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Informal Meeting during the spring session of the Executive Board: a Call for Action

UNESCO's Intellectual Vocation: A special role for National Commissions

Schedule of the 2010 Regional Conferences and DG Consultations on the Draft 36 C/5

Key steps in the preparation of the 36 C/5 Document

Euro-Arab Dialogue: a New Phase of Cooperation

Comparative Study of History Textbooks

National Commissions shared experiences in Lugano

Best Practice: Twining between African National Commissions

Highlight: Cooperation with a Category II Institute

National Commissions in support of Haiti

Planned Publications in 2010

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Editorial

The recent 184th session of the Executive Board was rich in debates. Member States gave us a clear guidance on how UNESCO should move ahead in the years to come and what priorities it should pursue in cooperation with its multiple partnerships. Most importantly, numerous speakers raised a key role of National Commissions in programme elaboration and delivery. While appreciating the new leadership's positive approach towards National Commissions, they also asked for concrete action in strengthening UNESCO's relations with this unique network in the UN system.



Mr Ahmed Sayyad,
ADG/ERC

The forthcoming regional consultations with National Commissions on the draft programme and budget for 2012-2013 (36 C/5) shall be crucial moments to prove once again the special value of National Commissions in the global process of programme formulation. The consultations will allow us to define regional priorities in order to better shape UNESCO's programmatic orientations. The Secretariat will take every measure, in close cooperation with host countries, to ensure that the consultations take place in the best possible conditions and result in solid outcomes. The presence of the Director-General during the consultations, for the first time, will certainly add a special lustre to these meetings.

These regional gatherings will be also the last consultations organized under my direct supervision. After 14 years of rewarding service, I will be leaving my post of Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Cooperation this summer. I should like thus to seize this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all and every National Commissions for their strong support and cooperation during my tenure at helm of the ERC Sector. It has been an immense pleasure and privilege for me to work *with* and *for* National Commissions. I am glad that we have achieved significant progress through our joint efforts in enhancing the role of National Commissions at the core of UNESCO's mission to promote international intellectual cooperation and moral solidarity.

Ahmed Sayyad
Assistant Director-General for
External Relations and Cooperation

An Informal Meeting during the Spring Session of the Executive Board: A Call for Action

An informal meeting of National Commissions was convened in Paris on 13 April 2010, on the margins of the 184th session of the Executive Board. The participants, representing over 40 National Commissions and the Secretariat, agreed that National Commissions should have a clear message of what services they can render to UNESCO in the current context of renewal and the elaboration of next biennial priorities.

The objective of the meeting, organized by the Section of National Commissions, was to inform the participants of latest developments and discuss future activities. Under chairmanship of Mr Walter Lerouge, President of the Flemish (Belgium) National Commission, brief presentations were made by the representatives of several National Commissions and the UNESCO Secretariat.

The participants noted that the unique role of National Commissions was widely highlighted in the deliberations of the Executive Board and appreciated the Director-General's position towards National Commissions. They suggested that National Commissions should take proactive measures and concrete action to keep this momentum high.

It was suggested that National Commissions should be consulted as part of the current External Evaluation of UNESCO and that the representatives of the Evaluation Team could attend the upcoming regional consultations on the Draft 36 C/5. During the consultations, National Commissions should collectively reflect on the new changes taking place

at UNESCO and formulate their clear responses and recommendations in this respect.

The meeting reiterated that the Secretariat should continue to provide support in their capacity-building and to involve National Commissions in the decentralization and "UN Delivering as One" reform processes.

After the meeting, the representatives of National Commissions were received by Mr Ahmed Sayyad, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Cooperation (ADG/ERC), on behalf of the Director-General. UNESCO's overall policy on National Commissions was at the centre of their discussions.

Mr Sayyad underscored the key role of National Commissions in assuring UNESCO's visibility in Member States and in coordinating multiple partnerships. He also thanked the donor countries, such as Bulgaria, Germany, Spain and the Republic of Korea for their generous support to promote North-South-South cooperation among National Commissions.

