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Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO

from developed and well-resourced countries,

20 January 2009,

UNESCO HQ, Paris

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Summary Report of the meeting

Presentation of outcomes to the Decentralization Review Task Force (DRTF) Second Phase, 4th Meeting, on 21 January 2009.

1. The representatives of 14 National Commissions participated in this one-day meeting. The National Commissions of Lebanon, Swaziland, and Vietnam also attended as observers and contributed to the discussions. The UNESCO Secretariat was represented by the Sector of External Relations (ERC) and the Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP). The meeting was opened by Ahmed Sayyad, ADG/ERC.
2. M. Luis Ramallo, President of the Spanish Commission for UNESCO, was elected Chair, M. Roland Bernecker, Secretary-General of the German Commission for UNESCO, was elected Rapporteur of this Meeting.

I. General Remarks

3. Representatives of National Commissions thanked the Secretariat for the opportunity to discuss the issue of strengthening the network of National Commissions with a view to enhancing their contribution to UNESCO's decentralization strategy. M. Bernecker took the occasion to particularly thank ERC, BFC and BSP for the excellent cooperation in the frame of the project to strengthen capacities of National Commissions in Africa.
4. Participants of the meeting pointed out that the international crisis the world is facing today makes it even more clear that UNESCO stands for the basic values that need to be promoted on a global level and that the Organization has a great responsibility through its mandate for fundamental issues that need to be addressed in order to create a better future for humanity. With regard to the review of its decentralization strategy, the main question therefore is how to strengthen the impact of the Organization's action in UNESCO's Member States. The best advocacy is to have strong outcomes and lasting results. Well functioning National Commissions are an effective tool to create that impact at a national level.
5. In the process of joint UN country programming UNESCO cannot be seen a funding agency, although it mobilises extra-budgetary funding for its activities. While UNESCO is determining its consolidated role in that process, it should place emphasis on becoming the defining authority among the UN agencies for the joint UN work – the “think tank” of the team. National Commissions, with their outreach capacities, can have a particular role in marshalling knowledge and expertise at the national level. The essential matter is that UNESCO has above all to be an authoritative world leader in its areas of competence. That means to decide what the challenges are and what are realistic goals to meet those challenges. UNESCO should also promote the best policies, set the necessary agreed international standards, help build capacity in countries and

monitor collective global efforts. UNESCO has the potential for a global leadership role in all its areas. As one participant put it: *UNESCO doit gagner la bataille de l'expertise.*

6. It was felt that the wide range of topics raised during the meeting needed further reflection and discussions by all parties concerned in the context of latest developments. The possibility of presenting a draft resolution to the General Conference in this regard was also proposed.

II. National Commissions in a decentralized UNESCO

7. It was pointed out that National Commissions are decentralized UNESCO. This is particularly the case in Member States where there are no field offices. National Commissions are the eyes, the ears and – in many respects – the voice of UNESCO in its Member States.
8. By its Constitution, UNESCO is an Organization explicitly set up to reach out through a participative approach: “a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.” In this context, National Commissions as actors that link governments, civil societies and the multilateral arena are to be seen as a genuine part of UNESCO’s overall architecture.
9. It was pointed out that National Commissions are a unique network in the UN system, creating a comparative advantage for UNESCO with regard to other UN-Organizations. Among others, the following features have been emphasized by representatives of National Commissions:
 - a) National Commissions are a unique and efficient tool to link the governmental dimension to civil society; they can effectively reach out to civil society
 - b) They can mobilize and coordinate expertise on the national level and organize intellectual input into UNESCO
 - c) They are a network of networks
 - d) They create visibility for UNESCO in Member States through publications, projects and PR-activities and by translating relevant information into the national context
 - e) They coordinate the wider UNESCO family on a national level (ASP schools, Chairs, Clubs and Associations, Committees of scientific programs) and supervise the use of the name and logo of UNESCO by these actors on a national level
 - f) They build advocacy for UNESCO in governments and parliaments
 - g) They initiate partnerships with private partners
 - h) They can mobilize funds for UNESCO related activities
 - i) They can implement projects, in partnership with local stakeholders, UNESCO Secretariat and/or with other National Commissions.

III. Some concrete proposals for a strategy to strengthen the effective contribution of National Commissions to a decentralized UNESCO

10. Although National Commissions are different in each country, it is useful to share some standards for their efficient functioning, for example:
 - a) National Commissions should be well structured and equipped with minimum financial resources.

