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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

First Intersessional Meeting

Introductory Remarks

H.E. Ambassador Michael Worbs

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Permanent Delegate of the Federal Republic of Germany to UNESCO

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris

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Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to welcome the Members of the Executive Board, as well as Member States non-Member of the Executive Board as observers with enhanced participation status to the first intersessional meeting, organized pursuant to 197 EX/decision 28 & 44.

Let me recognize the presence the President of the 38th General Conference, Vice-Minister Stanley Simaata. I know of your keen interest in this new mechanism, which is being inaugurated today.

I wish to also recognize the presence of the President of the 37th General Conference, Vice-Minister HAO Ping, who will be with us later today and who wished to demonstrate his support by being present here today.

And, of course, I am very pleased to see Ambassador Amr, my predecessor, here today whose role, as we all know, was pivotal in laying the groundwork for today's meeting.

Finally, I welcome Mr Getachew Engida, the Deputy Director-General, who shall represent the Director-General this morning. Madame Bokova will join us later.

Let me apologize in advance for what may seem like taking quite some time at the beginning of today's meeting to outline how we shall proceed. But, as this is the first of these newly established intersessional meetings, I feel it is important to make sure we are all on-board.

As the Executive Board's decision clearly stipulated that there will be no changes to the Board's rules of procedure, there is no need to establish terms of reference for these meetings. Let me however briefly outline some of the groundwork that I have done – together with the Members of the Bureau – to prepare for this meeting, and then share with you the proposed structure for today's session, which should form the basis for all forthcoming meetings. I am certain that you will agree with me that my proposal represents both pragmatic and common sensical approach, which is based on inclusiveness and efficiency.

Nonetheless, as this is an experimental exercise, whenever we believe it necessary to make modifications to the proposed format, we shall certainly be able to do so.

I think it's important to structure our meetings in a uniform manner, so that we will be able to assess the usefulness of this experiment and report our findings to the General Conference at its 39th session in 2017. In this regard, I think it is also important that we establish the nature of the evaluation that will be undertaken at the end of this experimental phase. Before our next intersessional meeting, I will undertake consultations with a view to presenting to you a common approach to such an evaluation.

As you will recall, the Board decided, in 197 EX/decision 28 & 44, the *“the Chair [...], in consultation with the Director-General, [...would] make the necessary practical arrangements and organize on a trial basis, during the 2016-2017 biennium, and without amending the Rules of Procedure, meetings of the Executive Board Members, in principle six times per year; such meetings will be open to States Members of the Executive Board, to Member States non-Member of the Executive Board as observers with enhanced participation status, and to the Secretariat”*.

The Board also decided *“to suspend the Preparatory Group and the information meetings between the Director-General and the Executive Board on a trial basis during the 2016-2017 biennium, and to integrate their work into the [Intersessional] meetings.”* I am certain that you will agree with me that my pragmatic approach will take on board the best practices of both of these mechanisms.

Finally, it was decided that these *“meetings will have no decision-making power, but will foster discussions in view of the regular formal Executive Board sessions during the biennium, to be followed by an evaluation.”*

Also, it was decided by the Board that these intersessional meetings would be cost-neutral to the extent possible utilizing savings gained from the suspension of the PrepGroup and the Information Meetings with the Director-General.

Please be assured that I have asked the Secretariat to keep this in mind, so that we will be able to make a cost analysis of the effectiveness of these meetings at the end of the biennium.

Equally, it is not foreseen that additional documents be made available for these meetings. However, should documents prepared for the regular sessions be already available (even if they are not yet ready in all languages) they could of course be useful for our discussions in intersessional meetings. While I will endeavour, at the end of each meeting, to summarize the key points raised during the day's discussions I do note that the ASPAC members are of the opinion that these meetings should be documented and made available to all member states as a point of reference and as a guide to move forward.

At the end of my introductory remarks, when I invite you to make comments on this proposed organization of these intersessional meetings, I would kindly ask that you take this request into consideration.

As we become accustomed to these intersessional meetings, I believe that their rhythm will be increasingly defined by the usual Board cycle and availability of documents prepared for the regular sessions. Hence, it is proposed that at least one meeting be held before each session of the Board, once most official documents are available.

In brief, the main purpose of these new intersessional meetings is to better organize our work and ensure continuity from one session to the next.

These meetings will help us to:

- Regularly receive updates on the Secretariat's current activities;
- Deal with un-finished business of the Board or to follow-up on previous decisions;
- Discuss in a more in-depth manner, certain important items on the agenda of the regular meetings of the Board with a view to freeing up time; and
- Prepare the up-coming regular session of the Board

Also, because of the importance of getting this first intersessional meeting right, I invited the members of the Bureau to meet informally at the beginning of the New Year and again formally on 10 February, to best prepare this meeting together.

With this in mind, I wish to inform you that I consulted with and indeed actively involved all members of the Bureau who consequently undertook further consultations within the regional Groups with a view to seeking everyone's views on the purpose, structure and organization of these meetings.

Throughout these consultations and during the meeting of the Bureau, it became evident that these meetings need to be focused and to be carefully tailored to facilitate and support the smooth functioning and formal debate of each regular session of the Board.

