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ORAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE EDUCATION COMMISSION

Mr Duncan Hindle (South Africa)

16th plenary meeting, Thursday 22 October 2009

Mr President,
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Education Commission of the 35th session of the General Conference completed its work and adopted its report on 19 October, reaching consensus on all recommendations. I have the honour and privilege to submit to you the main conclusions of our three days of fruitful discussions.

As an introduction to our debates, the Assistant Director-General for Education presented the Highlights of the Ministerial Round Table on “What education for the future? Lessons from the major international education conferences”, which was held on 9 and 10 October. He recalled a number of important recommendations for UNESCO that emerged from this round table which informed the substance of our debates.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now let me turn to our substantive debates. Our work was divided into five debates.

The first debate was devoted to the consideration and adoption of the Draft Programme and Budget for 2010-2011 (35 C/5 Rev.). The item was introduced by the Assistant Director-General for Strategic Planning. He reminded us of the seamless transition between the Medium-Term Strategy set for the Organization for the period 2008-2013 (34 C/4) **and** the strategies presented in document 35 C/5. He also underlined the continued emphasis given to the two global priorities – Africa and gender equality. He was followed by the Assistant Director-General for Education, who outlined the key features of Major Programme I in draft document 35 C/5.

Fellow delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us now turn to the general debate on the C/5 document. It was extensive and rich. Forty-one Member States, one Observer and one non-governmental organization took the floor to share their views on the programme and budget for the forthcoming biennium and their unwavering commitment to education for all (EFA) as the top priority for the Organization.

Let me try to summarize the main themes of this debate.

Many delegates expressed appreciation for the efforts made to increase the programmatic focus of the education programme and supported the priority areas identified for Major Programme I. They welcomed the increased budgetary support to education and appreciated the more reader-friendly document 35 C/5.

It is indeed unacceptable that 776 million adults remain illiterate. The Commission therefore called on UNESCO to continue to support **literacy** for empowerment and to further mobilize the international community through the United Nations Literacy Decade. While the assumptions used to arrive at the estimated **teacher** gap of some 10.5 million primary school teachers were challenged, there were no questions about the need to scale up teacher education and training as a means to improve the quality of education. Support was voiced for the Teacher Training Initiative in sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA) and for **priority Africa**. Likewise, many delegates expressed the urgent need to improve national **TVET** policies and programmes to better meet changing labour demands and to mitigate high youth unemployment rates and poverty. Some underlined the importance of moving UNESCO's actions **upstream** and of providing technical assistance and capacity development to allow countries to better **plan and manage** their education systems. It was agreed that triangular **North-South-South** cooperation should remain a key implementation modality.

In the debates it was noted that education is an opportunity to respond to the current financial crisis, and that UNESCO needs to scale up its efforts to improve the **global coordination of EFA** partners and to strengthen linkages between EFA and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Indeed, ESD was qualified as one of the major educational challenges of our times. The Associated Schools Project network (**ASPnet**) was highly appreciated and described as an important means of piloting ESD programmes. The Commission agreed that **gender equality** should continue to be of high priority for the Programme and that **inclusive** education policies should reach out to all marginalized groups, with the continued key objective of making education for all a reality.

Distinguished delegates,

Fifteen draft resolutions submitted by Member States on various aspects of the C/5 document were examined by the Commission. For the sake of brevity, I shall not enter into the details of the subsequent debates, the outcomes of which can be found in the written report of the ED Commission. I would, nevertheless, like to highlight some of our discussions not necessarily addressed in the written report, and in particular two proposed draft resolutions that led to more discussions.

