of peace. The impact of the arrival of a large number of new Member States at UNESCO in the early 1960s is an interesting issue. UNESCO’s actions and reflections on race and racism, as well as its involvement in the writing of history are also of great interest. In conclusion, Mr. Thioub stressed the importance of studying “mentalités” on both sides of the decolonization process and UNESCO’s specific role in their alteration.
22. Mr. Hadhri thought that the reflections should include at least the following four aspects: UNESCO itself, UNESCO as seen from outside, relations with the various actors (or stakeholders) and cultural heritage and cultural dialogue issues.
23. On condition that his university would accept this idea and that appropriate dates could be identified, Mr. Thioub proposed to host the conference on this theme (“UNESCO and Issues of Colonization and Decolonization”) in Dakar. Several Committee members expressed their appreciation of this invitation and this choice of location for the conference.

### Decisions

24. Mr. Sirinelli conducted the final discussions on follow-up, work methods, times and locations of the conferences. During this part of the meeting Ms. Rothschild accepted, in principle, a proposal that the Centre for History and Economics, King’s College, Cambridge University host the conference “Towards the Transnational History of International Organizations: Methodology / Epistemology” in Spring 2009.
25. The Committee decided - in principle and provided that appropriate dates and other logistic conditions could be agreed upon - that the three conferences shall take place as follows:
  - “Towards the Transnational History of International Organizations: Methodology / Epistemology” at Cambridge University in Spring 2009 (March, April or May)
  - “UNESCO and Issues of Colonization and Decolonization” at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar in late September or early October 2009
  - “UNESCO and the Cold War” at Heidelberg University in Spring 2010

26. The existing Committee working groups will be in charge of preparing the contents and programmes of their respective conferences; on condition that the two chairs that could not attend this meeting agree, the three members who so far have taken the lead in sharing reflections will continue to do so. The composition of the working groups will remain as follows – on the understanding that any Committee member may join as many working groups as he or she wishes:

- “Towards the Transnational History of International Organizations: Methodology / Epistemology”: Emma Rothschild, Ibrahima Thioub, Akira Iriye, Robert Frank and Glenda Sluga (chair)
- “UNESCO and Issues of Colonization and Decolonization”: Mohieddine Hadhri, Thomas G. Weiss and Ibrahima Thioub (chair)
- “UNESCO and the Cold War”: Akira Iriye, Robert Frank, Mohieddine Hadhri and Ilya V. Gaiduk (chair)

27. These working groups may, if they wish, decide to co-opt scholars, on the understanding that the final decisions on programmes and contents remain the responsibility of the Committee. The working groups are free to contact whomever they wish in order to commission papers and other contributions, to prepare panels and to advise and guide possible speakers. They should finalise their draft programmes by the end of August 2008 at the very latest, in order to constitute a solid basis for asking for financial contributions from Member States and other possible donors; however, the two latter conferences should probably keep some programme space open for adjustments. The Chair and the Secretariat will provide assistance and play an active role in servicing the working groups in the planning of each conference and in the coordination between the three working groups.

28. The essential findings of the three conferences will be presented at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Amsterdam (the Netherlands) in August 2010. Another outcome will be a publication on UNESCO history (or histories) that will include a selection of papers presented at the conferences, but possibly also other contributions commissioned by the Committee. The selection of contents of this publication will be the responsibility of the Committee.

29. The Committee decided to authorize the project coordinator, Mr. Boel, to use the funds available now and later (future contributions) on the Special Account for the UNESCO History Project to cover costs relating to the three conferences, in particular travel and accommodation costs for speakers and simultaneous interpretation.

30. The next meeting of the Committee will take place in Cambridge, in Spring 2009, in conjunction with the first of the three conferences. The project coordinator will propose alternative dates to the Committee members who will be invited to express their preference. The final timing of the meeting will be decided and communicated on that basis.