Also, it was proposed that the intersessional meetings could unburden the regular session of the Board by recommending a list of items that can be decided by the Board without debate – in a similar manner as the so-called “A-Points” within the European Union in Brussels. This would allow for more time to be made available during the regular sessions of the Board to be allocated to those items that required greater attention. The assumption being that the items identified as not requiring debate during the intersessional meetings would be treated more rapidly by the Board, based on a recommendation made during the intersessional meeting.

Equally, the members of the Bureau agreed that these intersessional meetings should:

1. Be connected to the work of the regular sessions of the Board;
2. Follow-up from previous sessions; and
3. Help to improve efficiency of the Board;
4. Help the Board to become more targeted and strategic in its work.

As the meetings of the PrepGroup and the Information Meetings with the Director-General have been suspended during this biennium, I would like to propose the following format for our intersessional meetings this year. As I have said earlier, this could be reviewed once we've all become accustomed to this format:

Each meeting could be broken down into 3 parts:

1. An introduction or statement by the Director-General

This first part of the intersessional meeting could be devoted to subjects that the Director-general wishes to raise with the Members of the Board, such as: following up from previous decisions of the Board, informing the Board of initiatives relevant to current international events, and any other subject of importance that she may wish to raise with you.

It would be followed by an interactive Question and Answer session with the participants who could ask subsidiary questions relevant to the topics raised.

For today's meeting, in consultation with the Director-General, I invited the Vice-Chairpersons of the Board to prepare one question from each region that would help frame the Director-General's statement. Should you have further questions for her, you will have an opportunity to raise them after her statement, during the Q&A part.

In the future I envisage this part of our meeting would be the first part of the agenda and would last approximately one and a half hours. Of course today is exceptional due to the Director-General's travel.

2. Preparation of the up-coming session of the Executive Board

This part of the meeting would be set aside for an analysis of all items to be dealt with at the coming session of the Board, with a view to evaluating the perceived time needed for each.

After this reflection, it might become evident that some items may not require formal debate during the regular session, but could be dealt with more efficiently during the intersessional meetings, ensuring greater efficiency of the regular sessions, thus freeing up time for more strategic discussions and decision-making by the Board.

The idea would be for the intersessional meeting to make a recommendation to the Board regarding those items that could be adopted by the Board without debate.

Of course, it would be premature to undertake such an exercise at today's first intersessional meeting, which is why I will only broach the subject briefly when we reach item 5 on our agenda.

For future meetings, I envisage that this part could last for approximately one and one-half hours.

3. Periodic thematic discussions on topics of importance for the work of the Board

I propose that the third part of these meetings be devoted to a thematic discussion. On this matter, we should be clear from the outset that a thematic debate would not be of the same nature as those we have experimented with in the past. This should rather be seen as an opportunity to take the time necessary to discuss in greater depth certain items that will be on the agenda of the coming

session of the Board that would require more time than would normally be available during the regular sessions.

It is proposed that these such items be presented briefly by the Director-General or her representative followed by an interactive Q&A session with the participants, with a view to examining the item from all possible angles thus preparing the item for decision at the coming session of the Board, which would not reopen discussion at that session.

For today's meeting, the Bureau identified two items that could be discussed in greater detail: (i) the TVET strategy and (ii) the Protection and Promotion of Culture in Armed Conflict – both items are foreseen on the provisional agenda of the 199th session of the Board.

I envisage that this part of the intersessional meetings could last approximately three hours.

With this brief summary that proposes the structure for today's session and all forthcoming meetings. I trust that you will agree with me that this meets our expectations of the intersessional meetings and represents a logical approach.

Also, we will also have to keep in mind that because these meetings are experimental, perhaps that one session per year ought to be devoted, at least partially, to analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of this proposed meeting structure with a view to making any improvements deemed necessary.

Before I give you an opportunity to comment on this proposed method of work, let me also mention that these meetings are open to States Members of the Executive Board, and to Member States non-Member of the Executive Board as observers with enhanced participation status, as was customary during the PrepGroup meetings.

As you know, according to usual practice during regular sessions of the Board, EXB members speak first, followed by Member States non-members of the Board, then other observer states and finally other observers (IGOs and NGOS). It is also customary to grant more speaking time to EXB members, and they can usually take the floor more than once.

As these INX meetings are intended to allow as much participation as possible, I propose that all speakers be given the same speaking time (2 minutes) and that all participants in these meetings be treated on the same level. I would urge us all to ensure efficiency in our interventions while dispensing of time-consuming niceties.

As I said before; it was decided by the Board that these intersessional meetings would be cost-neutral to the extent possible utilizing savings gained from the suspension of the PrepGroup and the Information Meetings with the Director-General.

Nonetheless, these meetings will be undertaken without making any changes to the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, as stipulated in the Board's decision.

In this regard, it has been proposed that each EXB member be represented in principle by its Paris-based Ambassador, rather than its Representative, in the spirit of cost savings.

In order to ensure maximum inclusion, let me assure you that the Secretariat is actively evaluating all possibilities to use video-conferencing technology for future INX meetings.

Now, dear colleagues, after this rather lengthy introduction, which I hope has set the mood for these intersessional meetings, I would like to see if this proposal meets your expectation, or whether you have any further questions, before we move on with the work ahead of us.