

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by  
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(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the opening of the general debate  
of the Executive Board at its 174<sup>th</sup> session  
Items 3, 4 and 5

3. Joint report by the Director-General on the implementation of the programme and budget (32 C/5), and on results achieved in the previous biennium 2004-2005 (draft 34 C/3)
4. Report by the Director-General on the follow-up of decisions and resolutions adopted by the Executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions
5. Report by the Director-General on the reform process

Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,  
Mr President of the General Conference,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As has become customary, and necessary, on these occasions, I would like to begin my remarks this morning with reference to the United Nations reform process and UNESCO's relation to it.

The World Summit last September was a crucial moment in the unfolding story of the United Nations. The Summit gave fresh impetus to the drive for UN reform and reconfirmed the multilateralist mission of the UN. However, while there is a palpably stronger appetite for structural and management reform, there is no firm agreement yet on the menu of change or the specific direction to be taken.

In follow-up to the Outcome Document adopted by world leaders, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has launched a number of review initiatives concerning the mandate, management, governance and oversight of the UN system.

On 16 February 2006, the Secretary-General announced the creation of a new High-Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence to explore how the UN system could work more coherently and effectively across the world, including the possibility of creating "more tightly managed entities" in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. The 15-member Panel is expected to present its recommendations to the next session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006. An inclusive consultation process is promised.

Another significant development has been the Secretary-General's management reform report entitled "Investing in the United Nations for a Stronger Organization Worldwide", which was released on 7 March 2006. In the light of a fundamental shift in the scope and breadth of UN Secretariat activity since the establishment of the United Nations system, the report identifies several key areas for change. It calls for an adjustment of regulations, rules and systems required to support an increasingly field-oriented Secretariat. It stresses that there is a need to ensure that the Secretary-General has the management tools he needs to run the Organization efficiently and effectively. And it calls for an alignment with best practices in matters of accountability and transparency. More specifically, the management reform focuses on six areas: people, leadership, information and communication technology, services, budget and finance, and governance, and proposes setting up a Change Management Office.

Later this week, I shall be going to Madrid and Segovia for the two-day CEB meeting chaired by Kofi Annan which, as has been the case for the past two years,

will have the UN reform as its main focus of attention. At the last CEB meeting held last October in New York after the World Summit, there was a very good discussion of the Outcome Document and its implications for the UN system. The forthcoming CEB meeting will provide another valuable opportunity to exchange views on the UN reform process, and I will certainly be sharing my own perspective on behalf of UNESCO.

As I am sure you know, the question of UN reform is attracting considerable debate and is the subject of a wide range of opinions. For example, the Group of 13, which is made up of various donor countries, has made known its views on the future direction that the UN system should take, as a whole and in terms of its constituent parts, through a phased approach with a number of clear benchmarks. Among the main proposals of the G-13 are (i) a strategic coherent model of the UN system consisting of a small number of strong organizations in the area of development, humanitarian action and environment; (ii) one consolidated representation at country level (namely, one UN team, one budget, one programme); (iii) Specialized Agencies to be seen as “Centres of Excellence” concentrating on the development of normative and substantive policies in their respective fields and translating these into concrete programmes in close cooperation with the operational organizations; and (iv) an operational focus on the provision of high-quality capacity-building and institutional development services.

Meanwhile, though supportive of UN reform, the G77 and China have expressed a number of concerns, saying that the reform should not lead to a change in the intergovernmental nature of the decision-making, oversight and monitoring process, nor reduce the budget levels, nor redefine the roles and responsibilities assigned to the various organs of the UN by the Charter. The voice of every Member State must be heard and respected during this reform process, irrespective of the contributions made to the budget of the organization. Finally, these Member States wish to reaffirm the roles and mandates of some UN institutions and agencies such as UNCTAD, FAO, UNIDO, UNESCO, IFAD, HABITAT and UNEP.