- b) A well trained Secretary-General with a mandate of at least 5 years and one professional staff for each of UNESCO's major programmes
 - c) Experience is one of the main assets of National Commissions' staff. Therefore, frequent changes of professional staff in National Commissions are to be seen as a main impediment to their effectiveness; there is clear evidence of a close relation between the quality of work of a National Commission and the number of years of tenure of its professional staff, especially with regard to the Secretary-General. Effective mechanisms should be developed to ensure stability in the Secretariats of National Commissions.
 - d) Inter-sectoral outreach of National Commissions is essential. A however limited autonomy in the administrative linkage to a national ministry allows National Commissions to establish good relations to all ministries concerned by UNESCO's large mandate. A National Commission should not, through the attachment to a particular ministry, be limited to work exclusively in one of the Organization's major programmes
 - e) Experience shows that it is necessary to address governments in order to enhance the status of National Commissions.
11. UNESCO and Member States should support and strengthen the worldwide network of National Commissions.
12. UNESCO Secretariat can play the role of a clearing house for gathering, systemizing and disseminating good practices in the field of National Commission (with regard to structure, management, regional and interregional cooperation, training needs, etc.).
13. National Commissions work in an extremely complex setting at the interface of many different stakeholders and institutions; therefore, training and capacity building are seen to be crucial for the strengthening of National Commissions, for example:
- a) Training and capacity building for National Commissions must be developed in the perspective of a long term programme, not as a set of single activities
 - b) Regular and extrabudgetary resources should be mobilized for such a comprehensive training programme
 - c) Training has to be made more effective, interactive and focused on the real need of National Commissions; e.g. a new formula of the regular training of new Secretaries-General should be developed (this is already being undertaken by ERC)
 - d) Funds from the Participation Programme should be earmarked for training and capacity building of National Commissions
 - e) A few days of training could be attached to the regional consultations of National Commissions
 - f) Exchange of staff between National Commissions should be promoted and organized; in this regard, UNESCO could establish fellowships for new Secretaries-General
 - g) A mentoring programme could be formalized to create relationships between National Commissions and to provide coaching and support
 - h) Inter-regional cooperation between National Commissions should be promoted, whereby two-way support and equal partnership among National Commissions from different regions should be encouraged

- i) Resource persons could be appointed as advisors for National Commissions in a region
- j) Support should be also provided to the capacity-building of the local partners of National Commissions.

14. The cooperation of National Commissions in regional clusters should be enhanced. In the case of Europe and North America, it was proposed to consider to group National Commissions into clusters to promote sub-regional cooperation and partnerships.
15. National Commissions could be encouraged to undertake projects jointly. More Participation Programme funds should be used for projects jointly organized by some National Commissions and involving other National Commissions, thus enhancing project management skills and cooperational links within the network.
16. A proposal was put forward to advertise selected projects from the regular biennial programme and budget of UNESCO through a call for applications to National Commissions; these could apply to implement the project and, if possible, bring in supplementary extrabudgetary resources.

IV. The role of National Commissions in the UNDAF process

17. Representatives of National Commissions congratulated UNESCO on the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding with UNDP and appreciated the efforts of UNESCO to enhance the involvement of National Commissions in the UNDAF process.
18. The ongoing UN-reform is a very complex and technical process; information and training of National Commissions with regard to all aspects of the UNDAF process is being seen as crucial. Representatives of National Commissions concerned stated a lack of transparency in the process.
19. A new partnership has to be build between Field Offices of UNESCO and National Commissions. Things have developed already in a very constructive way. Examples show that where people are willing to cooperate, relations very soon become effective. It is necessary to create a spirit of mutual supportiveness between Field Offices and National Commissions. As a matter of governance, this question should be addressed by the high-level management of UNESCO's Secretariat. Stronger links between Category I and II Institutes of UNESCO and National Commissions should be also established.
20. Partners of UNESCO in the UN-system, notably members of the UN Country Team in each Member State, have to be better informed on UNESCO's specificities, e.g. with regard to the added value of National Commissions and their international and national networks and expertise.
21. National Commissions from developed countries should nurture closer links with ministries in their countries dealing with ODA and National Commissions from developing countries should advocate "UNESCO's topics" within their National Development Plans.
22. It is essential to associate National Commissions in the UNDAF process in a pragmatic and flexible way, avoiding "one size fits all" approach and taking advantage of National

Commissions' expertise about the national context and their privileged access to relevant national stakeholders.

V. Conclusion

23. National Commissions are a modern instrument of governance, truly reflecting the participatory approach of UNESCO as laid down in its Constitution, and creating a strong link between governments, civil society and multilateral cooperation. They especially support the intellectual function of the Organization by mobilizing national expertise and they create awareness and advocacy for UNESCO in its Member States. We have to find more intelligent ways to maximize this resource for the Organization.

**Speech by Mr Ahmed Sayyad,
Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Cooperation,
at the opening of the Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO
from developed and well-resourced countries**

(20 January 2009, UNESCO, Room VII)

Mesdames et Messieurs les Présidents et Secrétaires généraux des commissions nationales
Mesdames et Messieurs les observateurs,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

J'ai l'immense plaisir de vous accueillir aujourd'hui à cette réunion et j'ai l'honneur de vous faire part des chaleureuses salutations du Directeur général ainsi que de ses meilleurs vœux de succès dans vos délibérations.

Permettez-moi aussi de vous remercier d'avoir accepté mon invitation à assister à cette réunion malgré le court préavis.

Mesdames, Messieurs,

L'Équipe spéciale d'examen de la décentralisation, présidée par le Directeur général Adjoint, a examiné la politique de décentralisation afin de garantir un meilleur impact de l'action de l'UNESCO. L'une des questions clés discutées par cette équipe spéciale est celle d'un engagement efficace de l'UNESCO, avec la contribution des commissions nationales et des partenaires au niveau national, dans le Plan-cadre des Nations Unies pour l'aide au développement (PNUAD).