National Commissions should have a clear message of what services they can render to UNESCO in the current context of renewal



Participants of the meeting



Participants of the meeting



Participants with ADG/ERC

▶ Do you know that

Currently, 16 out of 58 members of the Executive Board are either Secretaries-General (Bangladesh, Latvia and Uzbekistan) or Chairpersons (Cuba, Belarus, Barbados, Burkina Faso, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Grenada, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Syria and Viet Nam) of National Commissions for UNESCO. In addition, numerous National Commissions Officials participate in their capacities as Alternates or Advisors.

The President of the 35th session of the General Conference, Mr Davidson Hepburn, is former Chair of the Bahamas National Commission for UNESCO and recently appointed as Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Bahamas to UNESCO.

UNESCO's Intellectual Vocation: A special role for National Commissions

National Commissions shall remain the main interface between Member States and UNESCO and their membership and activities shall involve leading intellectuals of every nation.

The Coordinating Group of National Commissions met for a one-day meeting to reflect on the contribution of National Commissions in enhancing UNESCO's intellectual role at the country and international levels. The meeting took place at UNESCO HQs on 29 January 2010.

Two specific questions were at the centre of their discussions, namely "How National Commissions can better contribute to enhancing UNESCO's intellectual role" and "How UNESCO can efficiently support National Commissions in this context". The meeting adopted a series of concrete recommendations, which were transmitted to the Director-General.

Nearly 30 participants, representing all regions of the world, affirmed that within the UN system, where the majority of agencies deal with operational and technical issues, UNESCO shall remain focused on its key functions as laboratory of ideas, standard setter and policy adviser.

They called upon UNESCO to harmonize and enhance its governance at various levels and suggested that more space and time is given for intellectual debates in the Governing Bodies' meetings. They said that UNESCO shall be "depoliticized" and increasingly attract academia and intellectuals to its activities.

It was also stated that National Commissions, as constituent elements of the Organization, shall remain the

main interface between Member States and UNESCO and their membership and activities shall involve leading intellectuals of every nation.

A review of the way of conducting Regional Consultations and Quadrennial Conferences of National Commissions was suggested, in order to explore the possibility of merging them into one meeting. An introduction of an interregional consultation in order to work out a common position of all National Commissions on the drafts C/4 and C/5 was also proposed.

The participants said that collaboration between National Commissions and Field Offices shall be improved, especially in the "UN Delivering as One" process in which National Commissions shall be closely involved in bringing additional intellectual dimension to the UN Country Team discussions, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by UNDP and UNESCO in October 2008.

The daily challenges facing National Commissions were discussed as well. The weak and inadequate positioning of National Commissions within government structures, difficulties in their communication with line Ministries, Permanent Delegations and the UNESCO Secretariat, as well as their limited human and financial resources were mentioned as main challenges. In this respect, Member States and UNESCO were called upon to assume their responsibilities towards National Commissions as outlined in their Charter of 1978.

The meeting was opened by Mr Ahmed Sayyad, Assistant Director General for External Relations and Cooperation. Mr Hans D'Orville, Assistant Director-General for Strategic Planning, who also addressed the participants, outlined major challenges for UNESCO in asserting its position within the UN system.



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Participants of the meeting



Key steps in the preparation of the 36 C/5 Document

Oct 2009	35th Session of the General Conference	The exchange of views and discussions on broad policy guidelines for the 36 C/5 document.
April 2010	184th Session of the Executive Board	The Director-General reports to the Board about the preparations for the C/5 process.
May-July 2010	Regional consultations of the Director-General with National Commissions	Conduct of 5 regional consultations with National Commission; in ARB and AFR, the consultations are combined with the regional conferences.
12 July 2010	Deadline for submission of written replies by governments, IGOs and NGOs to questionnaire	National Commissions play a key role at the national level in consulting with all relevant stakeholders involved on the basis of the Questionnaire prepared by the Secretariat.
August 2010	Preliminary proposals for the 36 C/5 by Director-General	The Director-General prepares a document containing his preliminary proposals for the C/5 document, bearing in mind the outcome of the regional consultations as well as the written replies received (last biennium of the 34 C/4 cycle).
Oct 2010	185th Session of the Executive Board	The Executive Board considers the preparations for document 36 C/5 and adopts a decision providing framework, policy and programming direction to the Director-General.
Oct-Nov 2010	Publication of Director-General's ivory note	Gives instructions to the Secretariat for the preparation of the draft 36 C/5, including budget envelope.
March 2011	Dispatch of the draft 36 C/5 document	Statutory deadline for submission of the draft 36 C/5 document to Member States.
April 2011	186th Session of the Executive Board	Consideration of the draft C/5 document by the Executive Board (Plenary, PX and FA Commissions and Drafting Group). The Board adopts a decision (C/6) containing its observations and recommendations on the draft 36 C/5.
Oct 2011	36th Session of the General Conference	The General Conference considers the draft 36 C/5 document in light of 36 C/6 and the amendments submitted by Member States and approves it.

