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ORAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PRX COMMISSION

H. E. Mr Mohammad Zahir Aziz, Afghanistan

14th Plenary meeting,

Wednesday 21 October 2009

Mr President of the General Conference,
Mr Director-General of UNESCO,
Honourable delegates, dear colleagues, dear friends,

It is both an honour and a privilege to present this oral report on the work of the PRX Commission concerning general questions, programme support and external relations, to the General Conference at its 35th session in my capacity as Chairperson. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the members of this Commission for the quality of debates, as well as the flexibility and mutual understanding they displayed during the discussions of the various agenda items. I also wish to thank the members of the Bureau for their support, particularly the Rapporteur, Mr Einar Steensnaes, from Norway.

The Commission worked at a steady pace between 9 and 13 October 2009, during six sessions organized into eight debates. Considering the time constraints, I shall present to you a concise report in the knowledge that the substantive and procedural questions tackled throughout the meetings, together with the adopted Resolutions, form an integral part of the written report of the Commission submitted as document 35 C/70.

Mr President, the Commission's first debate was devoted, within the examination of the draft C/5 document (item 4.2), to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). In his introduction, the Director of the Institute, Mr van der Pol, presented the report by the Governing Board of the UIS. Referring to the three priorities of the Medium-Term Strategy 2008-2013 of UIS, he highlighted the progress

on the revision of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as well as the strengthening of UIS presence in the field to improve the quality of the data through capacity-building.

The representatives of 14 Member States took the floor, commending the work of UIS and the excellent results achieved. The interventions focused on a number of items such as the revision of ISCED, the discrepancies between UIS indicators and national ones, the need to improve the indicators related to gender and Africa, and to strengthen the Member States' capacity to produce reliable indicators through the posting of Statistical Advisors in UNESCO Cluster Offices. Member States also stressed the risk of UIS becoming over-reliant on external funding and the collaboration of UIS with other international organizations and National Commissions. Finally, they stressed the importance of further developing the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP); the development of the Framework for Cultural Statistics and the importance of measuring Technical and Vocational Education Training. The Delegate of Finland announced a contribution of €200,000 to UIS for 2009. The draft resolution concerning this item was adopted by consensus.

The second debate also focused on the part of item 4.2 related to the coordination and monitoring of action to benefit Africa. The representative of the Director-General, Mr Tidjani-Serpos, Assistant Director-General of the Africa Department, provided an overall introduction on the activities implemented by his Department, ensuring that the priority for Africa is reflected effectively in UNESCO's programmes. This is done through its role of dialogue towards Member States, intersectoral coordination and follow-up of the sectors' activities. He mentioned notably the good cooperation established with the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities (REC); as well as the Department's role in post-conflict/post-disaster situations, and the mobilization of extrabudgetary funds for African Member States.

The representatives of 12 Member States intervened, welcoming the priority given to the continent, using notably UNESCO's fields of competence to achieve regional integration. They also commended the work done in mobilizing extrabudgetary resources and the cooperation established with the African Union, its New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) programme and the Regional Economic Communities. The reinforcement of the Africa Department in terms of staff and budget was requested, as well as the reinforcement of the North-South cooperation and with the National Commissions. The Commission was informed of the withdrawal of DR.56 (submitted by Nigeria) and adopted by consensus the draft resolution contained in the draft C/5 document.

Mr President, the third debate was devoted to three items: the part of item 4.2 concerning the Bureau of Strategic planning and programme monitoring; item 3.2 on the proposed procedure regarding the Draft Medium-Term Strategies and item 6.2 on the implementation of the guidelines and criteria for category 2 institutes and centres. The representatives of 18 Member States took part in the debate.

The representative of the Director-General, Mr D'Orville, Assistant Director-General for the Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP), introduced the three items, recalling the broad-based responsibilities of his Bureau, notably the preparation of the Programme and Budget, the monitoring and reporting of its implementation, as well as the refinement of the Results Based Management (RBM) approach in UNESCO. BSP is also the focal point for all issues pertaining to United Nations reform at the global level and the linkage to the country level. In this context, UNESCO has effectively participated in the "Delivering as One" pilot exercise. The Division for Gender Equality is also part of BSP and is responsible for promoting and monitoring gender equality, one of the two global priorities of the Organization. Finally, BSP is in charge of the Intersectoral Platform on Foresight and of the guidance and backstopping provided to the 12 intersectoral platforms.

