

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

INTRODUCTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

In keeping with the tradition of presenting a unique simulation of a United Nations body or affiliated organization, AMUN 2006 will simulate the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with an emphasis on educational themes. Participation will be voluntary and open to one Representative from each delegation attending AMUN. UNESCO will meet for all four days of the Conference. Before delving into the substantive issues, Representatives should understand why this agency is distinctive. In the tradition of AMUN special simulations, UNESCO will give participants a diverse, more challenging atmosphere in which to use their skills of diplomacy, research and analysis. The topics are detailed and will require careful preparation prior to the Conference. In order to fully participate in the simulation, it will be imperative that Representatives have a working knowledge of the structure and mission of UNESCO, the relevant policies of the Member State they represent, and an awareness of educational issues worldwide.

ABOUT UNESCO

UNESCO was established on 16 November 1945. It is a specialized UN agency responsible for promoting global collaboration through programs that promote education, science and culture. The five major programme areas addressed by UNESCO are education, natural sciences, social and humanitarian science, culture, and communication and information. UNESCO acts as a clearing house for information and assists Member States in developing human and institutional capacity. UNESCO reports to ECOSOC; it also coordinates with several other UN specialized agencies as well as many intergovernmental organizations outside the UN system. The General Conference meets every two years to determine the policies and the main lines of work of the organization.

THE SIMULATION

During the 2006 AMUN Conference, UNESCO will focus on two issues: Education in Situations of Emergency, Crisis, & Reconstruction; and Literacy. The Organization may create either reports or resolutions to cover these issues. UNESCO will present a final summary of their work, including reports and/or resolutions, to the Combined General Assembly Plenary session during the last session of the Conference. Note that each delegation may place one Representative on the UNESCO simulation. AMUN may make exceptions to this policy and allow a second Representative; this is typically allowed when a delegation has filled all other Committee/Council assignments.

PREPARATION

As a foundation for subsequent research, Representatives are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with the UNESCO Constitution, as well as the summaries and supporting documents for each topic on the UNESCO website. Careful review of the following topic overviews and bibliographies will provide some assistance in this regard. It should be noted, however, that the topic overviews should not serve as the terminal point for research efforts, but only as the beginning.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

EDUCATION IN SITUATIONS OF EMERGENCY, CRISIS, & RECONSTRUCTION

Since 1945, over 150 world conflicts have produced 20 million refugees and 30 million displaced persons; of these, at least 60% are children. Other emergencies such as natural and man-made disasters have also contributed significantly to the displacement of populations and the destruction of infrastructures. During crises, children are deprived of basic needs such as shelter, education, and family. Educational institutions are often partially or completely disrupted. Failing to provide children with proper education deprives them of necessary social and psychological development opportunities.

At the 1990 World Conference of Education For All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, the international community committed to achieving education for "every citizen in every society." The conference encouraged each country to assess progress towards the goals of the EFA Declaration. These assessments were presented ten years later at six regional conferences in 1999 and 2000. Following the assessments, the World Education Forum adopted the

Dakar Framework for Action. The Framework placed responsibility for EFA with each country and affirms that no country committed to achieving EFA will be prevented from executing its goals for lack of resources. The Framework further requested that states strengthen or develop plans so that they could achieve EFA goals and targets by 2015. Crises and emergencies were identified as specific impediments to achieving these aggressive goals, and therefore critical factors to consider in developing plans.

The Dakar Framework for Action identified UNESCO, the lead education agency, as the coordinator for all partners at international, national, and regional levels, including funding agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and civil society organizations. Sister agencies working with UNESCO include the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Children's Education Fund (UNICEF). UNESCO recognized the need for education in situations of emergency, crisis, and reconstruction and established an education theme in response. In addition, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) was formed, steered by UNESCO,



UNICEF, and UNHCR as well as three NGOs: the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), CARE, and Save the Children.

As part of the original EFA assessment, UNESCO published a thematic study on Education in Situations of Emergency and Crisis. The study recognized that the field is new, and that while it has not yet receiving the attention it needs, the assessment should help raise awareness of the issue. The study recommended that measures be taken as soon as possible to reintroduce education during emergency situations. It also noted that education is crucial to sustainable development and preventing continual cycles of conflict. UNESCO later published a document offering guidelines for strategic planning in crisis situations. Additionally, in 2003, UNESCO established a draft strategy for implementing UNESCO actions when intervening before and after situation of crisis and conflict.

UNESCO established several specific programs and projects to address education during crisis. The Programme for Education for Emergencies and Reconstruction (PEER) was created to coordinate and plan exercises within Somalia and the Great Lakes Region with the purpose of establishing curricula, rebuilding schools, and training teachers. The Teacher Emergency Package was introduced to provide teachers with basic teaching materials needed to instruct 80 students.

UNESCO and its associated agencies have raised several issues of concern relating to education in emergency situations. A recent study suggested that there is disconnect between the research and the implementation in the field. Women and minorities have also been identified as an at-risk population, as circumstances and discrimination may be preventing them from receiving proper attention and education. In addition, there is a continued need to ensure that emergency education is consistent and all activities are assessed and evaluated.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- How can developed countries aid developing countries in reaching education for all? What actions are developed countries willing to take?
- What are the special needs of children in emergencies, crises, and reconstruction? How do these affect appropriate methods of education?
- What materials and resources would be helpful in implementing the methods of instruction that UNESCO recommends? How can research be put into action?
- How can UNESCO help ensure equal access to education for women and minorities?