Les représentants des commissions nationales de l'Allemagne, de l'Espagne, du Swaziland et du Vietnam, ainsi que du Liban qui les a rejoints pour cette session, ont activement contribué aux travaux de cette équipe spéciale. Des séances ont aussi été consacrées à cet important sujet lors des cinq Consultations régionales sur le projet du 35 C/5.

Afin de renforcer cet élan et de créer de meilleures conditions pour que les commissions puissent prendre part à ce processus, le Secrétariat de l'UNESCO a pris des mesures supplémentaires. En octobre dernier, l'UNESCO a signé un Mémorandum avec le PNUD sur un partenariat d'accord stratégique. Le document stipule en particulier que les coordonnateurs résidents des Nations Unies peuvent faire appel aux représentants des commissions nationales au cours des discussions sur les questions de programmation.

Nous avons ensuite organisé à Hanoï en novembre dernier, une réunion de 20 commissions nationales des pays pilotes "Uni dans l'action" et des nouveaux pays concernés par le déploiement du PNUAD. Lors de cette réunion des recommandations ont été adoptées invitant le Secrétariat, les commissions nationales et les gouvernements des Etats Membres à prendre des mesures pour promouvoir le rôle des commissions nationales dans la programmation commune par pays de l'ONU.

Je pense qu'il s'agit là de deux événements majeurs qui constituent un cadre solide pour notre réflexion et notre action dans un avenir proche.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNESCO's decentralization policy is now closely linked to the UN common country programming. But not all countries are covered in that approach. Therefore, there is a need to further elaborate on the

participation of the National Commissions from countries not benefiting from joint UN country programming. This concerns mainly developed countries, predominantly in the Europe and North America region.

Today's meeting is primarily convened to discuss and collect the ideas and proposals on how National Commissions from developed countries can better contribute to UNESCO's decentralization process.

In order to participate efficiently in the decentralization process, the National Commissions should have sufficient operational capacities and resources. Unless this critical condition is met, we cannot achieve much progress in the above-mentioned objective.

The second objective of today's meeting is therefore to reflect on one important aspect of capacity-building, namely the promotion of partnership bonds amongst National Commissions. More specifically, to hear your ideas and proposals on how active and well-resourced National Commissions can assist other less-active and modest Commissions, both within their own regions and across the world.

In this connection, let me take the opportunity to thank all the National Commissions from developed countries who contribute to the promotion of North-South and North-South-South cooperation. To name them all is difficult within a short speech but I can assure you that their generosity and welcome efforts deserve UNESCO's highest appreciation.

Mesdames, Messieurs,

J'espère que votre réunion aboutira à des propositions concrètes qui seront présentées dès demain à l'Équipe spéciale d'examen de la décentralisation. Elles seront également utiles à la Section des commissions nationales dans ses activités futures pour la promotion de la coopération entre les commissions nationales et de leur participation dans le processus de décentralisation.

Je vous remercie de votre attention et vous souhaite tout le succès dans vos délibérations.

MEETING OF NATIONAL COMMISSIONS FOR UNESCO FROM DEVELOPED AND WELL-RESOURCED COUNTRIES

(20 January 2009, UNESCO HQs, Paris)

AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

19 JANUARY 2009

Arrival of participants in Paris

20 JANUARY 2009

09:30-10:00 Participation in the Opening Session of the 4th Meeting of the Decentralization Review Task Force (DRTF)-Second phase, chaired by Mr Marcio Barbosa, DDG
Venue: Room 5021

10:00-10:30 Coffee break

10:30-10:50 Opening of the Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO
Venue: Room VII

- Welcoming Remarks by Mr Ahmed Sayyad, ADG/ERC
- Election of the Chairperson and the Rapporteur
- Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

10:50-13:00 **First Session:** How can National Commissions for UNESCO from the developed countries actively contribute to the decentralization process, including in UNESCO's engagement in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) processes?

Questions to be addressed include: *What role the National Commissions from the developed countries, notably in Europe and North America, can play in the decentralization process (e.g. advocacy for UNESCO; raising UNESCO's visibility; information role, notably on UNESCO's standard-setting action; implementing programmes, including the PP projects; liaising UNESCO with a large network of national stakeholders and partners; mobilizing funds for UNESCO; etc)? What are the criteria and conditions for these Commissions to achieve this objective, notably in countries where UNESCO has not a Field Office? How can they help in UNESCO's engagement in UN common country programming?*

MEETING OF NATIONAL COMMISSIONS FOR UNESCO FROM DEVELOPED AND WELL-RESOURCED COUNTRIES
(20 January 2009, UNESCO HQs, Paris)

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Main Participants

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Mr. Akio ARATA	Director a.i., Division of Cooperation with Extrabudgetary Funding Sources
Mr. Xiaolin CHENG	Chief, National Commissions Section
Mr. Bobir TUKHTABAYEV	National Commissions Section
Ms. Vida HABASH	National Commissions Section
Ms. Reem SALEH	National Commissions Section
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