Many Member States expressed satisfaction with the work carried out, in particular the quality of the Programme and Budget document for the next biennium, while expressing the need for UNESCO to become more efficient and results driven, as well as establishing clear priorities and

concentrating on its core tasks. Within the “Delivering as One” process, Member States recommended to integrate intersectoral efforts in country programming and to apply a human rights-based approach to development activities.

Concerning Priority Gender Equality, several speakers highlighted its importance as a critical component of poverty reduction efforts through women’s empowerment. Several speakers commended the preparation of the Gender Equality Action Plan and the e-learning initiative, regretting however, the scarcity of funds for this priority.

At the end of the debate the draft resolution related to strategic planning was adopted, as amended by Draft Resolution 35 C/DR.27 (submitted by Colombia).

Concerning item 3.2 on the Draft Medium-Term Strategies, the ADG/BSP presented document 35 C/10, and informed the Commission that the discussions by the Executive Board had not resulted in a formal draft resolution.

The Commission recommended that the General Conference take note of document 35 C/10 and adopted the draft resolution contained in document 35 C/COM PRX/DR.2 (submitted by Barbados, Finland, Grenada, Norway, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and supported by Pakistan and El Salvador, as amended orally by Spain and Grenada).

Concerning item 6.2 related to category 2 institutes and centres, ADG/BSP informed the Commission that document 35 C/22 constituted the results of the detailed work by the Executive Board with the Secretariat over several sessions. The integrated strategy is already applied on a preliminary basis, subject to the final approval of the General Conference at the present session.

Some delegations underlined that the increasing number of category 2 institutes and centres should not become a burden on the financial and human resources of the Organization. However, this is balanced by the positive contribution these centres make to the achievement of UNESCO’s programme priorities and expected results. On the question of “flexibility in the draft agreement”, as mentioned in paragraph A.1.7 of the strategy, the ADG/BSP informed that it had already been applied and was indeed used to accommodate the legal constraints of Member States. The draft resolution contained in document 35 C/22 was adopted without amendment.

The Commission then pursued on its fourth debate on item 4.2 regarding budget planning and management. The item was introduced by the representative of the Director-General, Ms Valle, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, who briefly recalled the four missions of the Bureau of the Budget: Planning and Management, Analysis and Control, Policies and Practices and Support to decision-making processes. She also presented the main challenges for the Bureau of the Budget, namely to be a key actor to accelerate the harmonization of business practices within the United Nations system, and country-oriented approach, with the “Delivering as One” initiative, and to improve cost awareness in a non-profit organization, in order to ensure that UNESCO has the means of its ambition for all its programmes whatever the source of funding.

The representatives of two Member States took the floor and expressed their satisfaction with the work done so far. At the end of the debate, the relevant draft resolution was adopted by consensus.

The fifth debate of the Commission addressed the chapter of item 4.2. related to public information. In his introduction, the representative of the Director-General, Mr Muñoz Gomez, Director of the Bureau of Public Information, highlighted the transitional and holistic nature of the Organization’s public information activities, stating the need to adapt constantly to developments of information technologies and to the requirements from different audiences. He also stressed the importance of the public information measures carried out by the Organization’s different networks, communities and partners, in particular the National Commissions.

The representatives of 19 Member States took the floor, commending the improvements achieved through the work of the Bureau of Public Information, notably as regards the UNESCO Internet portal. The main issues raised concerned the need to be informed in a timely manner on the global Public Information Plan. The possible revitalization of the UNESCO *Courrier* was mentioned by many delegates, and several also requested that the Organization's publications be made widely available in both electronic and printed form.

The representative of the Director-General explained that the forthcoming Publication and Distribution Plan, prepared for the 2010 spring session of the Executive Board, will be based on a stronger relevance of the publications to the programme priorities and will include distribution modalities for each publication. He stressed the need for additional extrabudgetary resources for translations. Regarding the UNESCO *Courrier*, he informed the Commission that it was currently published in electronic form in seven languages and mentioned that a report will be presented at the 184th session of the Executive Board. At the end of the debate, the draft resolution related to public information was adopted by the Commission.

