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SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

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ESTABLISHMENT OF A WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY

A FEASIBILITY STUDY

SUMMARY

This document, drawn up by the UNESCO Secretariat, presents a feasibility study on the establishment of a World Philosophy Day. It comes in support of document 171 EX/48, submitted by Morocco which calls for the establishment of a World Philosophy Day.

The Director-General hereby places at the disposal of the Executive Board the findings of this study.

BACKGROUND

1. Philosophy Day at UNESCO has been celebrated every year since 2002, on the third Thursday of November, both at Headquarters and in the field, under the Organization's regular programme. In a letter dated 19 May 2004, Mr Mohamed Achaari, Minister of Culture of the Kingdom of Morocco, submitted to the Director-General for consideration a proposal to establish a World Philosophy Day, following the deliberations of the third session of the *Rencontres du Printemps de la Philosophie*, organized by the *Association des Amis de la Philosophie* in the city of Fez, Morocco, on 9 and 10 March 2004. At a meeting organized on 13 January 2005 by the Social and Human Sciences Sector with the representatives of Permanent Delegations to UNESCO and the different sectors of the Organization as part of the consultation process on the intersectoral strategy on philosophy, Ms Aziza Bennani, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of Morocco to UNESCO, put forward the idea of a draft resolution. In a letter dated 7 February 2005, Ms Bennani transmitted to Mr Hans-Heinrich Wrede, Chairman of the Executive Board, the proposal by the Kingdom of Morocco to establish a World Philosophy Day. This proposal invites the Director-General to conduct a feasibility study – including an estimate of the costs and an indication of the expected results – on the celebration of a World Philosophy Day, and to report to the Executive Board on that matter at its 172nd session. In this connection, the Social and Human Sciences Sector was called upon by the Secretariat of the Executive Board to conduct the feasibility study for submission to the Board at its 171st session.

SCOPE, PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

2. The aim of this study is to consider, through a study of possible objectives, expected results, modes of implementation and the financial implications of such an undertaking, whether UNESCO should extend the reach of Philosophy Day at UNESCO by proclaiming a World Philosophy Day. The study is based mainly on the results of the three previous Philosophy Days at UNESCO which were held in 2002, 2003 and 2004, and received very broad endorsement from both the international intellectual community and the public at large. In 2004, the participation was noted of some 95 philosophical institutions spread across 79 Member States, 22 of them in Africa, six in the Arab region, 17 in Asia and the Pacific, 22 in Europe and North America and 12 in Latin America and the Caribbean, whereas only 53 countries were involved in the first day organized in 2002.

3. Furthermore, at its 169th session, the Executive Board of UNESCO, on the initiative of Turkey (169 EX/Decision 3.6.3), requested the Director-General to submit an intersectoral strategy on philosophy. Following a broad consultation carried out among the Permanent Delegations, National Commissions, the NGOs concerned, universities, research institutes and eminent personalities, it appears that there is wide support for the celebration of a Philosophy Day, especially in relation to the “promotion of philosophical thought and research”, as emphasized in Pillar III of the intersectoral strategy.

UNESCO's ROLE IN THE PROMOTION OF PHILOSOPHY

4. In the light of the above, Philosophy Day at UNESCO, organized as a regular programme activity, would undoubtedly benefit from being celebrated worldwide with the support of the Organization's Member States. Transcending disciplinary divides, such a Day would make it possible to envisage at the global level the organization of open and pluralistic dialogues about the relationship of societies to knowledge and learning.

5. The proclamation of a World Philosophy Day could also have a beneficial influence on the promotion of philosophy teaching, which is absent from the curricula in many countries and occupies a position that is both uncertain and weak in others. As reflected notably in the responses to the questionnaire drawn up with a view to formulating the international strategy on philosophy (Pillar II of the Strategy), the teaching of philosophy was unanimously identified as one of the priorities to be implemented by UNESCO. World Philosophy Day could therefore assist the gradual inclusion of philosophy in curricula so as to encourage a reflective and critical exercise in thinking and reasoning. The celebration of World Philosophy Day would thus enable UNESCO to fulfil its role as a catalyst of ideas and a forum for encounter and reflection, while upgrading, alongside the other human and social sciences, the questioning and critical function of the discipline of philosophy.