How, then, should UNESCO position itself in relation to these ongoing debates? What is or should be our strategic vision? Recognizing that ‘business as usual’ is no answer, the UN system must be adapted to the new realities of the world. How should UNESCO seek to contribute to the debate, based on its experience? These are all important questions. I hope that, during this session, the Board will discuss the UN reform as this exchange of views will help me when I participate in the CEB meeting later this week. Meanwhile, let me offer several thoughts of my own for your consideration.

First, while recognizing that there will always be a gap between ideals and reality, we must keep things in perspective when it comes to the Organization’s

strengths and weaknesses. UNESCO has many friends and we must not disappoint them by being faint-hearted in the face of a challenging environment. Our mandate and mission continue to resonate strongly with all those committed to building a better world. Our core values, our insistence on respect for human dignity, our universality, and our celebration of the full and varied richness of humanity – these are the basis of our strengths, our achievements and our virtues as an Organization. The 60th anniversary celebration process is most revealing for it is reminding us of many things we take for granted. It is enabling us to rediscover not simply past accomplishments but also the strength of commitment of our staff and their professional expertise and experience. There is much excellent work being done and we should not be shy in saying so.

Having said this, I acknowledge that there are deficiencies in UNESCO, just as there are in the wider UN system. Some of these deficiencies are manifest in the still insufficient impact of our action at the field level. Hence, UNESCO must strengthen its action at regional, sub-regional and country levels, especially in key areas and in key countries, and this means strengthening our decentralization policy. This direction is consistent with the UN Secretary-General's view that the whole of the UN system should become more field-oriented. In addition, it is imperative that UNESCO strengthens its capacity for teamwork at country level so that we are increasingly an integral and active member of coherent UN teams.

Second, with regard to the management reform process envisaged by the UN Secretary-General, it needs to be recognized that UNESCO's reform process is well advanced in many of the areas under consideration. Indeed, I recently met with a consultant appointed by the UN Secretary-General to examine the functioning of the UN system's governance and oversight mechanisms; the consultant informed me that, in his judgement, UNESCO's oversight mechanism is in the vanguard of the UN system. While the reform that Member States, the Secretariat and I have been fashioning together for the past six and a half years is admittedly incomplete and we still have some way to go, we must stay true to our purpose, recognizing that much has been done which is in clear conformity with the direction of the wider UN reform process.

Third, UNESCO must be extremely wary of any tendency towards separating 'operational activities' from normative, analytical and policy matters. This is a false dichotomy and is a recipe for incoherence, not coherence. This is why I cannot accept the G-13's argument if this means that specialized agencies are no longer expected to involve themselves in implementation on the ground; the global and local roles of specialized agencies are inseparable in my view. In the case of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, for example, it would be ludicrous to argue that UNESCO should confine itself to the designation and listing of World Heritage sites and not engage in practical efforts of protection and conservation at country level, in particular in developing countries.

Thus, I believe that UNESCO's position must be that its own intellectual and ethical functions cannot be divorced from implementation and operational action. To be effective, the feedback loop between theory and practice needs to be direct, not mediated or second-hand. Policy development is not an abstract, academic process but one that engages with real-world problems and is informed by actual needs and concrete situations. As you have just said, Mr Chairman, the question of the right balance between the normative and the operational is crucial. I am therefore cautious about any notion of turning the specialized agencies into 'centres of excellence' if the effect is to cut UNESCO adrift from direct, operational, ground-level activity in the service of Member States. I would like to strongly advise developed countries to think very carefully indeed about advocating an untested and, in my view, unworkable model for the specialized agencies.

Fourth, at the country level, UNESCO is equipping itself to engage more effectively with CCA, UNDAF and PRS processes. However, this is not simply a technical exercise but one that is oriented to the proper purposes of the development process, namely, to ensure that countries themselves 'own' the process and that the UN system and its partners align themselves with country-driven strategies. Our technical advice, our capacity-building programmes and our policy development functions must be geared to the empowerment of developing countries.

