

## **Experts' Consultation on the Operational Definition of Basic Education**

**17-18 December 2007**

### **Conclusions**

The Experts' Consultation on the Operational Definition of Basic Education, organized 17-18 December 2007 at UNESCO HQ, brought together eminent experts from different regions to further discuss a preliminary draft operational definition of basic education that was initially proposed during the Experts' Workshop on "Challenges and Perspectives of Law and Education" organised in Sao Paulo in December 2006.

This Consultation was part of UNESCO's efforts to address the request by the Joint Expert Group UNESCO (CR)/ECOSOC (CESCR) on the Monitoring of the Right to Education and by Experts during the "International Conference on the Right to Education as a Fundamental Human Right" (Jakarta, 2005), to initiate a reflection and dialogue process for the elaboration of an operational definition of basic education and to elaborate a definition that will be universally accepted and recognized.

In preparation for this meeting, UNESCO undertook a thorough analysis of recent policy and legal texts which illustrated the lack of linguistic consistency in the terms used to describe the initial stages of formal education (basic, elementary, primary, fundamental, secondary, basic learning needs, etc.). A Thematic Framework, prepared by the secretariat presented the policy and international normative framework as well as the right to basic education in constitutions and national legislation.

Mr Nicholas Burnett, Assistant Director-General for Education, who opened the meeting, underlined the need for a more effective monitoring of the right to basic education and highlighted the need for a forward looking and visionary definition.

The discussions, which pointed to the need for a new future oriented approach to basic education, focused on key legal and policy parameters of basic education, namely: duration (number of years), purpose, curriculum and content, quality and evaluation of outcomes, beneficiaries, provision and resources as well as its free and compulsory nature.

Together with the need for harmonizing these parameters, their main concern was to arrive at a definition which is universally acceptable. Bearing this in mind, the experts identified and examined main elements which should go into the definition and accordingly elaborated a text. They recognized that the approach should be flexible and the definition may be applied in a way that allow for and embrace diverse local specificities, while fully respecting the elements it contains in an international perspective.

### **Operational Definition of Basic Education**

The rich and fruitful discussions by the experts during the two days of the Consultation resulted in the definition, produced below:

*For the purposes of this definition, basic education covers notions such as fundamental, elementary and primary/secondary education. It is guaranteed to everyone without any discrimination or exclusion based notably on gender, ethnicity, nationality or origin, social, economic or physical condition, language, religion, political or other opinion, or belonging to a minority.*

*Beyond pre-school education, the duration of which can be fixed by the State, basic education consists of at least 9 years and progressively extends to 12 years. Basic education is free and compulsory without any discrimination or exclusion.*

*Equivalent basic education is offered for youth and adults who did not have the opportunity or possibility to receive and complete basic education at the appropriate age.*

*Basic education prepares the learner for further education, for an active life and citizenship. It meets basic learning needs including learning to learn, the acquisition of numeracy, literacies, and scientific and technological knowledge as applied to daily life.*

*Basic education is directed to the full development of the human personality. It develops the capability for comprehension and critical thinking, and it inculcates the respect for human rights and values, notably, human dignity, solidarity, tolerance, democratic citizenship and a sense of justice and equity.*

*The State guarantees the right to basic education of good quality based on minimum standards, applicable to all forms of education, and provided by qualified teachers, as well as effective management along with a system of implementation and assessment.*

*Basic education is provided in the mother tongue, at least in its initial stages, while respecting the requirements/needs of multilingualism.*

*In those States where basic education is also provided by private schools, the State ensures that such schools respect fully the objectives and content as mentioned in the present definition.*

### **Explanatory text**

The purpose of this text is to present the factual and legal reasons justifying the adoption of the text of the definition by the group of experts participating in the Consultation. It explains the text of the definition paragraph by paragraph.