The first related to the draft resolution proposed by France on Holocaust remembrance. Some 16 countries took the floor on this draft resolution. Some felt that it was important to make a reference to the specificity of Holocaust remembrance and to UNESCO's ongoing work as a previous General Conference resolution. Others emphasized that UNESCO should more broadly promote education for tolerance to combat all forms of discrimination, without making specific reference to the Holocaust. A working group was set up, and it successfully identified a consensus proposal whereby no specific reference to Holocaust remembrance is made in the resolution, while Volume II of document 35 C/5 recognizes UNESCO's ongoing work in this area through extrabudgetary funds. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran voiced his country's reservation on the proposed amendment to the draft resolution. In view of the fact that the amendment would make the inclusion of Holocaust remembrance into national curricula voluntary, and not compulsory, he agreed to allow for adoption of the amended resolution by consensus.

The second draft resolution that led to some discussion related to the proposed budgetary allocation for the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC). Some Member States of the Latin America and Caribbean region expressed the view that the Institute's budget should be maintained at the same level as in document 34 C/5 and regretted that the concerned institute had not been more thoroughly consulted during the planning process. A budgetary amendment to document 35 C/5 Rev. by the General Conference would however require the Commission to identify from where the corresponding funds should be taken. In view of this, the Commission reached consensus by proposing amendments to the resolution that asked the Director-General to mobilize extrabudgetary funding to support the Institute, to strive to restore in document **36 C/5** the financial allocation for IESALC to the same level as that of document 34 C/5, and for future budgetary allocations to duly take into account the Institute's achievements. When adopting the report of the Commission, the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela submitted her country's reservations concerning the Institute's budgetary reduction, stressing the lack of proper consultations and the fact that it was inconsistent with the performance of the Institute and the economic crisis.

She also expressed Venezuela's reservations with regards to the reference of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) in document 35 C/5 Rev. as they consider methods, such as "Yo si puedo" to be very successful.

Following the examination of all the draft resolutions and the adoption of the recommendations of the Executive Board (with the exception of the addendum to document 35 C/6, which became obsolete given the adoption of a new resolution concerning IESALC), the Commission examined and adopted the budgetary provisions of document 35 C/5 Rev. relating to Major Programme I. At

this point a round of applause followed, marking the conclusion of a long process which had started two years ago for the preparation of this programme and budget document.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Commission highly appreciated the reports on the 2008-2009 activities presented by the chairpersons of the governing boards of each of the six education institutes of UNESCO. Throughout our deliberations, the excellent work of these institutes, their contribution to achieving the EFA goals as important technical implementation arms of Major Programme I, and the need to identify more sustainable financial solutions to support these institutes were acknowledged by many delegates.

The ED Commission also appreciated the report provided on the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for the Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC).

Fellow delegates,

I would like now to turn to our second debate, which concerned the four items that were considered for adoption without debate.

The first of these items related to the “Amendments to the Statutes of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for the Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC)”. The Assistant Director-General for Education recalled that the PRELAC Statutes had been provisionally approved by the Executive Board at its 180th session. It was noted that the Spanish version of the statutes should be identical to those submitted to the Executive Board at its 180th session.

The second item related to the revision of the “1981 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees and other Academic Qualification in Higher Education in the African States” and the “1983 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific”. The resolution invited the Director-General to convene two intergovernmental conferences in 2010-2011, in order to adopt the revised texts of the regional Conventions and this was supported.

The third item concerned debt swaps for education. The resolution recommended that the Director-General establish an advisory panel of experts on debt swaps and innovative approaches to education financing and the establishment of a Special Account to receive extrabudgetary resources. The representative from El Salvador expressed regrets that the document had only been made available very recently.

The last item under the second debate was related to the implementation of 34 C/Resolution 58 concerning educational and cultural institutions in the Occupied Arab Territories. It was also adopted without debate. The representative from the Occupied Palestine Territories thanked the Member States and the Secretariat for all the support provided to their educational institutions. The representative of Israel expressed reservations to paragraph 14 of this resolution, which deals with the situation of education on the Golan Heights, as they emphasized that all residents of the Golan can acquire Israeli citizenship and therefore enjoy full rights to education. Paragraph 14 of the resolution was therefore not approved by Israel.

Distinguished delegates,

Let me now turn to our third debate, where 27 Member States and one non-governmental organization took the floor to address the following three items.