Schedule of the 2010 Regional Conferences and DG Consultations on the Draft 36 C/5

The Director-General's Regional Consultations with National Commissions on the draft Programme and Budget for 2012-2013 (36 C/5) and relevant Regional Conferences of National Commissions for UNESCO are scheduled in the following order:

Arab States

21st Regional Conference of National Commissions in Arab States and Director General's Consultation on the Preparation of the Draft 36 C/5
10-13 May 2010, Rabat, Morocco

Asia and the Pacific

Director General's Consultation on the Preparation of the Draft 36 C/5
21-24 May 2010, Changwon, Republic of Korea

Europe and North America

Director General's Consultation on the Preparation of the Draft 36 C/5
5-8 June 2010, London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Island

Africa

12th Regional Conference of National Commissions in Africa and Director General's Consultation on the Preparation of the Draft 36 C/5
15-18 June 2010, Kampala, Uganda

Latin America and the Caribbean

Director General's Consultation on the Preparation of the Draft 36 C/5
5-7 July 2010, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Further information on the Consultations, including Draft Programmes and the Questionnaire, can be consulted at: www.unesco.org/en/national-commissions.

Do you know that

Although held in the past on an ad hoc basis, the Regional Consultations with National Commissions on draft C/4 and C/5 were first introduced and institutionalized in 1997 through Resolution 29 C/Res 87, as part of recommendations made by the Krogh Committee on the structure and function of the General Conference. Mr Torben Krogh (Denmark) was President of the 28th session of the General Conference (1995-1997), and later, Chair of the Danish National Commission for UNESCO (1999-2007).



Task Force meeting participants with Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General

Euro-Arab Dialogue: a New Phase of Cooperation

The Task Force of National Commissions for the Euro-Arab Dialogue met in Paris on 27-28 January 2010. The meeting was inaugurated by Mrs Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, who said that new ways to promote mutual understanding, respect and tolerance between peoples and cultures must be envisaged.

The Director-General assured the Organization's full support to the Euro-Arab Dialogue initiative, affirming that National Commissions are in a privileged position to relay UNESCO's ideals and messages, to launch initiatives that bring cultures and people closer together.

The Task Force, made of 18 National Commissions equally representing both regions, deliberated over two days to assess the progress achieved since the launch of the Euro-Arab Dialogue project a decade ago and to define its plan of action for the years to come, in view to revitalizing this important initiative.

The Task Force meeting, under the chairpersonship of Ms Salwa Saniora Baasiri (Lebanon), adopted four projects for joint action and called all parties concerned to participate in their implementation.

The Director-General assured the Organization's full support to the Euro-Arab Dialogue initiative

The projects concern the comparative study of history textbooks, the production of the educational toolkit on Identity, the encouragement of twinning among ASP Schools, UNESCO Clubs and Chairs, and the engagement of university students and teachers in the Euro-Arab Dialogue project.

It was agreed that the activities within the Euro-Arab Dialogue project should also contribute to the celebration of the International Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010.

Several Permanent Delegations to UNESCO and the representatives of the partner organizations, such as ALECSO, ISESCO, the Council of Europe, MBI Al Jaber Fondation and the UNESCO Catalonia Centre, contributed to the discussions and pledged their support.

The Euro-Arab Dialogue project was launched in 2001 in Geneva during the IBE Conference as a framework for interregional cooperation among National Commissions to promote the values of "learning to live together," as outlined in the Delor Report on Education for the 21st century.

