

UNESCO AND ISRAEL

Two resolutions adopted by the 18th Session of the Unesco General Conference in October and November 1974 concern chiefly Israel. One refers to the composition of regional groupings, the other to the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Jerusalem.

Regional Groups

Israel has not been excluded from Unesco, as some people might have been led to believe by incomplete or erroneous interpretations of the first resolution. Israel's membership in the Organization has never been questioned by anybody.

The facts are these :

In order to carry out certain regional activities, Unesco's Member States have been grouped together in five regions : Africa ; Latin America and the Caribbean ; Asia and Oceania ; Arab States ; Europe. Israel asked to belong to the European grouping and it was this request which was rejected by the General Conference. But before the General Conference, Israel was not in fact listed as belonging to any regional grouping, so that today it is still in the same situation as previously - a situation which was, incidentally, the same for more than a dozen other unlisted Member States, which nobody claimed were being "excluded" from Unesco.

It should be noted that Israel is still listed under Group I (Western Europe) for elections to the Executive Board, on the same footing as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America which are also geographically outside of Europe.

In any case, Israel's non-inclusion in the European grouping does not prevent the country from participating as an observer in Unesco-organized meetings and conferences for Europe or for other regions.

Protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Jerusalem

The General Conference considered that the Israeli Government had not heeded the "urgent appeals" which both the Conference and the Executive Board had made since 1968, calling on it to "desist from any archaeological excavations in the City of Jerusalem and from any modification of its features or its cultural and historical character, particularly with regard to Christian and Islamic religious sites". Noting that works which it considered acceptable of endangering the character of the Old City of Jerusalem, occupied by Israel since 1967, were continuing, the General Conference decided six years after issuing its first notification to condemn Israel's attitude, which it considered "contradictory to the aims of the Organization as stated in its Constitution ..." and invited the Director-General to "withhold assistance from Israel in the fields of education, science and culture until such time as it scrupulously respects the decisions and resolutions" of the Conference and the Executive Board.

This resolution has been given a very limited interpretation since it implies no more than the suspension of financial aid given by Unesco to Israel for specific programmes ; under this provision, Israel received a total of \$ 24,000 in 1973 and 1974. It does not mean that Israel must cease to contribute to, or benefit from, the carrying out of the Unesco programme.

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Unesco and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

The Palestine Liberation Organization which is recognized by the League of Arab States, was accepted as an observer by the Unesco General Conference at its eighteenth session on the same footing as 14 African liberation movements recognized by the Organization of African Unity. It has never been proposed that the PLO should become a Member State of Unesco.

Has there been a "politization" of Unesco?

In some circles, the measures which have just been cited have been used to brand Unesco with "politization" as though the agencies of the United Nations system had not, in fact, been born of a political determination to found a just and lasting peace by contributing to the general progress of humanity and by strengthening understanding and co-operation among peoples.

It would hardly be realistic to think that an intergovernmental organization such as Unesco could be entirely apolitical, for it is precisely concerted action at governmental level which permits the realization of its large-scale programmes of intellectual co-operation, thanks to which marked progress has been made in the fields of Unesco's competence : educational planning, scientific and technological policies, cultural policies and communication policies.

Tolerance, patience and understanding

"Of course we do not live in an ideal world and it would be useless to try to idealize it," the Director-General remarked at the close of the General Conference. But at the same time he affirmed that "without denying any of the contradictions of our times". Unesco should seek to rise above tensions and conflicts. He made an urgent appeal for tolerance and understanding in order to achieve "through patient dialogue the consensus which should be the golden rule in an institution such as this. "Admittedly, he said, this calls for quiet, patient and unflagging efforts and for mutual concessions".

For nearly 30 years, men and women of all creeds and origins have been taking part in Unesco's work for the good of the international community ; at this very moment, men and women from more than 100 Member States, including Israel, are working together in the common action.

Faithful to its mission, Unesco will continue to seek "the broadest possible agreement on the basic issues" giving constant proof of its willingness to engage in dialogue. What is now necessary is for men and women of good will not to refuse this dialogue which Unesco seeks throughout the world in its struggle on behalf of humanity.