**“For the purposes of this definition, basic education ...”**

1. Experts meeting at the International Conference on the Right to Education as a Fundamental Human Right (held in Jakarta in 2005 and organized by UNESCO and the Ministry of National Education of Indonesia), as well as the Joint Expert Group UNESCO (CR)/ECOSOC (CESCR) on the Monitoring of the Right to Education requested UNESCO to initiate a reflection and dialogue process for the elaboration of an operational definition of basic education that would be universally accepted and recognized. The objective of this process was to ensure more effective monitoring of the implementation of the right to basic education in accordance with legal parameters based on a common understanding, and to ensure linguistic consistency within the United Nations system.

2. Mindful of its mandate, the Expert Group (hereinafter referred to as “the Group”) initially focused on the need to examine the phrase “**basic education**” for which it was required to produce an operational definition. On the basis of the right to education, which provides the framework for the specificities of education, existing texts contain a variety of phrases, some of which are enshrined in international texts while others appear more frequently in the internal systems of different States. In the context of human rights, the Group was of the view that it was necessary to use a concept that was universally acceptable and that had, as far as possible, universal meaning. It was also important to find a phrase that would stand the test of time, since an operational definition elaborated today would be likely to remain in use in the long term. Moreover, the phrase had to be general enough to be applicable in diverse local situations and avoid repeating concepts such as “elementary education” that had a vastly different meaning in different countries. In conclusion, the phrase “basic education” seems to be most suitable for the operational definition required by the mandate.

3. The qualifying phrase – “**for the purposes of this definition**” – seeks to establish that the terminology used (“basic education”) does not have an absolute value and should be understood within the context of the proposed definition. The aim of defining basic education is closely linked to the need to clarify the various concepts commonly used to describe the first few years of formal education: basic, elementary, primary, and fundamental education, learning needs, and so on. The term “fundamental education” appears in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the term “elementary” is used in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; “primary” education, a term that is used frequently, appears in Article 4 of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education. The concept of basic education did not exist when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted; it uses the word “elementary”, and for that reason “basic education” was not used in subsequent instruments. For a long time, UNESCO worked on a programme of “elementary education”. The World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien promoted the concept of basic education, which also featured in the work of the Delors Commission and in its report entitled “Learning: the treasure within” (1996). Since the international community is committed to the education for all (EFA) goals and basic education is at the heart of that initiative, the concept has been now adopted internationally. Moreover, General Comment No. 13 on Article 13 of the International Covenant (elaborated by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) together with UNESCO (December 1999)) elucidates the full scope of the right to education and provides a number of references to basic education (para. 9): “The Committee obtains guidance on the proper interpretation of the term ‘primary education’ from the World Declaration on Education for All which states: ‘The main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family is primary schooling. Primary education must be universal, ensure that the basic learning needs of all children are satisfied, and take into account the culture, needs and opportunities of the community’ (Article 5). ‘Basic learning needs’ are defined in Article 1 of the World Declaration. While primary education is not synonymous with basic education, there is a close correspondence between the two.

In this regard, the Committee endorses the position taken by UNICEF: ‘Primary education is the most important component of basic education.’”

**“...covers notions such as fundamental, elementary and primary/secondary education.”**

4. Given that several terms are used with the same intended meaning, it seemed important to state that basic education encompasses several concepts in order prevent misinterpretation owing to terminological variation. In the text, the experts make reference only to **fundamental, elementary and primary** and **secondary** education, as these are the concepts that most frequently appear in international texts and national legislation. These are just some of the terms widely used in international and domestic law, and similar phrases not mentioned in the definition could also be included in the concept of “fundamental education”. For the purposes of verification, the elements of basic education contained in the definition may be considered in order to determine whether and to what extent they could be applied to any other concepts with the same intended meaning.

