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Educational, Scientific and
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# Executive Board

**Hundred and eighty-seventh session**

# 187 EX/13

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Item **13** of the provisional agenda

## PROCLAMATION OF A WORLD RADIO DAY


**SUMMARY**

The Director-General submits for the approval of the Executive Board, the feasibility study for the proclamation of a World Radio Day further to a request from Spain.

Financial and administrative implications: see paragraph 24.

Action expected of the Executive Board: decision in paragraph 25.

## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1. Following a request from the Academia Española de la Radio, on 20 September 2010 Spain proposed that the UNESCO Executive Board include an agenda item on the proclamation of a World Radio Day. The Chairperson of the Executive Board further requested UNESCO's Secretariat to undertake a feasibility study on the matter.

2. The proposal was based on the popularity and success of radio due to its unique qualities as a low-cost technology, both to broadcast and to receive, that is equally suited to reach global, national or local audiences. It is argued that radio production is simple and inexpensive, ideal in areas of low literacy or for serving small specialized audiences, such as linguistic or cultural minorities. For many communities it is the only medium available and certainly the only one open to the voices and concerns of women, youth and the poor. Radio is also an essential component of emergency communication systems and ideal for supporting disaster relief efforts. The incorporation of digital technologies is making new forms of radio possible such as Internet radio and "podcasts" delivered via the Internet to computers or mobile devices, further lowering barriers to entry and facilitating wider distribution.

3. Yet the benefits of radio are far from fully realized. Up to a billion people do not have access to radio, even as innovative uses are still being found. There is scope for action to raise interest in and support for radio where it is needed most, to encourage international exchange of good practice, and to stimulate innovation. While for billions of people radio is the most accessible and affordable mass medium and in many cases the only one, it is in danger of being overshadowed by digital technologies on the public agenda. A World Radio Day would highlight radio's importance and support innovation in both policy and practice.

### UNESCO's role in promoting communication

4. Radio is an important means for the achievement of UNESCO's Constitutional mandate. It contributes substantively to UNESCO's commitment "to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding" (Preamble) and greatly facilitates the "free flow of ideas by word and image" (Article I) even to the remotest areas, reaching out to the most disadvantaged people and disseminating educational and cultural content.

5. In striving for free, independent and pluralistic media, UNESCO's activities in favour of radio are extensive and include: supporting different radio transmission platforms (e.g. community radio with "Radio-in-a-box" start-up kits, shortwave and satellite radio use), training of personnel, institutional capacity-building as well as promoting policy (e.g. the 1972 Declaration: Guiding Principle of the Use of Satellite Broadcasting, the Media Development Indicators and Public Service Broadcasting seminars, editorial guidelines, surveys and publications). Common threads running through all UNESCO activities in this field are strong support for freedom of expression and fostering free, independent and pluralist media.

## RESULTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION

6. A comprehensive consultation process among all stakeholders was carried out during June and July 2011, contacting 1,210 parties, including all Permanent Delegations and National Commissions, and receiving 418 responses. It should be noted that National Commissions and Permanent Delegations to UNESCO represented only 10% of all respondents. International experts Bruce Girard and Seán Ó Siochrú managed the process.

7. The proposal for a World Radio Day was endorsed by 91% of those responding to the consultation, including 129 public, private and community broadcasters, 38 Broadcasting Unions/Associations, 73 NGOs, 46 academics, 34 National Commissions for UNESCO and 16 Permanent Delegations to UNESCO.

8. Separately from the consultation, the Academia Española de la Radio received direct endorsements from 46 organizations, almost all of them broadcasters and broadcast associations.

9. A total of 2% of those consulted rejected the proposal, several suggesting that a link to World Information Society Day or to World Press Freedom Day would be more appropriate, and a few noting that the concept was as yet too vague and general. The remaining 7% were neutral. Broadcasters were more strongly in favour than the average. A disproportionately large number of National Commissions for UNESCO and Permanent Delegations to UNESCO were neutral or negative as were government institutions, though to a lesser extent.