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Sommers, “Children, Education, and War: Reaching Education for All (EFA) Objectives in Countries Affected by Conflict,” *World Bank Working Paper*, June 2002.

Tomlinson, Kathryn and Pauline Benefield, “Education and Conflict: Research and Research Possibilities,” *National Foundation for Education Research*, January 2005.

Tavernise, Sabrina, et al., “The Struggle for Iraq: Education; Amid Iraq Chaos, Schools Fill After Long Decline,” *New York Times*, 26 June 2006.

UNESCO, “Thematic Studies on Education in Situations of Emergency and Crisis,” 2001.

“UNHCR, UNESCO to Sign MOU to Education Afghans in Pakistan,” *The Nation*, 17 May 2006.

Wallace, Wendy, “A Future Without Fear,” *Times Educational Supplement*, 26 May 2006.

World Bank, “Reshaping the Future: Education and Postconflict Reconstruction,” 2005.

UN Documents:

The Dakar Framework for Action

The World Declaration on Education For All

Additional Web Resources:

www.unesco.org/education - Primary site for all educational related themes of UNESCO

www.ineesite.org - Interagency Network on Education in Emergencies

www.unhcr.org - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

www.unicef.org/emerg - United Nation International Children’s Education Fund

www.care.org - CARE

www.savethechildren.net - Save the Children

LITERACY

In the context of the United Nations, literacy means a great deal more than the ability to read and write in one’s chosen or legal language. The United Nations considers global literacy to be essential. In past decades it has become clear that literacy is an important prerequisite to achieving many UN goals, including the eradication of poverty, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, and combating the spread of HIV/AIDS. Many believe that without literacy there can be no true progress toward the future.

The United Nations first became involved with literacy efforts in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1950, UNESCO began gathering statistics on global literacy, which showed that worldwide, nearly three out of five people were illiterate. At the 1964 General Conference of UNESCO, a declaration for the eradication of illiteracy was announced, and in 1966, September 8th was declared International Literacy Day. The hope at the time was that global literacy would be achieved by the year 2000. By the late 1980s, however, it was clear that if something didn’t change, the goal of complete literacy by 2000 would not be reached. To this end, and over the next several years, the GA made many efforts to address literacy. It declared 1990 as International Literacy Year, and an International Literacy Conference was held in Thailand on 5-9 March 1990.

The 1990 conference is considered by many to be the turning point in the fight for global literacy. Following the conference, significantly more attention was paid to the progress of global literacy efforts. By the turn of the century, global illiteracy rates had



been reduced to about one in every five people. Despite the tremendous progress, there are still nearly 800 million people who are illiterate; another 100 million children are not receiving primary education and thus will likely become illiterate adults. Over the past two decades, evidence has emerged indicating direct correlations between literacy and population control, development success, and other important goals, many of which are included in the Millennium Declaration. So while much progress has been made, global literacy remains an important goal of the United Nations.

The International Literacy Decade, established by the General Assembly in 2001, started in 2003 and will last until 2012. The decade's objective is to reduce illiteracy levels by 50% by 2015. UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment 2005-2015 (LIFE) is a global strategic framework for reaching the goals set out in the UN Literacy Decade. This framework has four main principles: 1) engage in advocacy and communication to create national and international momentum; 2) reinforce national capacities to develop appropriate policies and programs; 3) support countries in the delivery of programs; and 4) facilitate the sharing of information to improve policies and practice. A key part of LIFE is the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP), which aims to facilitate sound policy-making decisions by giving countries a more accurate assessment of literacy in their country. Working closely with participating countries, LAMP strives to not only tailor survey questions to reflect local socio-cultural and linguistic circumstances, but to strengthen local capacities to conduct their own policy analyses.

The United Nations Literacy Decade Progress Report for 2004-2005 identified several challenges facing the international community as it strives to reach the UNLD goals. These challenges include a strong need for a clearer sense of direction and purpose with a sustained program of intervention; committed political will, long-term financial resources and effective institutional infrastructure; and a sustained commitment in terms of human and financial resources. Countries will also need to consider gender inequality. Of the 800 million people in the world that are illiterate, nearly two thirds are women. Other issues include funding problems, updating curricula and making it culturally relevant, and promoting partnerships between governments and NGO's.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- What measures should be enacted to combat the disparity between the number of literate men and literate women?
- How can the world community reach and educate the large number of at risk children to prevent them from becoming illiterate adults?
- How can current efforts be made more accessible?
- What can the UN do to ensure literacy stays a major priority in the world?

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- "Illiteracy 'Hinders World's Poor,'" *BBC News*, 9 November 2005.
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UN Documents:

- The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments
- Declaration on the Eradication of Illiteracy in the United Nations Development Decade
- Declaration of Persepolis, 1975
- 172 EX/10 - United Nations Literacy Decade: Progress Report 2004-2005
- 31 C/4 – UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy 2002-2007
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics International Literacy Day 2005 Fact Sheet
- Literacy Initiative For Empowerment (LIFE) 2005-2015: Vision and Strategy Paper (2nd edition)
- A/C.3/52/L.II/Rev.1 / 29 October
- A/RES/56/116
- SG/SM/8353 OBV/286
- DSG/SM/187-OBV/323
- SG/SM/8606
- SG/SM/8849-OBV/368
- SG/SM/10065-OBV/504

Additional Web Resources:

- www.unesco.org/education/litdecade – United Nations Literacy Decade
- www.literacyonline.org/ili.html – International Literacy Institute
- www.ungei.org – United Nations Girls' Education Initiative