5. The Group discussed which verb to use in this context: some preferred “**encompass**”, although the majority finally agreed on “**cover**”. Clearly, these semantic differences become more significant when translated into UNESCO’s official languages, and even more so when translated into various national languages. Given the impossibility of arriving at a unitary term and bearing in mind that different languages would be used, the word “cover” was chosen in order to make clear that the various concepts referred to explicitly or implicitly in the context of the proposed definition are not different or separate; rather, they are simply another means of referring to the “basic education” used in the text.

**“It is guaranteed to everyone without any discrimination or exclusion based notably on gender, ethnicity, nationality or origin, social, economic or physical condition, language, religion, political or other opinion, or belonging to a minority.”**

6. The right to education, of which basic education is a key element, is an essential human right that is recognized in every international and regional text. It must be ensured and guaranteed to every person, every individual without discrimination, as has been stated since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

7. It is therefore entirely normal that basic education, which is the subject of the proposed definition, be guaranteed to all without discrimination or exclusion. It seemed necessary to use both “**discrimination**” and “**exclusion**” because, particularly in education, there might be not only discrimination (the different treatment of a group, category, or certain individuals without justification) but also exclusion, because regrettably there are specific situations and cases where certain individuals, groups and so on are entirely prevented from accessing this right.

8. Such enumeration is basically the same as that found in international instruments (such as the Convention against Discrimination in Education), but it takes account of current circumstances and changes in terminology. For example, the word “gender” has replaced “sex”, and “ethnicity” has replaced “race”, thus reflecting current perceptions of these sources of discrimination. In addition, this definition includes a non-exhaustive list of specific examples of sources of discrimination.

9. Given the array of arguments and factors that can cause discrimination or exclusion, the list in the text is preceded by the words “**notably**” in order to emphasize once more that this is not an exhaustive list of the causes of discrimination or exclusion, but rather a list of the most common causes of discrimination or exclusion. While the causes of discrimination or exclusion may differ from one country to another, however, the resulting situation would nonetheless be contrary to the

principle of non-discrimination, which has an absolute value in the field of human rights, particularly in the context of the right to education and basic education.

10. The Group considered the possibility of inserting other elements or changing the order in which they are listed. However, care was taken to ensure that the chosen wording does not introduce any new elements into the expressions commonly used in other texts, thus preventing any misinterpretation, and it should in any case be considered as a series of examples that is non-exhaustive in nature, given the absolute value of the principle of non-discrimination.

**“Beyond pre-school education, the duration of which can be fixed by the State,”**

11. The first element that must be determined in a definition of basic education is its duration. In most countries, social factors, the work commitments of parents and other constraints mean that the public sector and, in some cases, the private sector are required to provide early childhood care services, beginning with the “crèche” or what is known in some countries as nursery school. In general, this is a period of some years that comes to an end when the child reaches school age and during which, depending on the age of the child, there is some learning activity that does not correspond exactly to the conventional notion of schooling. Although emphasis was placed on the opportunities provided by such a period, which helps children to interact while providing relief to working parents, it was decided that, owing to the varying functions and aims pursued and the range of solutions adopted by different countries, such a period, qualified by the unitary phrase “**pre-school period**”, should not be included in the duration of basic education.

12. The word “pre-school” is used here as a substitute for “early childhood”. This period is of key importance in the context of its treatment by the *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, but it does not constitute a right under international legal instruments (they contain no legal obligations in this regard). That is why it is referred to in the definition of basic education but is not strictly part of it. Moreover, most developing countries are not in a position to assume full responsibility for this type of education.

**“Basic education consists of at least nine years and progressively extends to 12 years”.**

13. There is no legal instrument or strategic document stipulating the duration of basic education. According to the *International Standard Classification of Education* (UNESCO, revised 1997), basic education consists of nine years of formal education at two levels: six years of primary education and the first stage of secondary education, which lasts three years. The Group took account of two key factors: (i) consistent with the information supplied for the purposes of monitoring EFA, it is clear that, in most countries, the duration of compulsory schooling varies from four to nine years; and (ii) recent developments of national legislation that make clear provision for the right to basic education: in most countries, basic education provided for a minimum of nine years and a maximum of 12. It should further be noted that several countries make provision for basic education in their constitution.

