

DG/2003/032
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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at the opening of the Inter-Agency Meeting on “Promoting Peace and Security
through Education and Science: Elements for a UN Strategy against Terrorism”

Paris, 26 February 2003

Dear colleagues,

Let me first of all thank you for attending this meeting of representatives of the member organizations of the Chief Executives Board (CEB). I am very glad that, despite time constraints and the pressing concerns raised by the international situation, we have with us representatives of the UN Department of Political Affairs, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNDP, UNWRA, ILO and the United Nations University (UNU). Several other agencies have expressed their considerable interest in pursuing interagency cooperation on this theme, but are unable to be represented here today.

I have invited several of my colleagues from the different Sectors of UNESCO – Education, the Natural Sciences, the Social and Human Sciences, Culture, Communication and Information – and from our Education Institutes to attend our meeting and share with us their experience and perspectives. Our Secretariat has prepared a brief review paper outlining UNESCO’s position, which is included in the background files distributed to you today. This paper is the result of intersectoral consultations and has been prepared by the Bureau of Strategic Planning and the Education Sector’s Division for the Promotion of Quality Education.

As I informed you in my letter of invitation, this meeting is meant as a response to two of the recommendations contained in the Report of the Secretary-General’s Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism, which was presented in August 2002 to the UN General Assembly and the Security Council. I take this opportunity to commend its authors on the high quality of this text, which should serve as a guide in our future reflections. Following consultations I had with Mr Kofi Annan, it was agreed that UNESCO would take the lead, jointly with UNDP, to convene this meeting of all concerned member agencies of the CEB to discuss the interagency follow-up and implementation of these recommendations.

The first of these recommendations, Recommendation 10 (b), concerns “educational initiatives aimed at increasing understanding, encouraging tolerance and respect for human dignity, while reducing mutual mistrust between communities in conflict”. It explicitly aims at developing “a coherent worldwide programme to assist countries in which the educational systems need support or that are under the control of groups advocating terror”.

The other is Recommendation 21, which recommends the production of “proposals to reinforce ethical norms, and [encourages] the creation of codes of

conduct for scientists, through international and national scientific societies and institutions that teach sciences or engineering skills related to weapons technologies”.

I will confine my remarks this morning to outlining some key findings of the Working Group which may guide our discussions, some priorities for action based on our experience and mandate at UNESCO, and a suggestion concerning possible future working methods.

Several principles are laid out with great eloquence and wisdom in the Report prepared by the Working Group. The first principle is that acts of terrorism can never be justified whatever the motives and should be condemned in an unequivocal fashion, as stated in several Resolutions of the General Assembly, in particular Resolution 56/1. UNESCO’s Member States adopted a similar Resolution in 2001 at the last session of the General Conference, entitled “Call for international cooperation to prevent and eradicate acts of terrorism”, in which the Member States strongly condemn any act of terrorism and consider such acts not only as “a denial of the principles and values of the United Nations Charter, the UNESCO Constitution and the [1995] UNESCO Declaration on Principles of Tolerance”, but also as “an attack against humanity as a whole”.

At the same time, the Working Group clearly recommended that the issue of terrorism should be approached in a broad and inclusive fashion. Peace and security cannot be separated. As the Working Group recognized, terrorism is a criminal act and yet it is more than mere criminality. The United Nations must address both sides of the terrorism question in terms of its political as well as criminal nature (para. 13). In particular, the Working Group states that “lack of justice provides breeding grounds for terrorism. Where United Nations efforts to reduce lawlessness and despair in the world succeed, terrorism will find no nourishment”. This recommendation is entirely in keeping with the Resolution of UNESCO’s General Conference, which notes that “intolerance, discrimination, inequality, ignorance, poverty and exclusion, among others, provide fertile ground for terrorism” and that “the world community requires a global and inclusive vision of development based on the observance of human rights, mutual respect, intercultural dialogue and the alleviation of poverty, founded on justice, equity and solidarity, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations and segments of society”.

The Working Group is also emphatic about the role of the UN in the area of norm setting and human rights. In this respect, support to basic human rights and freedoms such as the right to education, the right to participate in cultural life, and freedom of expression and information is vital for sustaining broad-based

international cooperation in the fight against terrorism. They establish the conditions in which peace and mutual understanding may be nurtured. In this respect, action against terrorism already is part of the wider UN agenda of promoting and protecting human rights and freedoms but it obviously gives that agenda added urgency.

At the same time, the Working Group warns us that the fight against terrorism should not be used to justify assaults on key human rights and freedoms. As noted by the Working Group, “The United Nations should beware of offering, or be perceived to be offering, a blanket or automatic endorsement of all measures taken in the name of counter-terrorism”.

Finally, while proposing three types of activities to counter terrorism – dissuasion, denial and cooperation – the Working Group places a strong emphasis on the first one. Indeed, the fight against terrorism needs to seek long-term changes not only in behaviour and attitudes but also in institutions, and such changes cannot easily be achieved through short-term measures, especially in conflict and post-conflict situations. It may be useful here to recall the distinction made by the Secretary-General, in his Report on the prevention of armed conflict (7 June 2001), between “structural prevention” measures and approaches and “operational prevention”. Whether in the field of education, science, communication or culture, structural prevention aimed at longer-term changes is probably the most effective and sustainable way to remove the causes of conflict, aggression and terrorism.