The sixth debate was devoted to item 6.1 on the relations between the three organs of UNESCO, and item 1.6 related to the organization of the work of the session and the report by the President of the 34th session thereon. The representative of the Director-General, Mr Millward, Secretary of the General Conference, introduced the two items.

The representatives of 26 Member States took the floor on item 1.6 for a lengthy and substantial debate, which was preceded by introductory remarks by the Ambassador of Greece, former President of the General Conference and author of the report contained in document 35 C/43.

There was unanimous praise for the outstanding work of the President of the 34th session of the General Conference and the Member States representatives who assisted him, within the informal working group, to produce the report. Speakers also welcomed the fact that many of the practical recommendations had already been taken into account by the Director-General and the Executive Board in the organization of the current session. A number of speakers also believed that the report would make an excellent contribution to the overall external evaluation of UNESCO that was debated under another agenda item.

Many speakers stated, however, that they could not support all the conclusions and recommendations of the report. An amendment to the proposed draft resolution had therefore been tabled (*35 C/COM PRX/DR.3 submitted by Albania, Barbados, Canada, Finland, Grenada, Jamaica, Monaco, Norway, Portugal, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and supported by Andorra, Dominican Republic, Australia, United States of America, Pakistan, Iceland, Solomon Islands, Zimbabwe and Germany; amended orally by Pakistan, Norway, United States of America and Morocco*). The section in the report which dealt with governance issues, however, drew a large number of comments. A majority in the Commission did not share the view in the report that certain authorities might be delegated to the Executive Board by virtue of its enhanced representativeness. Indeed, most speakers opined that the Executive Board would not be perceived as fully representative unless the question of the rotation of its membership was addressed, and insisted on the need to preserve the supreme policy and decision-making powers of the General Conference. These matters therefore had to be marked down for ongoing consideration, which is why the full report could not be approved as it stood.

It was requested that the discussion be reflected in the Commission's report for future reference.

A Member State introduced a further addition to formalize the future consideration by the General Conference of the results of the Youth Forum. The amendment of the draft resolution, as modified per the above comments, was adopted by consensus.

The representatives of six Member States took the floor on item 6.1, agreeing that the time had come to turn the page on the specific implementation of the General Conference resolution on the

three organs, while continuing to keep these issues under regular scrutiny. The Executive Board was praised for its in-depth work on the subject, notably in its Special Committee. The draft resolution recommended by the Executive Board was thus adopted without amendment.

The seventh debate grouped several items linked to external relations and cooperation, namely item 9.3 on the Definition of regions with a view to the execution by the Organization of regional activities; item 4.2 on the External relations and cooperation, the Participation Programme and the Fellowships Programme.

Item 9.3 concerned the inclusion of the Faroe Islands in the Europe region with a view to the execution of regional activities, further to their admission as Associate Member of UNESCO. The Commission congratulated the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Faroe Islands who was present in the room and recommended that the General Conference admit the Faroe Islands to the Europe region with a view to its participation in the regional activities of the Organization.

The representative of the Director-General, Mr Ahmed Sayyad, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Cooperation, provided an overall introduction to the debate, recalling the specificity of his sector which is not only a support sector, but which also manages important programmes, such as the Participation, Fellowships and Coupons programmes. Stressing the importance of enhancing cooperation with Member States, National Commissions, international organizations, as well as with civil society and the private sector, Mr Sayyad explained the main thrusts of ERC-related activities foreseen for the next biennium.

The representatives of 35 Member States took the floor in the ensuing debate, stressing the importance of the Participation Programme, commending its role in assisting Member States and calling for its strengthening, as it enhances the visibility of UNESCO, involves Member States in the Organization's activities, and improves the lives of people. Some speakers argued that the programme should remain open to all Member States in order to promote both South-South and North-South interregional cooperation.

Speakers called for better administrative efficiency, commending the efforts in view of more expeditious acknowledgements and replies. Delegates also asked for further improvements in transparency and evaluation of reports, and for greater flexibility in the scope of the projects and in the deadlines for their execution.