14. To determine the duration of basic education, the Group considered the various solutions adopted and became convinced that there was no one solution that was universally applicable. The duration of basic education, particularly when it is free and compulsory, clearly depends to a great extent on the socio-economic development of each State. However, the general view is that the minimum duration of basic education should be at least nine years. Many States have already exceeded that duration, and in the course of future developments in each State this period should be extended to 12 years; currently, however, nine years is the minimum period for basic education, while 12 years is an objective that can be achieved gradually.

15. The Group therefore focused on the progressive aspect (of achieving a maximum period of 12 years) for the purposes of this definition, in an effort to be flexible and take account of the wide range of circumstances and situations, because the definition is intended to be forward-looking.

16. In indicating duration, the Group mentioned only the number of years without making **reference to age**, for the simple reason that any indication of the child's age might cause confusion owing to the differences between countries. As will be made clear below, there can be no doubt that the right to education, which is a right for all, should be implemented regardless of the age of the individual, particularly when that person has for some reason been deprived of the opportunity to exercise his or her right at the appropriate age.

**“Basic education is free and compulsory without any discrimination or exclusion”.**

17. With regard to basic education, national policies should ensure that it is both **free and compulsory**. Given that free and compulsory education (at least in the initial stages) is enshrined in all instruments relating to education and is a key aspect of the right to education, States' obligations are considerable; however, bearing in mind the constraints on free, compulsory primary education and the difficulties encountered by some States in providing it in practice, the Group decided that it was appropriate to reiterate this obligation (in State schools). Otherwise, there is a risk that “dumbing down” could undermine the efforts made over several decades to ensure compliance with these major legal obligations. The right to basic education must be interpreted in such a way that everyone can benefit, which would not be the case if education was not compulsory and free.

18. Following the question of duration, the second element of basic education is its free and compulsory nature. States are bound by the obligations contained in the various international texts. Both conceptual elements “compulsory” and “free” are closely linked, since education can hardly be made compulsory unless it is provided entirely free of charge.

19. The compulsory and free nature applies to the education services provided by the State, although in addition there may be private schools in the same country offering similar services that are not free of charge (see below).

20. The sentence ends with the phrase **“without any discrimination or exclusion”**. The phrase is the same as that used in the preceding paragraph but without the second half of the phrase, beginning “based on”. The text seeks to avoid reiterating the possible sources of discrimination or exclusion because the list in the first paragraph of the definition applies to the definition of basic education as a whole and to all its constitutive elements. It is therefore unnecessary to list the most common causes at every stage. In other words, reference to those causes should be considered to be implicit in the phrase “without any discrimination or exclusion”. As a fundamental right, basic education must be guaranteed to any person without explicit reference to their age.

**“Equivalent basic education is offered for youth and adults who did not have the opportunity or possibility to receive and complete basic education at the appropriate age”.**

21. At this point, the Group drew on existing provisions in this regard, namely Article 4(c) of the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education, which makes provision “to encourage and intensify by appropriate methods the education of persons who have not received any primary education or who have not completed the entire primary education course and the continuation of their education on the basis of individual capacity”; Article 13.2(d) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which stipulates that: “fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education”; and the Dakar Framework for Action with regard to

the provision of education. Governments are free to determine the content and definition of “equivalent” education. It is also important to note that literacy is increasingly recognized as a right.

22. Experience of the situations in several countries reveals sectors of the population which have never had the opportunity to benefit from basic education, while others have been forced to leave school before they have completed their studies, and so on.

23. Other texts reflect this situation using the phrase “adult education”, but the terms “**adults**” or “**youth**”, although widely used, do not refer to a clearly defined age group and cannot be applied universally. That is why the current definition uses the terms “youth” and “adults” but provides additional clarification regarding the appropriate age, i.e. the age set by each country to meet the requirement for basic education lasting a minimum of nine years.

