



30 C/82
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PROCLAMATION OF 21 MARCH AS WORLD POETRY DAY

OUTLINE

Source: 157 EX/Decision 3.4.2.

Background: Pursuant to a request by the Moroccan National Commission, which wished an item to be included in the agenda of the Executive Board on the desirability of proclaiming an International Poetry Day, the Secretariat drew up a feasibility study that was submitted to the Executive Board at its 157th session.

Purpose: The present document sets out the results of an international consultation on the desirability of proclaiming an International Poetry Day, organized on the instructions of the Director-General and with the involvement of international non-governmental organizations of writers and poets, in particular International PEN, and poetry centres connected with UNESCO. In accordance with the Executive Board's decision, (157 EX/Decision 3.4.2), this document is submitted to the General Conference at its 30th session for study and decision.

Decision required: paragraph 12.

Report on the International Survey for the Proclamation of an International Poetry Day

1. An international survey was conducted by UNESCO with the assistance of Mr Alexandre Blokh, former International Secretary of International PEN and an honorary UNESCO consultant, among some 50 national, international and regional organizations specializing in poetry. About 30 replies were received. The purpose of this survey, carried out by questionnaire, was to seek the views of poetic circles in different geocultural regions of the world on the form that such a proclamation might take. In this regard, the following three types of action were envisaged:

- (i) the proclamation of an International Poetry Day each year at a set date;
- (ii) the celebration of the International Day on the dates corresponding to existing national poetry days in each country;
- (iii) the organization of a world event in honour of poetry in a different Member State each year.

2. Generally speaking, the recipients of the questionnaire gave affirmative answers to all questions relating to these three proposals for launching an International Poetry Day. Although not overly significant, these replies do at least reflect the expectations of the international poetic community and its interest in some action being taken by UNESCO on this matter.

Recommendations of the ad hoc meeting held on 26 March 1999 at UNESCO Headquarters

3. The ad hoc meeting on the advisability of proclaiming an International Poetry Day, organized at UNESCO Headquarters, brought together some 15 poets and/or representatives of the leading poetry centres in the various geocultural regions.

4. Following a detailed analysis of the state of poetry as the century draws to a close, the following considerations were put forward:

- (i) In today's world there are unfulfilled aesthetic needs. Poetry can meet this need if its social role of interpersonal communication is recognized and it continues to be the means of arousing and expressing awareness.
- (ii) Over the past 20 years there has been a strong revival of interest in poetry, with a proliferation of poetic activities in the various Member States and an increase in the number of poets.
- (iii) It is a social need, which incites young people in particular to return to their roots, and a means whereby they can look into themselves at a time when the outside world is irresistibly luring them away from themselves.
- (iv) Moreover, as an individual, the poet is taking on a new role as the public becomes more and more appreciative of poetry evenings with readings by the poets themselves.

- (v) This shift in society towards the recognition of ancestral values also represents a return to the oral tradition and an acceptance of speech as a means of socializing and structuring the individual.
- (vi) There is still a tendency in the media and among the general public to refuse to take the poet seriously. Action is needed to free ourselves in order to make this image a thing of the past and to give poetry its rightful place in society.

UNESCO's role in promoting poetry

5. All persons consulted on this project, whether by writing or at specially convened meetings, showed a keen interest in the proposal that UNESCO should undertake global action in favour of poetry that would give recognition and fresh impetus to national, regional and international poetic movements. The main objective of this action should be to support linguistic diversity through poetic expression and to offer endangered languages the opportunity to be heard within their communities. This is why, after studying the different forms that such action might take, it was agreed that 21 March, the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere, should be proclaimed International Poetry Day.

6. The day would be celebrated throughout the world, starting in 2000. The idea that it might open the Cultural Olympics to be held in Delphi in 2001 is also under consideration.

7. It should be noted, however, that by decision of the United Nations 21 March is to be devoted to the elimination of racial discrimination. Nevertheless, given the large number of days set aside for specific celebrations, it would be difficult to find another date that was both significant and consensual.