The vast majority of speakers stressed the importance of further enhancing the role and operational capacities of the National Commissions, insisting that capacity-building will help increase the central role of National Commissions in fulfilling UNESCO's goals at national level.

A more consistent approach to the promotion of networking among National Commissions was requested as well as improvements in their partnerships and interaction with field offices and civil society organizations. One Member State, supported by many delegates, also insisted on the importance and the need to monetize and take into account the substantive financial and in-kind contribution of the Member States to the implementation of UNESCO programmes through the National Commissions.

The Director-General's representative stressed that, in order to take full advantage of these unique structures of UNESCO, capacity-building efforts will continue to be a priority and that Member States will receive the greatest level of assistance and flexibility, while respecting the financial rules and regulations of the Organization.

The ADG/ERC reiterated the importance of the partnership between the National Commissions, parliamentarians, NGOs and field offices, calling upon them to work hand-in-hand to implement UNESCO's goals and objectives. He also informed the floor that within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between UNESCO and UNDP, National Commissions are enabled to play a role, when and where possible, in the United Nations country team exercise. A

number of speakers commended ERC sector's efforts to promote a true culture of partnerships with civil society, including the organization of the Partners Forum.

With regard to the Fellowships Programme, Mr Sayyad provided an overview of this long standing programme which helped thousands of leading specialists, often from developing countries, to share their best practices and gain new experience. Thanks to several donor countries, the programme benefits from important extrabudgetary resources, complementing the regular budget.

The representatives of 22 Member States took the floor, expressing their full support for this programme, which improves education, international cooperation and capacity-building in the Organization's fields of competence in the Member States.

Following the discussions, DR.16 and DR.63 (*submitted respectively by Burkina Faso and Argentina*) were withdrawn. The ADG/ERC reassured the Member States that the Secretariat will find a suitable solution for the transfer of funds, in accordance with UNESCO's rules and regulations, to those Member States whose National Commissions do not have a bank account in their own name.

The Commission then adopted the draft resolution related to External relations and cooperation, as amended by the Draft Resolution 35 C/DR.64 (*submitted by Azerbaijan*), and orally by the Commission. The draft resolutions related to Participation and Fellowships programmes were adopted without amendment.

Following the adoption of all the draft resolutions contained in document C/5 attributed to PRX Commission and after having examined the recommendations by the Executive Board on the Draft Programme and Budget for 2010-2011 (35 C/6), the Commission recommended that the General Conference endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 1 to 28 and 80 to 82 of document 35 C/6.

The last debate dealt with item 5.1, Proposals by Member States concerning the celebration of anniversaries in 2010-2011 with which UNESCO could be associated and item 5.10 concerning the celebration of the bicentenary of the independence processes of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (*agenda item added by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*).

Mr President, the ADG/ERC briefly introduced both items, making an appeal for Africa, Arab States, and Latin America and the Caribbean to submit proposals with a view to improving geographical distribution.

The representatives of 19 Member States participated in the discussions, many of them expressing their support for item 5.1 which helps to increase the visibility of UNESCO at the national level. Some delegates requested UNESCO increase its participation and ensure a follow-up to the celebrations.

The ADG/ERC invited Member States to submit requests under the Participation Programme to finance such activities and reassured them that all UNESCO's partners, including the goodwill ambassadors, are encouraged to be associated with these celebrations.

The Commission recommended that the General Conference adopt both draft resolutions without amendment.

The Commission had the privilege to receive the visit of the Director-General of UNESCO during this last meeting. Mr Matsuura underscored the unfailing support of National Commissions to the advancement of UNESCO's objectives and programmes, and recalled that UNESCO is privileged to be the only agency within the United Nations system to have a global network of National Commissions.

Mr President, I hope that I have reflected the core ideas of our fruitful debates in the PRX Commission, which dealt with decisions important to the future policy and actions of our Organization, and other matters specifically related to many facets and dimensions.

I shall conclude my presentation by thanking the Rapporteur, the Vice-Chairpersons, and the representatives of the Director-General who presented the items on the Commission's agenda and replied to the questions raised thereon. I also express my gratitude to the Secretary of the PRX Commission, Ms Véronique Dauge and her dedicated team, as well as to the interpreters and all technical staff who contributed to the success of our work.

Thank you for your attention.