First, the “Draft strategy for the second half of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development”. The item was introduced by the Assistant Director-General for Education, who recalled that the strategy sets out key areas of strategic action through which

UNESCO will put knowledge into action and promote the further integration of education for sustainable development in all types and setting of education.

In the debate that followed, the ED Commission expressed strong support for Education for Sustainable Development as a strategy to mitigate global challenges (such as climate change and the global financial crisis, and issues such as social inclusion, conflict resolution and human rights). The Commission urged UNESCO to strengthen its global leadership for the implementation of the Decade and expressed its appreciation for the successful outcomes of the Bonn World Conference on ESD in 2009. The proposed draft resolution, which highlighted the urgent need to operationalize education for sustainable development, was adopted by consensus with only minor modifications.

The second item discussed concerned the strategy to make the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE) UNESCO's centre of excellence for curricula. Many delegates expressed their appreciation of IBE's work and supported the proposal to make it a centre of excellence for curricula. Some raised the need for IBE to give more focused attention to curriculum development. While some delegates would have liked to see the strategy already submitted to the current session of the General Conference, they extended their support to the working group that will be established to prepare the strategy, which will be open to all interested Member States, and noted that they looked forward to being consulted on the final version of the strategy.

Finally, the last item under this debate related to the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, which will be held in Moscow in September 2010 thanks to the support of the City of Moscow. The item was introduced by the representative of the Russian Federation. The Assistant Director-General for Education expressed his appreciation for the resolution, recalling the importance of giving increased attention to the first goal of EFA.

Let me now turn to our fourth debate, which covered three items proposing the establishment of UNESCO category 1 and 2 education institutes and centres.

The first item related to the establishment of a category 1 institute in India: the **Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development**. When introducing the item, the Assistant Director-General for Education recalled that the proposal had been submitted to the Executive Board at its 182nd session, which recommended that the General Conference, at its 35th session, approve the establishment of the Institute. The delegate from India explained that her country would finance all costs of the institute, with the exception of the Director's post, and that it would be the first category 1 education institute in Asia. Representatives of 15 Member States took the floor to support wholeheartedly the establishment of this institute, indicating worldwide interest in promoting education for peace and sustainable development through it.

The second item discussed under this debate dealt with the proposals for the establishment of two category 2 centres, one in the Philippines – that would deal with **lifelong learning for sustainable development in South-East Asia** – and the other in the Syrian Arab Republic, which would be a **regional centre working on early childhood development**. Representatives of five Member States took the floor to voice their support for the establishment of these important centres and satisfaction that the centres were located in countries of the South. Throughout the debates, delegates also called for a reference to category 2 centres in the final version of document 35 C/5 document. They underlined the importance of continuing current efforts to make linkages between these centres, category 1 education institutes and the rest of Major Programme I.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I now turn to our fifth and last debate, which concerned item 5.2 "Impacts on the education system and freedom of expression as a consequence of the situation in Honduras", and was possibly one of the most delicate items discussed by our Commission. A working group had been established by the President of the General Conference to amend the draft resolution on this item. Thanks to their constructive approach and spirit of compromise, this group was able to propose a resolution

acceptable to all, which underlined the possible negative impacts on the functions of an education system resulting from a breakdown of a democratic system and requested the Director-General to follow developments within the fields of competence of UNESCO in the interest of the right to education and freedom of expression.

Mr President,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the last meeting of the Commission, some delegates suggested useful recommendations and lessons learned that can be valuable for the preparation of the Education Commission at the next General Conference. The Secretariat assures me that due note has been taken of these suggestions.

Allow me to thank the Vice-Chairs of the Education Commission for their valuable assistance and dedication to ensuring that all decisions were reached by consensus, the representative of the Director-General, and the Secretary of the Commission for his support to all of the Bureau and Members of the Commission. Let me associate all those who contributed to the success of our proceedings.

I thank you for your attention.