However, our best efforts in this regard will be severely constrained if common country programming is not fully inclusive of all UN system agencies and if donor funds are channeled exclusively at country level to so-called 'operational agencies'. We do not believe that such an approach can satisfactorily serve the diversity of needs of Member States.

Fifth, we have to insist that 'development' is not the only agenda of the UN system. By virtue of its constitutional mandate, UNESCO has always had a broader vision that places development within the wider framework of building peaceful and harmonious relations between nations, including the promotion of dialogue among peoples, cultures and civilizations, on which I will later elaborate further. There is no automatic 'peace dividend' of development. Of course they are linked but the connections are complex and situation-specific. The key point is that the UN system serves several purposes and its reform and restructuring should not be predicated on just one of those purposes.

Last but not least, it is not yet clear what form the idea of more tightly managed entities might take or even whether the formulation of three distinct areas to be organized by such entities is acceptable to Member States. In UNESCO's case, we have contributed and are contributing to all three areas – development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

In regard to humanitarian assistance, of course, UNESCO is traditionally not a humanitarian agency but is now getting more and more involved because it believes it has a technical and ethical role to play and is regularly called upon by Member States to act during the earliest stages of post-conflict and post-disaster situations to address the human, more than physical, aspects of recovery and reconstruction. Education must be part of humanitarian action, helping to normalize communities and assist in psycho-social recovery; for UNESCO, since education is an integral aspect of the process of bridging from relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction, we must engage with early-stage processes so that solid foundations may be laid and planned for longer term action. It must be recognized that the transition between humanitarian action and development is not abrupt but is a seamless process in which UNESCO should be involved. This is evident in other areas of our mandate too. Thus, UNESCO believes that media capacity-building is needed to help the delivery of emergency information in post-disaster situations. Similarly, we make early-stage interventions to protect cultural heritage, which has enormous symbolic value as a focus of identity, continuity and shared values, and for the building of social cohesion.

In the area of development, UNESCO makes contributions throughout its fields of competence, oriented by the global development agenda in general and the MDGs in particular. The 2005 Summit Outcome Document gave clear recognition to the vital link between education and development, and, in that context, gave support to UNESCO's priority of Education for All (EFA). The Global Action Plan is designed to create a more coherent, strategic partnership among the five EFA convening agencies so that greater progress can be achieved towards the six EFA goals and hence to the whole MDG agenda.

Let me emphasize here that UNESCO's contribution to EFA is not confined to coordination at the global level, but includes concrete programmatic action at country level in close cooperation with governments, civil society and international partners. In the follow-up to the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000, UNESCO's first priority was to assist developing countries to prepare national action plans so that they could better position themselves to receive the higher levels of financial support that had been promised. Please note that a recent external evaluation in this area gives high marks to UNESCO's action. Later, we shifted our emphasis towards key areas of educational action that are strategically vital for the EFA drive within countries. Hence our launch of specific EFA initiatives in literacy (LIFE), teacher training in sub-Saharan Africa (TISSA), and EDUCAIDS, the UNESCO-led global initiative on education and HIV and AIDS, along with an abiding emphasis on quality improvement.

With regard to environment, UNESCO's natural sciences programme has been a pioneer in devising and implementing scientific approaches to environmental and ecological questions. Today, as was abundantly evident at the Fourth World Water

Forum in Mexico City last month, UNESCO is a major international actor in the field of water, which is at the heart of many sustainable development issues. UNESCO is recognized for its strong professional command of the technical and policy-oriented aspects of freshwater, grounded upon its much-respected International Hydrological Programme (IHP), the World Water Assessment Programme and its *World Water Development Report*, and the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft, The Netherlands. UNESCO's work is not narrowly normative in this field, let me add, but is deeply engaged with practical aspects of implementation, lessons from which inform the further elaboration of technical advice and guidance.