24. The words “**possibility to receive and complete**” cover the two most common scenarios: on the one hand, individuals who have not had the opportunity to receive education, i.e. children who have not had the opportunity to attend school. “Complete”, meanwhile, refers to situations where basic education has not been completed by certain people, i.e. the nine-year cycle of basic education has not been completed. In general, the paragraph takes account of a situation in which a sector of the population, certain groups or simply certain individuals have not had the opportunity to benefit from the right to basic education for reasons that may be related to discrimination or any de facto situation with similar consequences.

25. The definition employs the phrase “**equivalent basic education**” because the range of situations means that basic education may not necessarily correspond to that envisaged for the appropriate age that is the subject of the following paragraph. The basic education described in that paragraph could therefore draw on different methods, depending on the age and circumstances of the various beneficiaries, and simultaneously fulfill the requirement of equivalent education. As an alternative to “equivalent”, the Group considered other words such as “comparable” or “similar”, but since it wished to place greater emphasis on the results and objectives of education rather than on the methods used to achieve them, “equivalent” was deemed to be closer to the idea of basic education with the same objective. Furthermore, the text avoids making any reference to duration, because adult basic education might be condensed and shortened in relation to the usual duration in order to accommodate work commitments and other factors.

26. Basic education of shorter duration cannot be considered identical to that described in the preceding paragraph, but in terms of its aims and content it may still be equivalent to basic education. Adult basic education clearly needs to be different in terms of methodology and teaching.

**“Basic education prepares the learner for further education, for an active life and citizenship.”**

27. The Group gave considerable thought to basic education in the light of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international instruments and national constitutions and legislation, and concluded that the learner, on completion of his or her basic education, should be prepared for the following cumulative elements: further education (additional, higher or specialized); active life (entering the job market if necessary); and democratic citizenship (being able to fully exercise his or her role and take an active part in society).

28. The Group attached special importance to the content of the Delors report, which was at the origin of the concept of basic education with its four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. In the context of globalization and new technology, the

Group adopted a pragmatic approach and placed special emphasis on scientific and technical knowledge and on technical and vocational education, in particular their practical application in daily life, in order to ensure that basic education has a useful and practical dimension. In that regard, technical and vocational education is of special importance.

29. The descriptive paragraph aims to establish the objectives of basic education. The Group wondered whether it was appropriate to specify the content of basic education, but again, the differences between member countries meant that the Group preferred to limit itself to stating the objectives and results of basic education. The content of basic education will of course vary according to the sociocultural situation in each society, its philosophical and religious roots, and so on. However, a common denominator may be determined by giving a very broad indication of the desired results.

30. The first sentence refers to the three fundamental objectives, the first of which is preparation for **further education**. Given that this is basic education, one of its primary aims is to prepare the learner for the continuation of his or her education in the various advanced structures available in the country of origin and the rest of the world.

31. The concept of an active life refers to the capability of each individual educated in this way to participate in the **active life** of society in the broadest sense, including any form of active economic, social and cultural life. The term “productive life” was also considered but the Group took the view that it was restrictive and preferred the term “active life”.

32. **Citizenship** is the third component and refers to the individual as part of the society of the State of which he or she is a citizen; the word is intended to embrace all aspects relating to the participation of the individual in the organization, management and action of the State, both at the local and national levels.

**“It meets basic learning needs including learning to learn, the acquisition of numeracy, literacies, and scientific and technological knowledge as applied to daily life”.**

33. The second sentence lists in general terms more specific results and objectives, such as basic learning needs, i.e. the fundamental requirements of education *per se*, and some of its objectives: the capability to learn to learn, i.e. giving beneficiaries the elements and capabilities they need to enable them to learn what they are taught, and, of course, to acquire literacy and numeracy.