Let me now briefly summarize some of the approaches and priorities for action which have been chosen by UNESCO and which, in our view, can have a substantial impact on preventing and eradicating acts of terrorism.

A key concern for UNESCO is the promotion of dialogue between and within cultures and civilizations. We see such dialogue as a means for achieving better knowledge and appreciation of different cultures as well as greater respect for and acceptance of cultural diversity. Clearly, globalization has brought peoples and nations into closer interaction and interdependence than ever before and, in the process, has created or further developed multicultural, multiethnic, and multifaith societies throughout the world. At the same time, globalization has been accompanied by increased social fragmentation and growing inequalities. In addition, there has been a revival of deep-seated hatreds and increased intolerance and misunderstanding, all of which thrive on ignorance, stereotyping and the stigmatization of ‘the other’.

While some have argued that this is the result of an intractable “clash of civilizations”, it is rather, in many respects, the result of a clash of ignorances – by this I mean the ignorance of each other’s way of life, values and heritage, the ignorance of the equal dignity of the human person in all cultures and civilizations, and the ignorance of the unity of humanity and of commonly shared values. This paradoxical situation represents one of the world’s greatest challenges in the decades ahead, one which will require action and commitment on many fronts, in particular in education, culture, communication and science.

These considerations have led UNESCO to choose the protection of cultural diversity and the promotion of dialogue among cultures and civilizations as key strategic priorities. This frame of reference also explains why we are leading the 2001-2010 International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World and playing a key role in implementing the “Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations” adopted by the UN General Assembly in November 2001.

The heightened tensions and insecurity in the world today also lead us to recognize that education, as often practised in schools, families and communities, often fails to fulfil its purpose of promoting social understanding and civic responsibility. In 1996, the Delors Commission identified “learning to live together” as the fourth pillar of education, but it requires much strengthening in this new century. In this regard, a key concern for UNESCO is the promotion of quality education to prevent violence, to strengthen a climate of tolerance and security, and to foster the development of values of peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding as well as capacities for the non-violent resolution of conflicts. This action requires substantial time and resources, as it calls for far-reaching changes in teacher training, the revision and development of textbooks and curricula, and the general improvement of learning environments so that stereotypes, violence, prejudice and discrimination have no place. In our view, it is particularly important to encourage, through bilateral and multilateral processes, the removal of hate messages, distortions, prejudice and negative bias from textbooks and other educational media. Similarly, it is essential to encourage the acquisition by all learners of a basic level of knowledge and understanding of the world’s main cultures, civilizations and religions.

Together with the other agencies involved in the Education for All (EFA) movement, we consider that this overall task should be considered as one element of a larger vision of education, one focusing on a new vision of quality education encompassing all aspects of human development: values, knowledge, attitudes and skills.

In addition to educational activities in various fields, the Secretary-General's Working Group calls on us in Recommendation 21 to ensure the reinforcement of ethical norms and the creation of codes of conduct for scientists, in particular those who work in sciences and engineering related to weapons technologies. As you know, the ethics of science and technology is a priority for us here at UNESCO, which is host to the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST). As a follow-up to the World Conference on Science, held in Budapest in 1999, which recommended that "ethics and responsibility of science should be an integral part of the education and training of all scientists", COMEST received a specific mandate in this area, in cooperation with the International Council of Scientific Unions' Standing Committee on Responsibility and Ethics of Science. COMEST has established a working group on ethics and responsibility in research training; the first meeting of this working group was held on 26 January 2003 in Paris under the Chairmanship of Professor Dagfinn Follesdall. In addition, an action is underway to encourage the formulation of codes of conduct among scientists and engineers, drawing inspiration from the "Hippocratic Oath" given by medical doctors.

These are not easy endeavours. It is my wish that all the UN system agencies, funds and programmes having competencies in scientific areas will join forces with UNESCO and harness the resources of their networks among science specialists to take work in these areas to new levels of achievement. In carrying out this work, UN agencies need to recognize that they cannot act alone. They need to involve civil society organizations, professional associations and networks, specialized NGOs, universities and research institutes, and the private sector. These institutions, many of which share our concerns and values, are vital because of their involvement in education, training and the establishment, conduct and monitoring of professional scientific practices.

Dear colleagues,

The Secretary-General's Working Group recommended "neither substantial modifications to the Organization's agenda, nor organizational changes within the United Nations system or the diversion of major resources to the struggle against terrorism". I fully concur with this overall assessment. Many of our organizations already carry out activities which, in many different ways, address the fight against terrorism. Rather than creating entirely new programmes, our goal should therefore be to concentrate on making them more effective through deeper and more focused cooperation. We therefore need to think about how to improve the coordination of the UN's terrorism-related efforts, how to define strategies and priorities more cogently, and how to secure substantive improvements through relatively modest

enhancements of resources. As a first step towards enhancing mutual cooperation in the areas described in Recommendations 10 (b) and 21, it may be useful for this meeting to consider the establishment of an inter-agency working group which would take forward its work and which might also inform the work of the Executive Committee on Peace and Security.

I look forward to the results of your deliberations, which I will share with the Secretary-General and other members of the CEB.

Thank you.