A last comment on this whole issue. The full implementation of the decentralization policy is at the heart of the reform process underway. As I stressed earlier, our global role must be complemented and translated into concrete practice through operational work, especially at country level. However, our decentralization policy has been in place for only a few years and I cannot claim that the Organization has developed a strong implementation capacity everywhere in the world. This has been pointed out by various evaluations conducted by IOS and by the External Auditor and therefore we must take appropriate action; indeed, some measures have already been taken to address this question.

Let us consider this question in context. In a budgetary situation of zero nominal growth, in past years UNESCO has increasingly turned towards acquiring extrabudgetary funds. These are an important way in which donor countries can visibly express their international solidarity and cooperation. Increasingly, not only developed countries but also private sector enterprises are interested in working with UNESCO, drawn by our mandate and trustworthiness.

However, this trend towards dramatically increased extrabudgetary funding has not occurred within the framework of a fully-developed global strategy, which we now see clearly to be imperative. As a result, while more and more extrabudgetary funds have been going to the field at a time of putting the decentralization policy into effect, our field units have not been able to cope either with the volume and complexity of extrabudgetary work, or with achieving the right balance between that work and the activities coming under the regular programme and budget. In short, some field offices have become overstretched.

Let me turn briefly to the example of the Brasilia Office, which accounts for a large proportion of the increased volume of extrabudgetary funds, because this is a special case. I can assure the Board that the Brasilia Office case does not deserve to be characterized as the tip of the iceberg; this metaphor is quite inappropriate. The situation in Brazil is distinctive because, even though its ministries have the necessary expertise, they face many constraints under Brazilian law to undertake large-scale projects directly. As a result, they must have recourse to partnering with

relevant outside agencies, including UNESCO. In other countries, ministries are lacking in expertise and experience in certain areas and this is where UNESCO's expertise is needed. Thus, the specific weaknesses identified in Brazil are not, repeat not, typical of a universal trend.

Having said this, in the general area of extrabudgetary funding, we readily acknowledge certain weaknesses to which the External Auditor has drawn critical attention, but we are already taking appropriate measures along the lines given in the 174/INF 4 document. There is scope for improvement and improve we shall - I am confident that when I make an interim report to the next session of the Board in the autumn, our performance regarding extrabudgetary funds will already show improvements in terms of delivery, management, monitoring and reporting, including the integration of extrabudgetary activities with our regular programme and budget. Appropriate management tools are being designed and will be in place by October, enabling us to automatically check where things stand. In addition, extrabudgetary funding issues will be regularly reviewed together with regular programme and budget matters through established in-house mechanisms.

I would like to remind you of our achievements during the last biennium and that we have done well in completing our programme of activities, as your positive response to the C/3 testifies. UNESCO has many assets, including its name and image, and these are recognized by those who wish to be associated with various areas of our work, and here I refer not only to governments but also civil society and the private sector.

I am very pleased to inform the Board that on 31 March 2006, in accordance with our rules and financial regulations, we have sent to the External Auditor the financial report (that is, the closure of accounts) related to the period 2004-2005. This is an important achievement, which has been attained for only the second time in the recent history of the organization – the first time being when we closed the accounts of the 2002-2003 biennium, as was recognized in writing by the External Auditor. I congratulate and thank all the staff involved in this achievement.

Monsieur le Président,

C'est dans cet esprit qu'il nous faudra envisager le nouveau cycle d'élaboration de la prochaine stratégie à moyen terme et du prochain programme et budget pour 2008-2009, qui devront, comme j'ai déjà eu l'occasion de le dire lors de la réunion d'information que nous avons tenue en janvier dernier, être étroitement liés à une réflexion plus globale sur le rôle futur de l'UNESCO que la 33<sup>e</sup> session de la Conférence générale a appelée de ses vœux.