PROGRAMME OF THE CELEBRATION

6. World Philosophy Day could be celebrated each year on the third Thursday of November. All of UNESCO's partners (National Commissions, associations, universities, relevant NGOs, schools, institutes and so forth) would be called upon to organize various types of activities (round tables, television programmes, publications, cultural activities in schools, universities and even in public places, etc.). UNESCO would perform its function as a philosophical forum and as a platform for exchanges, undertaking the dissemination and promotion among its partners and its networks of the activities and experience developed in connection with the event.

7. For its part, UNESCO would endeavour to encourage and support national, subregional and regional initiatives designed, *inter alia*, to:

- (i) build up a momentum enabling universities, institutions and the NGOs concerned to make philosophy more accessible;
- (ii) function as a place of assembly and a philosophical forum so as to strengthen or set up new networks of philosophers from around the world;
- (iii) foster the teaching of philosophy in curricula, in close collaboration with ministries of education, higher education and research;
- (iv) raise awareness in schools so that this Day may be celebrated as widely as possible;
- (v) mobilize local organizers (municipalities, cities, regions, etc.) to contribute actively to the preparation and holding of World Philosophy Day.

OBJECTIVES

8. The main objectives of World Philosophy Day would be as follows:

- (i) to renew the national, subregional, regional and international commitment to philosophy;
- (ii) to foster philosophical analysis, research and studies on major contemporary issues so as to respond more effectively to the challenges that are confronting humanity today;

- (iii) to raise public awareness of the importance of philosophy and its critical use in the choices arising for many societies from the effects of globalization or entry into modernity;
- (iv) to appraise the state of philosophy teaching throughout the world, with special emphasis on unequal access;
- (v) to underline the importance of the universalization of philosophy teaching for future generations.

EXPECTED RESULTS

9. The expected results could be as follows:

- (i) greater international awareness of the need for free, critical and responsible philosophical reflection;
- (ii) mobilization of the intellectual community, decision-makers, educational institutions and the media to promote philosophy;
- (iii) reinforcement of international cooperation in the fields of philosophy, ethics and the social and human sciences;
- (iv) elaboration of new approaches and procedures in the teaching and practice of philosophy;
- (v) greater visibility of UNESCO's pioneering role, its mandate and intellectual mission.

DIFFICULTIES ANTICIPATED

10. The following difficulties are anticipated:

- (i) need to ensure flexible and consistent coordination of the envisaged events;
- (ii) effort required to ensure the participation of developing countries on the basis of equality, parity and accessibility;
- (iii) lack of financial resources.

11. In order to ensure the viability of World Philosophy Day through the continuous participation of Member States and the long-term continuation of partnerships and networks of philosophy institutions, full account will have to be taken of a number of parameters, such as the support of public authorities, effective methods of financing and an ongoing effort to mobilize the general public.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. World Philosophy Day would institutionalize Philosophy Day at UNESCO, which is an activity that has been organized since 2002 and is already included in the regular programme of Major Programme III – Social and human sciences. A particular effort will be made to raise extrabudgetary funds.

13. With regard to the budgetary implications for the National Commissions for UNESCO, the ministries of education, higher education and research, the UNESCO Chairs, schools, universities, specialized institutions and the non-governmental organizations concerned, it is worth noting that a symbolic budget would undoubtedly be enough to mark this celebration. Depending on the programme drawn up beforehand by the Member States, however, the celebration would benefit from a sizeable financial involvement, which would guarantee the impact needed for a worldwide event.

RECOMMENDATION

14. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to examine the findings of this feasibility study with a view to adopting the proposal submitted by the Kingdom of Morocco for the celebration of a World Philosophy Day.