



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Two hundred and first session

201 EX/37

PARIS, 18 April 2017
Original: French

Item 37 of the provisional agenda

WORLD HUMANITIES CONFERENCE: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR A PLANET IN TRANSITION

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 201st session of the Executive Board at the request of Mali with the support of Belgium, Brazil, China, Lebanon, Portugal and the Republic of Korea.

An explanatory note together with a proposed draft decision is attached.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 9.



EXPLANATORY NOTE

INTRODUCTION

1. Scientific understanding, knowledge and human solidarity continue to be fundamental to enabling humans to address challenges that are not only problems but also complex dilemmas requiring choices in the management of civic participation, peaceful coexistence and creativity, which enable everyone to imagine futures characterized by fairness and sustainability.
2. In this context, the humanities have a historic task. They must continue to be a bastion against xenophobia, intolerance and fundamentalisms. Their contributions must not be confined to books, but must be engaged in understanding history, in critical thinking and in nuanced analyses of the human ideas and values that they foster, in order to understand the growing complexity of our globalizing world, in accordance with the aims of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme.
3. Through critical reflection on the humanities disciplines – including languages and literature, philosophy and the arts – the role that they can and must play within contemporary societies should thus be defined and reformulated, particularly in the context of the current crisis, which is more societal, cultural and human than financial or economic. This role must take into account both the specificities and the resources of every culture – which must be valued and protected as such – as well as the possibilities of exchange, dialogue and mutual enrichment between these cultures, as defended by UNESCO through its different standard-setting instruments relating to cultural heritage and cultural diversity, and the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures.
4. From this perspective, the humanities, also called “human sciences”, pave the way for this education on the complexity and intercultural dimension that the world needs more than ever, with an approach founded on fruitful polycentrism, in contrast to the current more Euro-centric Western orientations. It is necessary to ensure the reestablishment of the humanities over time, in all continents, integrating the disciplines in an approach centred on the cultural and linguistic diversity of the world, in response to societal and governance challenges, including in the fields of education and health. The perspectives of the humanities will enrich the debates on local needs for medium- and long-term reasoning, thus facilitating the move away from rupture and fear towards convergence and foresight.
5. The response to all these challenges requires an open and in-depth debate. To that end, at the 35th session of the General Conference of UNESCO, in October 2009, the President of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (ICPHS) proposed the idea of a world conference on the humanities. The idea was endorsed by the ICPHS General Assembly held at Nagoya, Japan, in December 2010, and is now included in UNESCO's plan of activities.
6. The central purpose of the Conference is to discuss the role of the humanities in a twenty-first century characterized by cultural diversity, the failure of different forms of one-track thinking, and the need to reintroduce the medium- and long-term dimension into everyday reasoning. A century struck by global changes, growing migrations and social and economic tensions, the resolution of which depends largely on intercultural skills, understanding of the unity of humanity in its diversity and the need to strengthen the sciences in their transdisciplinary relationships, as well as with the arts and technologies.
7. The town of Liège in Belgium will host the World Humanities Conference from 6 to 12 August 2017. Co-organized by UNESCO and ICPHS, in partnership with the University, City and Province of Liège gathered together as a Foundation for this purpose, the Conference will be attended by some 1,800 participants from around the world working in both scientific and political fields, in creation and communication, and representatives from governmental and non-governmental international organizations.

8. In the lead up to the Conference, preparatory meetings on topics established by geographical region have taken place in Brazil, China and Portugal. Other preparatory meetings shall take place in Lebanon (May 2017), France (June 2017), Jamaica (June 2017) and Mali (June 2017). The World Humanities Conference also draws on the work of the 4th World Humanities Forum, held in the Republic of Korea in October 2016.

Proposed decision

9. The Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Affirming the importance of discussing the specific role of the humanities, in dialogue with the social sciences and the natural sciences, in a twenty-first century characterized by cultural diversity, the failure of different forms of one-track thinking, and the need to reintroduce the medium- and long-term dimension into everyday reasoning,
2. Recalling that the humanities have the historic task of working against xenophobia, intolerance and fundamentalism by enriching the understanding of the increasing complexity of our world,
3. Recognizing the necessity to promote spaces for intellectual and political exchanges on the role of the humanities in a world in transition in order to promote the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity,
4. Welcoming the initiative of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies, which spearheaded the World Humanities Conference, and its efforts to co-organize the Conference along with UNESCO,
5. Referring to the comprehensive strategy for the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme, approved in 199 EX/Decision 7, whose thematic priorities are reflected in the major themes of the World Humanities Conference,
6. Taking note of the Action Plan to implement the comprehensive strategy for the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme, as presented in document 201 EX/8, and in particular the role of the humanities therein,
7. Appreciating the commitment of Mali, the Republic of Korea, Brazil, China, Lebanon, Jamaica and Portugal to host regional preparatory meetings,
8. Expressing thanks also to the Kingdom of Belgium, and in particular to the University, City and Province of Liège, for hosting the World Humanities Conference and for the financial and institutional efforts made in connection with it,
9. Encourages Member States to lend their financial support to the organization of the World Humanities Conference, in the form of contributions to the Foundation for the World Humanities Conference or assistance to the travel and accommodation of their nationals participating in the Conference;
10. Requests the Director-General to take all measures deemed necessary to ensure the visibility and impact of the World Humanities Conference, in particular through the mobilization of UNESCO's various means of communication;
11. Also requests the Director-General to include in the agenda of the 39th session of the General Conference an item relating to the outcome of the World Humanities Conference, in order to ensure its thematic reflection in document 39 C/5;

12. Invites the Intergovernmental Council of the MOST Programme to take into account in the forthcoming revision of the Action Plan to implement the comprehensive strategy for the MOST Programme the outcome of the World Humanities Conference and the corresponding resolutions adopted by the General Conference at its 39th session, in order to ensure the contribution of the humanities to the understanding and management of social transformations.



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201 EX/37 Corr.

PARIS, 20 April 2017
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CORRIGENDUM

The summary should read as follows:

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