34. The reference to **scientific and technical knowledge** was included to take account of the importance of science and technology in the daily lives of people of all ages, and in particular the development of such knowledge in future. However, the phrase “as applied to daily life” was added in order to underline that, when technical aspects are included in basic education, the aim is not to acquire technical knowledge for its own sake but rather to be aware of the daily application of, for example, modern means of communication (PCs, the Internet, and so on).

**“Basic education is directed to the full development of the human personality. It develops the capability for comprehension and critical thinking, and it inculcates the respect for human rights and values, notably, human dignity, solidarity, tolerance, democratic citizenship and a sense of justice and equity.”**

35. With regard to the objectives of basic education, the definition sets out the aims of education as described in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in the various international legal instruments. These objectives encompass new trends and complete the set of values that should be acquired in our knowledge societies today. However, some new elements

were added, such as “critical thinking” and the concepts of “equity”, “solidarity” and “justice”; the latter two are an integral part of UNESCO’s constitutional mission.

36. Among the other objectives of education (**developing the capability for comprehension and critical thinking**) which already feature in various earlier texts, the Group attached particular importance to the final part of the sentence, which refers to **respect for human rights and values**, and it added a number of key specifications such as **solidarity, tolerance, democratic citizenship, and a sense of justice and equity**. The words used occur frequently in various international texts and should not give rise to any difficulties of interpretation. Reference may be made to the various documents elaborated by the bodies responsible for monitoring and interpreting relevant international texts that clarify the concepts of human values, solidarity, tolerance, democratic citizenship and a sense of justice and equity.

37. Significantly, this is the first time a text has placed emphasis on such concepts in the context of the results to be achieved through basic education. Certain shortcomings in modern society, particularly when it comes to a lack of values, require specific education in this area. Respect for human rights and values is not merely a commitment by States – it is first and foremost a way of life for each individual in society. This way of life, which embraces human values, solidarity, tolerance, justice, citizenship, must be taught to every individual at all levels, even from the age of comprehension, and it is therefore one of the objectives of basic education. The environment in which this learning takes place must also respect and promote these values.

**“The State guarantees the right to basic education of good quality based on minimum standards, applicable to all forms of education, and provided by qualified teachers, as well as effective management along with a system of implementation and assessment”.**

38. The phrase “**basic education of good quality**” is difficult to interpret because, again, it depends on the situation in each society. In an effort to arrive at an operational definition that is useful for the specific application of the right to education, this paragraph lists certain principles that must be upheld.

39. The requirement of quality features in Article 4 of the Convention against Discrimination in Education, which is the main legally binding instrument relating to the level and quality of education. The Convention obliges States Parties “*to ensure that the standards of education are equivalent in all public educational institutions of the same level, and that the conditions relating to the quality of the education provided are also equivalent*”. Ensuring basic education of good quality is currently one of the major concerns of the international community.

40. The phrase “**based on minimum standards, applicable to all forms of education, and provided by qualified teachers**” refers to aspects of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, which sets out the obligation of States to guarantee quality education for all; identifies the need to apply a set of common standards and measures; and contains detailed provisions relating to teacher training; professional development; promotion and career progression; job security; salaries; and social security.

41. The phrasing indicates that every State, responsible for organizing basic education services, must do so by establishing a system of legal norms and other regulations and standards that can be applied to all forms of education. Clearly, a universally applicable operational definition should not specify details, because this is an area where adjustment to the sociocultural conditions of each country is highly relevant. As mentioned previously, details are not helpful in the context of an operational definition, as they will necessarily vary, but it is appropriate to adhere to a number of general principles that are universally applicable.

42. To this effect, the suggestions made refer to some of these elements: for example, the reference to **qualified teachers**, which is closely connected with quality education, must be interpreted in the sense that the State must organize a system for recruitment, selection, training and continued assessment in order to ensure the availability of qualified teachers. By the same token, the reference to effective management is used in the broadest sense of the term to refer, *inter alia*, to administrative management; the allocation and use of resources; the establishment of programmes; the division of subjects; and teaching methodology, all of which must be accompanied by an effective assessment system.