Le questionnaire qui constituera la base initiale de cette consultation est à présent achevé, et sera envoyé sous peu aux Etats membres, aux commissions nationales, aux organisations intergouvernementales et non gouvernementales, ainsi qu'aux bureaux hors Siège et aux Instituts de catégorie I et II. Il vous a été distribué à tous au début de cette séance. Il est disponible dans les six langues à l'entrée de cette salle. Il constituera la base des consultations des commissions nationales – qui se dérouleront de la fin du mois de mai au début du mois de juillet, précédées de consultations au niveau des « clusters ». En parallèle, les Etats membres seront invités à formuler une réponse écrite à ce même questionnaire, laquelle devrait parvenir au Secrétariat avant la mi-juillet.

Le questionnaire sera complété par un document de réflexion qui présentera les problèmes, tendances et défis significatifs pour le rôle futur de l'UNESCO, comme l'a demandé la Conférence générale. Ce document devrait pouvoir être circulé vers la fin du Conseil exécutif. L'objectif de ce processus combiné est de faire bénéficier la réflexion stratégique sur l'avenir de l'UNESCO d'un réel retour d'opinions le plus large et documenté possible. Les conclusions de la revue des grands programmes II et III actuellement en cours seront également un élément crucial à cet égard. Cette vision pourra ainsi s'affiner et se nuancer au cours des mois qui viennent, et me permettra de présenter des propositions préliminaires à la session d'octobre du Conseil exécutif. Les consultations qu'entend mener le Président de la Conférence générale auprès des délégations permanentes iront également dans ce sens, et ne pourront qu'enrichir l'assise de ces propositions.

Sur la base de ces éléments, le Conseil exécutif à sa session d'octobre formulera un certain nombre de directives qui orienteront la rédaction des deux documents C/4 et C/5, lesquels paraîtront simultanément un mois avant le Conseil exécutif d'avril 2007.

Le document sur l'avenir de l'UNESCO nourrira également les débats d'autres enceintes, telles que l'ONU par exemple, et fera l'objet d'une discussion approfondie lors de la prochaine Conférence générale.

J'espère que ce sera l'occasion de prendre la mesure des défis qui se posent à notre institution, mais aussi du soutien dont elle bénéficie de la part de nos bénéficiaires premiers, les Etats membres, et de leur souhait de voir maintenu son rôle spécifique au sein du système des Nations Unies.

Les événements des derniers mois, liés à la publication par un journal danois, le 30 septembre 2005, d'un certain nombre de dessins représentant notamment le Prophète Mahomet, laquelle a déclenché des violences graves dans un certain nombre de pays, pourraient en être illustratifs.

Il nous faut tirer les leçons de cette crise complexe, qui touche à la fois aux questions de respect des croyances et de liberté d'expression, et met en cause les acquis souvent précieux des dialogues amorcés depuis quelques années.

Dès le 2 février 2006, comme vous le savez, je me suis exprimé afin de réaffirmer publiquement combien il importait à l'UNESCO, en fidélité à son mandat et son Acte constitutif, de réaffirmer l'égale et absolue prééminence des principes de respect des convictions morales et religieuses et de liberté d'expression.

Comme je l'ai dit lors d'une interview accordée à la télévision Al Jazeera le 10 mars dernier, je fais partie d'une génération qui a douloureusement éprouvé ce qu'il en coûtait lorsque de tels principes étaient bafoués. Permettez-moi donc de le redire solennellement : ce sont là deux principes sur lesquels nous ne saurions transiger et il ne saurait être question de les opposer l'un à l'autre, ni de tenter d'établir une quelconque hiérarchie entre eux, car ils sont au cœur de ce qui fonde la dignité humaine.

Nous ne devons pas davantage céder aux amalgames. Sachons reconnaître que la crise provoquée à travers le monde entier par la publication de ces caricatures dépasse de très loin l'opposition schématique Occident/Orient que certains voudraient imposer comme une évidence. Cette crise nous confronte bien davantage à la façon dont chaque société négocie et délimite, de façon distincte, les frontières du dicible et de l'indicible, du représentable et de l'irreprésentable, de l'ironie et du blasphème. Ces frontières n'opposent pas des blocs géopolitiques, culturels ou religieux. Est-il ainsi besoin de rappeler qu'un certain nombre de journaux dans des pays où la majorité de la population est musulmane ont choisi de publier les caricatures, tandis que d'autres journaux, dans des pays en Occident, faisaient le choix contraire ?