A two-day meeting of National Commissions on the Comparative Study of History Textbooks took place at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, on 30-31 March 2010. Organized at the joint initiative of the French and Moroccan National Commissions, the meeting was held within the framework of the Euro-Arab Dialogue project. The meeting was informative and enabled to assess the progress achieved since the launch of the comparative studies in 2005. The meeting recommended that all currently on-going studies should be finalized quickly and the results of these studies should be published to make them accessible to the public at large. While underlying the importance of using a common methodology in writing history textbooks, the participants stressed the need to involve closely UNESCO and its International Bureau for Education in that process.

National Commissions shared experiences in Lugano

Successfully-conducted activities with good impact are essential for assuring enhanced visibility for UNESCO

For the fourth time, the Swiss National Commission for UNESCO organized an informal meeting of National Commissions in Lugano, Switzerland, from 3 to 5 March 2010. This year's meeting (known as Lugano IV) took place under the theme "National Commissions for UNESCO: Strengthening our Relations Considering the International Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures".

The participants, representing 15 European National Commissions as well as the Secretariat, affirmed that National Commissions remain key players in making UNESCO's objectives known at the country level. National Commissions should be leading "stone-cutters" for building UNESCO temples of peace across the societies. They should therefore demonstrate the spirit of initiative and creativeness in addressing challenges of their daily work.

The discussions focused on how to improve the role and status of National Commissions and how to enhance UNESCO's profile in Europe. Although the European National Commissions are well organized and active, they nevertheless share common challenges and constraints relating to visibility, legal positioning, resources, funding and outreach to intellectual communities and youth.

The participants agreed that successfully-conducted activities with good impact are essential for assuring enhanced visibility for UNESCO. It was said that in order to increase the impact, National Commissions should focus on fewer well-defined projects instead of stretching their limited resources over numerous small-scale activities.

A thought-provoking debate was held on ways and means for closer cooperation between the UNESCO Secretariat and National Commissions in the celebration of the 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (IYRC). The participants shared best practices on major events and activities conducive for intercultural dialogue and discussed optimal modalities for celebrating the IYRC in the national context.

A special focus was made on the organizational aspects of the Director-General's regional consultation on the Draft Programme and Budget for 2012-2013 (36 C/5) to be held in London on 5-8 June 2010. The participants insisted that the outcomes of regional consultations shall have a tangible impact and influence on UNESCO's future programme orientations and the Secretariat's work plans.



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Participants of Lugano IV

The year 2010 is celebrated as the **International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (IYRC)**. UNESCO has been designated by the UN General Assembly as lead agency for the Year. In her letter addressed to Members States (CL/3911 of 7 January 2010), the Director-General welcomed the large number of practical actions that have already been planned by Member States and called upon, among others, National Commissions for UNESCO to participate actively in this Year. She also asked to give high visibility to the activities that will be carried out as part of the celebration of this Year so as to ensure the greatest possible impact at the local, national and regional levels.

At its 61st session, the UN General Assembly, in Resolution 61/203, declared 2010 as the **International Year of Biodiversity (IYB)**. The General Assembly designated the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as the focal point for the Year and invited other relevant UN bodies, international organizations and other stakeholders to cooperate together in the celebration of the Year. UNESCO joined CBD to make the IYB an effective instrument to advance the cause of biodiversity conservation. During the Year, UNESCO is leading, with the participation of National Commissions, several activities which aim to educate and to raise public awareness on the reasons for conserving biodiversity and to catalyze further international action for its sustainable use.

A Highlight: Cooperation with a Category II Centre

The Iranian National Commission enjoys solid relations of cooperation with UNESCO Category II Institutes and Centres located in the country. One of them is the Regional Center for Science Park and Technology Incubator Development, which was approved by the 35th session of the General Conference in October 2009. Hosted at the Isfahan Science and Technology Town (ISTT), the Centre contributes to capacity building and the dissemination of best practices in the sub-region.



Nagsh - e - Jahan. Aerial view of Mosque.
Isfahan, Iran (Islamic Republic of).

The Science Committee of the Iranian National Commission has already entered into operational cooperation with the Centre. As a good example of such partnership, they are jointly organizing the 6th National Sheikh Bahai Technopreneurship Festival on 13-15 May 2010 in Isfahan, a city known throughout the world for its exceptional historical and cultural heritage.

