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PROCLAMATION OF A WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY

OUTLINE

Source: 171 EX/Decision 15.

Background: At the request of the Kingdom of Morocco, an item on the proclamation of a world philosophy day was included in the agenda of the 171st session of the Executive Board (171 EX/48 Rev.) and was examined together with the feasibility study prepared by the Secretariat in that regard (171 EX/INF.12).

Purpose: This document sets out the results of the feasibility study on the proclamation of a world philosophy day and the decision of the Executive Board thereon.

This document is submitted to the General Conference at its 33rd session for consideration and decision.

Decision required: paragraph 11.

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, at the end of the deliberations of the third session of the *Rencontres du Printemps de la Philosophie*, organized by the Association des Amis de la Philosophie and held in the city of Fez, Morocco, on 9 and 10 March 2004. At a meeting on 13 January 2005 organized by the Social and Human Sciences Sector and bringing together the Sector, representatives of Permanent Delegations to UNESCO and other 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. The proposal invited 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.

UNESCO'S ROLE IN THE PROMOTION OF PHILOSOPHY

2. The aim was 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 had been involved in the first day held 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 with the Permanent Delegations, National Commissions, 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.

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 foster the gradual inclusion of philosophy in curricula so as to encourage a reflective and critical exercise in thinking and reasoning. The celebration of a 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. The 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 and so on). 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 schools, 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 for and the holding of a world philosophy day.

OBJECTIVES

8. The main objectives of a 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.

10. At its 171st session, the Executive Board adopted the following decision (171 EX/Decision 15):

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates in Article 26 that “everyone has the right to education” (para. 1) and that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality ... It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups ... for the maintenance of peace” (para. 2),
2. Recalling also the Constitution of UNESCO, which declares that “the States Parties to this Constitution, believing in full and equal opportunities for education for all, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, are agreed and determined to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives”,
3. Mindful of the eminent role played by philosophy in the development of humanity,
4. Convinced of the importance of philosophy, and concerned about the need to protect humanity from the dual threat of obscurantism and extremism,
5. Recalling the fundamental role of philosophy in the promotion of tolerance and peace,
6. Underscoring that UNESCO has the ambition of imbuing public opinion with moral and philosophical concepts which are conducive to strengthening respect for human beings, love of peace, solidarity and attachment to an ideal of culture,
7. Recalling that one of UNESCO's particular aims is to encourage progress in philosophical studies, to support the activities of associations, universities and all other

institutions with a similar goal, and to foster international exchanges and publications in the field, in particular through the holding of Philosophy Day at UNESCO, which has been celebrated since 2002 at the Organization's Headquarters and in more than 70 Member States,

8. Having examined document 171 EX/48 Rev.,
 9. Urges Member States to:
 - (a) pursue their efforts to promote philosophy within their countries;
 - (b) support the proclamation of a world philosophy day to confirm the traditional place of that discipline in civic life so that philosophy may pursue its universal mission in the service of cultural diversity and peace in the world;
 - (c) strengthen the teaching of that discipline in their countries, and encourage initiatives involving philosophical activities by different partners within the discipline;
 - (d) use the guidelines established by UNESCO, such as the intersectoral strategy on philosophy, and promote them within the framework of international cooperation on questions relating to philosophy education and within the scientific community;
 10. Takes note of the conclusions of the feasibility study presented by the Director-General on the celebration of a world philosophy day (171 EX/INF.12), including an indication of the expected results as well as an assurance that there will be no additional financial implications for the regular budget of UNESCO;
 11. Recommends that the General Conference, at its 33rd session, proclaim the third Thursday of November every year "World Philosophy Day";
 12. Recommends that the General Conference request the General Assembly of the United Nations to associate itself with this celebration and encourage the Member States of the United Nations to do likewise.
11. In the light of the above, the General Conference may wish to adopt the following draft resolution:

The General Conference,

1. Having examined document 33 C/45 relating to the proclamation of a world philosophy day and the decision of the Executive Board concerning that proclamation,
2. Endorsing the results of the feasibility study presented by the Director-General on the celebration of a world philosophy day (171 EX/INF.12),
3. Recalling that philosophy is a discipline that encourages critical and independent thought, and is capable of working towards a better understanding of the world and promoting tolerance and peace,
4. Aware that the proclamation of a world philosophy day will not have additional financial implications for the regular budget of UNESCO,

5. Convinced that the institutionalization of Philosophy Day at UNESCO as a world philosophy day would win recognition for and give strong impetus to philosophy and, in particular, to the teaching of philosophy in the world,
6. Proclaims the third Thursday of November every year “World Philosophy Day”;
7. Invites the Member States of UNESCO to participate actively in the celebration of this Day, at the local, national and regional levels, with the active participation of National Commissions for UNESCO, non-governmental organizations and the public and private institutions concerned (schools, universities, institutes, municipalities, cities, communities, philosophical associations, cultural associations and so on);
8. Invites the Director-General to encourage and support all initiatives which will be taken in this regard at the national, regional and international levels;
9. Requests the General Assembly of the United Nations to associate itself with this celebration and encourage the Member States of the United Nations to do likewise.