Ces frontières sont en réalité des espaces très fluctuants, où s'exprime le rapport complexe que chaque individu, groupe ou communauté, entretient avec l'histoire, la culture, le sacré. Là aussi, sachons reconnaître qu'il n'existe pas de consensus sur le positionnement de ces frontières et qu'il nous appartient précisément aujourd'hui d'en mieux connaître les contours, les inflexions et les évolutions. C'est une discussion qu'il faut maintenant mener en rapprochant toutes les parties concernées. C'est à cette condition que nous pourrions rétablir les voies d'un dialogue serein, sans violence, respectueux de chacun.

Tout ce débat nous a rappelé les immenses défis qui sont encore au-devant de l'UNESCO dans le domaine de la promotion du dialogue. Face à ces défis, le caractère interdisciplinaire de notre Organisation est un réel atout pour qui veut les aborder dans toute leur complexité.

L'Organisation, en particulier, poursuivra les activités qu'elle a entreprises afin de favoriser les discussions entre professionnels des médias de toutes les régions du monde sur les codes de conduite et chartes professionnelles des médias, ainsi que sur les mécanismes de médiation, afin que les individus et la société civile dans leur ensemble soient toujours en mesure d'engager un dialogue pacifique et constructif avec les médias. Par ailleurs, à travers ces activités, l'UNESCO continuera de promouvoir la prise de conscience qu'un journalisme de qualité ne saurait méconnaître, dans son examen critique du monde, l'importance des questions relatives aux diverses sensibilités culturelles ou religieuses.

C'est aussi pour cette raison que je me réjouis de l'inclusion dans le 33 C/5 d'un grand nombre d'activités relatives au dialogue dans tous nos domaines de compétence, et dont l'addendum au document 174 EX/5 donne une bonne illustration. C'est en effet aussi bien dans une éducation de qualité, à travers une coopération scientifique renforcée, une meilleure connaissance des traditions philosophiques dans le monde ou encore la valorisation des effets bénéfiques de la diversité culturelle que ce dialogue doit pouvoir prendre corps, et s'exprimer concrètement.

Un dialogue qui ne peut s'exercer sans tolérance, entendue, comme le rappelle si justement la Déclaration de principes sur la tolérance adoptée en 1995 par l'UNESCO, comme « le respect, l'acceptation et l'appréciation de la richesse et de la diversité des cultures de notre monde, de nos modes d'expression et de nos manières d'exprimer notre qualité d'êtres humains » ne pourra certainement pas être fructueux. Aussi devons-nous tout mettre en oeuvre pour lutter contre ces nouveaux conflits d'ignorances émergents, et développer une attitude active animée par la reconnaissance des droits universels de la personne humaine et des libertés fondamentales d'autrui.

L'UNESCO, sur la base de son mandat et de sa longue expérience, continuera d'offrir un espace à tous ceux qui se mobilisent pour renouer les fils du dialogue. Pour ma part je suis résolu à prendre en compte toutes les initiatives en cours dans les différents pays et les différentes régions, y participer activement, les faire connaître, en lancer de nouvelles. L'objectif est de parvenir à poser un regard renouvelé, sans aucune exclusive, sur les formes et usages de tels dialogues afin de dépasser le cercle étroit des initiés et des convaincus, et de toucher des franges de plus en plus larges de populations de par le monde. Le défi est immense, à nous de savoir le relever, tous ensemble.

Monsieur le Président,

C'est là les commentaires que je souhaitais faire en ouverture de cette session du Conseil, sachant que j'ai fait, dans le document d'introduction écrite qui vous a été distribué la semaine dernière, un bilan plus détaillé des activités majeures qui ont

jalonné ces derniers mois. A la lumière de vos débats, j'aurai certainement l'occasion de revenir, ou de compléter, certains d'entre eux.