The objective of this annually-held Festival is to foster the culture of creativity, innovation and "technopreneurship." It is expected that the Festival will be attended by decision makers, government officials, "technopreneurs", academia and the representatives of the civil society. The Festival should serve as a suitable platform for sharing ideas and scientific knowledge for "technopreneurship" development.

A Best Practice: Twinning among two African National Commissions



The Senegal NatCom delegation in Banjul

Through this innovative approach, both Commissions have committed to work together

In recent years, National Commissions talk increasingly about twinning as a suitable and efficient form of cooperation. The Senegalese and Gambian National Commissions turned recently this objective into reality by concluding an agreement on twinning. The document was signed by the Secretaries-General of the respective National Commissions in Dakar last December, defining areas of their joint action and modalities of cooperation for the period of 2010-2011.

Through this innovative approach, both Commissions have committed to work together in education, sciences, culture and communication. The joint projects include the organization of conferences, workshops and ASP summer schools, the publication of documents and reports, the submission of candidatures for the Memory of the World Programme, etc. Under the agreement, Senegal will also help in the maintenance of the Gambian National Commission's website.

To finance their common activities, the Commissions will elaborate an appropriate programme and budget, which will be submitted to their governments as well as to UNESCO, ISESCO and other donors for financial support. The implementation of the projects will also require that officials travel between the two countries. Under the agreement, the delegating Commission will pay for international travels of its representatives while the hosting Commission will assume local hospitality by offering accommodation and boarding to the visitors.

Within the framework of the twinning agreement, the delegation of the Senegalese National Commission, led by its Secretary-General, Moustapha Tambadou, paid a working visit to Banjul, Gambia, on 3-5 February 2010. On that occasion, both parties discussed and agreed upon on the terms of reference of selected activities and modalities of their implementation.

National Commissions in support of Haiti

As part of UNESCO's response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti last January, the Director-General sent a circular letter to all National Commissions on 28 January 2010, appealing them to help mobilize funds for UNESCO's relief efforts in support of the affected people. The Director-General welcomed any financial and in-kind contributions, underlying that National Commissions are best placed to mobilize funds at national levels.

Several National Commissions, especially from LAC, AFR and APA regions, have reacted immediately to the appeal, by submitting Participation Programme requests in support of Haiti, launching in-country appeals, undertaking fund-raising activities, and making donations. This exceptional demonstration of interregional solidarity is encouraging and it must continue as Haiti's reconstruction needs are still enormous.

New publications to be published in 2010 by the Section of National Commissions

National Commissions for UNESCO as Coordinators of multiple partnerships at the country level: a Compendium of Best Practices and Success Stories. The brochure will highlight the National Commissions' role with regard to UNESCO's traditional and new partners. The National Commissions are the pivotal point of all mechanisms involving collaboration with partners outside the Organization, be they governmental, administrative, or belonging to the various spheres of civil society. The examples of 'best practices' or 'success stories' in the brochure will illustrate how National Commissions are putting into constant practice their partnership with different categories of partners in order to further UNESCO's missions. The brochure is expected to be published in the second half of 2010.

Toolkit for National Commissions on Public Information. The National Commissions are an essential part of UNESCO awareness action within Member States and are an important platform for the exchange of ideas. As a follow up to the two workshops of National Commissions held in Vienna and Yaoundé in 2009, the Section of National Commissions and the Bureau of Public Information are jointly developing a Public Information Toolkit, specifically designed for the National Commissions. The toolkit will include policy guidelines, practical advice, factual information and best practices to facilitate National Commissions' public information role. The toolkit is expected to be finalized by the end of 2010.

National Commissions are on the front page of UNESCO Website

UNESCO Internet Website (www.unesco.org) is where the Secretariat publishes key information addressed to its many target audiences. After a comprehensive review in 2009, UNESCO has launched a new user interface for its website, updating its graphic design, layout and navigation system. National Commissions have been given a prominent position in the new interface. Taking into account that they constitute a global network, National Commissions are placed under "Worldwide" Section. This highly visible positioning of National Commissions in top level portions of the new layout is a recognition of their unique role within UNESCO!