8. At a time when poetry is flourishing, this day could provide an occasion for activities and efforts carried out at different levels to support poetry and more particularly to promote:

- (i) the efforts of small publishers who are struggling to enter the book market by publishing more and more collections by young poets;
- (ii) a return to the oral tradition, or rather to live performance, since poetry recitals attract more and more people today;
- (iii) the restoration of dialogue between poetry and the other arts such as theatre, dance, music, painting and so on, and with topical themes like the culture of peace, non-violence, tolerance, etc.;
- (iv) the association, on the occasion of International Poetry Day, of all the arts and philosophy, which is also akin to poetry, so as to breathe new meaning into the dictum of Delacroix who wrote in his Journal: "There is no art without poetry";
- (v) the image of poetry in the media so that the art of poetry will no longer be considered an outdated form of art but one which enables society as a whole to regain and assert its identity.

Programme of the celebration

9. As far as the celebration itself is concerned, it was recommended that each country should celebrate the day of 21 March in its own way, with the active participation of National Commissions, NGOs and the public and private institutions concerned (schools,

municipalities, poetic communities, museums, associations, publishing houses, local authorities and so on).

10. For its part, UNESCO will endeavour to encourage and support national initiatives designed, *inter alia*, to:

- (i) further the introduction of poetry as an important feature of arts education in school curricula;
- (ii) raise awareness in schools so that International Poetry Day will be celebrated in the most interdisciplinary way possible by and in schools;
- (iii) encourage the award of poetry prizes;
- (iv) mobilize municipal authorities so that they will contribute actively to the preparation and celebration of International Poetry Day; and
- (v) promote the creation of a network of prizes in each Member State (and Associate Member).

11. The Executive Board, at its 157th session, adopted the following decision:

The Executive Board,

- 1. Having examined document 157 EX/9,
- 2. Recalling the importance of poetry in the promotion of human values and ideas,
- 3. Decides to recommend that the General Conference at its 30th session approve the proclamation of 21 March as World Poetry Day;
- 4. Also decides to recommend that the General Conference invite Member States to celebrate the day of 21 March in their own way, with the active participation of National Commissions, NGOs and the public and private institutions concerned (schools, municipalities, poetic communities, museums, associations, publishing houses, local authorities and so on);
- 5. Further decides to recommend that the General Conference at its 30th session invite the Director-General to encourage and support all initiatives that will be taken at the national level in this respect.

12. In the light of the foregoing, the General Conference may wish to adopt the following resolution:

The General Conference,

- 1. Having considered document 30 C/82, Proclamation of 21 March as World Poetry Day, together with the Executive Board's decision concerning such proclamation (157 EX/Decision 3.4.2),
- 2. Endorsing the recommendations of the ad hoc meeting whose conclusions are set out in document 157 EX/9 and which, following a detailed analysis of the state of

poetry as the century draws to a close, regards the proclamation of a day for poetry with satisfaction and enthusiasm,

3. Convinced that the initiative for a worldwide event in support of poetry would give fresh recognition and impetus to national, regional and international poetry movements,
4. Mindful that this event, which responds to aesthetic needs in the present-day world, must have repercussions in the promotion of linguistic diversity, since through poetry endangered languages will have greater opportunities to express themselves within their respective communities,
5. Mindful also that a societal movement expressed in the recognition of ancestral values is also a return to the oral tradition and acceptance of the word as a socializing and structuring element of the human individual, and that such a movement, which may help the young to recover basic values, constitutes a means for them to come face to face with themselves,
6. Recalling that, since poetry is an art rooted both in the written text and in the given word, any action to promote it should be conducive to an intensification of international intercultural exchanges,
7. Proclaims 21 March as World Poetry Day;
8. Invites the Member States of UNESCO to take an active part in celebrating this Day, at both local and national level, with the active participation of National Commissions, NGOs and the public and private institutions concerned (schools, municipalities, poetic communities, museums, cultural associations, publishing houses, local authorities and so on);
9. Invites the Director-General of UNESCO to encourage and support all national, regional and international initiatives taken in this respect.