**Proposed date and the justification**

10. Several dates were suggested as part of the consultation to celebrate World Radio Day, none already listed as a United Nations Observance, and the following were shortlisted by the Secretariat:

– 6 October: Birth of Reginald Fessenden, inventor of audio broadcasting and radio pioneer (1866);

– 27 July: First public wireless transmission of Morse code by Guglielmo Marconi (1896);

– 30 October: First broadcast of Orson Welles' famous The War of the Worlds radio play (1938). Initially proposed by the Academia Española de la Radio.

About 40% of those responding felt the first and second were very suitable; about half of that choosing the third date. However, the third date was felt to be unsuitable by over one third, compared to about 8% for either of the other two dates. Comments point to concerns over a focus on the English-speaking world and that it might be seen as an example of radio "duping" the public.

Alternative suggestions by respondents included celebrating World Radio Day on 17 May alongside World Telecommunication and Information Society Day; 27 August for the first radio broadcast, of Wagner's Parsifal, from Coliseo Theatre in Argentina (1920) and 30 November the birth date of Jagadish Chandra Bose, the first to demonstrate remote wireless signalling and to use the semiconductor to detect radio signals (1858). A full list of suggested alternative dates is available for consultation.

**Objectives of the day**

11. The main objectives of a World Radio Day would be as follows (percentages represent respondents who agree or strongly agree):

(i) to raise the understanding among the public and the media of the value of radio, including in the context of new media, and the value of actively supporting radio (94%);

(ii) to encourage decision-makers to support, establish and provide access to radio (93%);

(iii) to provide a networking focus for radio proponents and practitioners worldwide, to exchange ideas, experiences and resources (92%);

(iv) to highlight selected issues each year to radio practitioners and the public, galvanizing otherwise dispersed support (90%).

**Expected results**

12. The expected results could include the following:

(i) greater awareness and appreciation of the positive role and continued relevance of radio, especially for marginalized groups and in the context of development, media pluralism, and the free flow of information and ideas;

(ii) practical reinforcement of international cooperation between those involved in radio production and dissemination;

(iii) mobilization of and concrete action by radio participants, supporters, policy-makers and other stakeholders around issues of current concern and in the further extension of access to and future development of radio;

(iv) greater acknowledgement and visibility of UNESCO's and the United Nations' role in promoting radio, and of its mandate in relation to radio.

**Programme of celebration**

13. A total of 73% of those consulted believe that World Radio Day should be pronounced as a United Nations Day and be celebrated by all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and their stakeholders in all countries of the world, rather than by UNESCO and its stakeholders alone.

14. Those consulted stakeholders who strongly endorse a celebration of World Radio Day considered that it could include (percentages represent those agreeing):

(i) extensive use of social media to promote World Radio Day, as a way also of drawing attention to the link between radio and new media (86%);

(ii) one or more annual themes selected to highlight important topical issues (80%);

(iii) a single dedicated website to link all the elements and enable wider "virtual" participation (80%);

(iv) special radio programmes produced for the day, and widely disseminated globally for broadcast and by social media (74%);

(v) key partners organizing a single headline celebration, or Radio Festival, in a different location annually (61%).

15. The consultation attracted many innovative ideas including: an annual or bi-annual prize of innovative use of radio for development, a schools radio programme competition, copyright-free broadcasting on the day, travelling radio roadshows, and a toolkit to enable local radio channels to celebrate in a context specific way.

16. As for organizational arrangements, consideration of other Observance days suggests that coordinated and committed support from a core set of broadcasting organizations and unions, as well as ongoing support of a wide range of others, is likely to lead to a successful outcome.

17. In this regard, it can be noted that more than two thirds (69%) of stakeholders consulted believe that their organizations definitely would, or most likely would, commit some time or resources to a World Radio Day, including 82% of 154 broadcasters and broadcast associations or unions that responded.