43. By using the phrase “**effective management along with a system of implementation and assessment**”, the Group took account of current trends and the concerns of planners in ensuring effective management and good governance, which in addition to effective planning requires a system of implementation and systematic, continuous assessment. As part of the EFA process, countries have established a system for implementation and the assessment of results that makes it possible to measure effectively the progress made towards achieving the EFA goals.

44. The Group attached particular importance to this point because, in an area as sensitive as the continuous development of basic education, an assessment system that operates at various levels in order to verify results is the only means of correcting errors and shortcomings and making appropriate adjustments to the education system so that quality education is maintained and fulfils the requirements of basic education.

**“Basic education is provided in the mother tongue, at least in its initial stages, while respecting the requirements/needs of multilingualism”.**

45. There was extensive discussion of questions relating to the possibility of providing education in the **mother tongue**. Given the existing elements of certain international instruments, the Group was of the view that it was important that education should be provided in the mother tongue in the initial stages. That view is also based on the Final Observations adopted by the CESCR and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). However, subsequent stages of education must be provided in the national language in order to enable all learners to understand the culture and the language of the wider community and thus prevent exclusion. In addition, the requirements of multilingualism make it necessary to learn a foreign language in order to meet the requirements of the job market in later life.

46. The final sentence refers to a problem that is particularly sensitive for some States and sets forth the principle that basic education should be provided in the mother tongue. This solution was deemed to be the only one possible in view of, *inter alia*, the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has to be recognized that this poses problems for a number of States where various groups speak a minority language. However, the Group was of the view that it was essential to consolidate the results that have already been achieved in the field of the rights of the child by taking into consideration, *inter alia*, the fact that basic education, with the exception of the specific situations mentioned above, is generally aimed at children aged five or six who step outside their family context, in which they are used to using only one language – their mother tongue. The use of the mother tongue is not obligatory for the full duration of basic education, hence the insertion of “**at least in its initial stages**”. The duration of that phase is not stipulated anywhere, so there is no explicit reference stating that the mother tongue must be used for three or five years or any other period. It is up to States to apply this principle and find a balance between the dominance of the mother tongue on the one hand and the requirements of multilingualism on the other. Again, the Group referred to such requirements without going into detail.

47. The Group engaged in extensive discussions regarding the value of **multilingualism** in an increasingly globalized society and the importance that States should attach to teaching at least a second language that can be used internationally, but again, the differences and practical factors that influence language teaching meant that reference was restricted to general requirements, leaving each State to apply the principle in practice in accordance with the local situation.

**“In those States where basic education is also provided by private schools, the State ensures that such schools respect fully the objectives and content as mentioned in the present definition”.**

48. The final sentence of the definition concerns private schools. By using the phrase **“in those States where”**, the Group seeks firstly to clarify that this part of the definition applies to States where basic education is provided both by public services (including State schools) and private schools. The main objective of this paragraph is to bring the basic education provided by private schools into line with that provided by State schools. It was not appropriate to go into detail because all the elements of the definition that are contained in the preceding paragraphs concern basic education *per se*, regardless of whether it is provided by State or private schools. However, whereas for State schools it is absolutely clear that the State is responsible, for private schools it is stated emphatically that the State must ensure that they respect fully the content and objectives mentioned in the present definition. In other words, since responsibility still lies with the State, it has the task of monitoring the activity of private schools with regard to basic education.

49. The definition is limited to general principles on the understanding that each State must organize a system of prior authorization, successive monitoring, verification, and so on, in order to ensure that private schools respect the content and objectives set out in the definition, thus enabling the State, in turn, to respect its international commitments in that regard.

50. The phrase **“private schools”** is used here only in contrast to “State schools”, which means that any type of school not run entirely by the State, for example in a mixed, semi-public or private manner, is covered by the phrase “private schools”.