18. The celebration of a World Radio Day might include the following activities:

(i) to convene a core group of supporters with a view to forming a Steering Committee;

(ii) to work with this group to secure external funding and support from stakeholders, foundations and others;

(iii) to facilitate National Commissions in organizing local celebrations;

(iv) to link relevant UNESCO programme activities to World Radio Day where possible;

(v) to organize or co-organize events, around World Radio Days, and participate in the celebration of others;

(vi) to encourage national celebrations;

(vii) to utilize networks of Goodwill Ambassadors to promote the event;

(viii) to encourage participation of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN in those celebrations.

**DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S COMMENTS**

19. While acknowledging the positive reaction of respondents to the consultation on Spain's proposal of a World Radio Day, the Director-General would like to provide the following elements for consideration.

20. The fact that digital technologies are blurring the distinction between radio, television and the Internet may lead us to question the logic of international celebrations of any particular technical platform (such as television, radio, Internet). In this time of media convergence, it is besides becoming more difficult to define and circumscribe the term "radio". It would therefore be worth reflecting on the possible impact on UNESCO's visibility that the proclamation of such a World Day could bring. Moreover, UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day on 3 May acknowledges all media, including radio; therefore there may be a risk of duplication in terms of general public perception.

21. The date of 30 October is associated with a radio drama broadcast announcing an alien invasion in progress interpreted by the actor Orson Welles. Despite being a pivotal moment in the history of radio, it also represents a date that provoked panic in listeners, with dramatic consequences.

22. Furthermore, radio has a multitude of non-broadcasting applications, including uses as diverse as aviation, space, amateur radio, two-way communication and disaster mitigation. In the 21st century, radio transmissions lie at the heart of Wi-Fi, the key component in the exponential global promotion of mobile (cell) telephones and the Internet. Many of these fields fall within the purview of another United Nations agency, namely the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), which is a lead agency in celebrating United Nations World Telecommunications and Information Society Day (17 May). The United Nations also recognizes a United Nations World Television Day (21 November). This was promulgated under GA Resolution 51/205 and the day acknowledges the first World TV Forum held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 21 November 1996.

23. Taking into account all these considerations and the overwhelming support of professional associations and organizations to the proposal of the Academia Española de la Radio, the Director-General suggests as a possible option for the Executive Board to consider celebrating World Radio Day on 13 February, the day the United Nations established the whole concept of United Nations Radio, in 1946.

24. Based on the budget and activities of other celebrations, it is envisaged, *mutatis mutandis*, that an annual UNESCO Regular Programme budget of US $80,000 to US $90,000, would enable a meaningful celebration and the capacity to fulfil activities outlined in paragraph 18. However, the UNESCO Programme and Budget for 2012–2013 does not include such provision, nor does the Organization currently have the necessary human and financial resources to play an effective role in coordinating the proposed Day.

**ACTION EXPECTED OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

25. Taking into account the results of the worldwide study on this matter, the Executive Board may wish to consider a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 which states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression" and to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media (...)",

2. Further recalling that the Constitution of UNESCO commits its members "to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding" (Preamble) and to the "free flow of ideas" (Article I),

3. Reaffirming its commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Constitution of UNESCO, as well as the principles of freedom of expression and information, and to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media,

4. Underlining that communications and media have attained a very high level of crucial importance for human, social and cultural development,

5. Recognizing the critical role of radio in development, among others in emergency situations, in enhancing democratic governance, in contributing to media pluralism and amplifying the voice of communities as well as empowering them to participate in the public debate,

6. Underlining that radio is still the main media reaching poor and marginalized people, thus able to turn both their attention and that of decision-makers to the issues that affect their lives,

7. Having examined document 187 EX/13,

8. Takes note of the conclusions of the feasibility study produced by the Secretariat and notes with satisfaction the high level of support for the celebration of a World Radio Day;

9. Recommends to the General Conference that it proclaim a World Radio Day and that this Day be celebrated on 13 February, the day the United Nations established the whole concept of United Nations Radio;

10. Invites all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, professional associations and broadcasting unions, as well as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and individuals, to duly celebrate the World Radio Day, in the way that each considers most adequate;

11. Requests the Director-General, subject to the final resolution of the General Conference, to bring this resolution to the attention of the Secretary-General of the United Nations so that World Radio Day may be endorsed by the General Assembly.