

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF NATIONAL COMMISSIONS FOR UNESCO ATTENDING THE 201st SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

The traditional morning meeting of the National Commission for UNESCO took place on Thursday 27 and Friday 28 April 2017, in the margins of the 201st session of the Executive Board. Over 106 participants, representing 68 National Commissions/Permanent Delegations, attended the meeting.

The meeting was chaired by Mr Carlton Mukwevho, Secretary-General of the National Commission of South Africa. He emphasized the great pleasure to have the opportunity to chair the two-day meeting as a member from an African country.

After the opening remarks, the meeting focused on five topics: 10th UNESCO Youth Forum, Youth Committee of the Italian Commission for UNESCO, #United4Heritage campaign, UNESCO's Priority Africa and UNESCO Fellowship Programmes.

Opening remarks

When introducing the meeting, Mr Eric Falt, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Public Information (ADG/ERI), recalled that the upcoming 39th session of the General Conference will adopt the new UNESCO Programme and Budget for 2018-2021 (39 C/5), and elect the Organization's new Director-General, constituting an important turning point for the life of the Organisation. In this regard, it was proposed that the 4th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions take place on Friday 27 October just before the start of the General Conference on Monday 30 October. A consultation for items to be included in the October agenda will be circulated in the close future and an interaction session with representatives of UNESCO Field Offices will be organized, as in the past meeting.

Recalling that the Executive Board will examine at this session item 5 II: *Progress Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan for Enhancing the Cooperation of the UNESCO Secretariat with National Commissions for UNESCO*, he underlined that, even if this progress report is far from being fully representative of all National Commissions' assessment, the Action Plan continues to generate positive changes in a great number of countries, not only in their cooperative relationship with the Secretariat, but also in the closer relationship among them.

Concerning the 4th edition of the Annual Report of National Commissions for UNESCO, to which 123 National Commissions contributed this year, he stated that the report increases the visibility of the actions of National Commissions and bears witness to their willingness to share with the public and amongst themselves, the achievements and challenges encountered during the year. He mentioned, however, that it is available only online at UNESCO.int website. He regretted that the current budgetary situation did not allow the Secretariat to prepare this year's Annual Report in a similar way as in the past three years, notably a printed edition.

Finally, he informed the National Commissions that the Secretariat has the intention to present to the 39th session of the General Conference a series of new measures and a draft resolution aimed at clarifying and codifying once and for all the legal framework of the cooperation among the National Commissions, the Clubs for UNESCO and the World Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations (WFUCA).

It will be a text clearly defining the roles of the National Commissions, as well as those of the national, regional and world federations of Clubs, with the aim of having a new comprehensive

guideline of cooperation approved by the governing bodies of UNESCO this year. In this regard, he asked the support of Member States to ensure the approval of these measures.

Noting that it is encouraging to take stock of all wonderful works done by the non-governmental movement of Clubs for UNESCO over the last 70 years, UNESCO has considerable expectations and seeks to ensure that the highest possible standards are met in terms of oversight, alignment with UNESCO's priorities, and responsibility in using the Organization's name and logo. He recalled that several texts were adopted in the past regarding the roles of the National Commissions vis-à-vis UNESCO Clubs. However, the existing texts are not sufficient to clearly define the roles of the National Commissions. In this regard, the Secretariat counts on WFUCA's leadership to rethink many of its mechanisms and to suggest a clearer way forward for the Clubs movement in the future, noting that its next meeting will take place in May 2017 at UNESCO Headquarters, with the financial support of the Chendu Culture and Tourism Development Group L.L.C. and the Chinese National Commission.

10th UNESCO Youth Forum

The Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences (ADG/SHS), Ms Nada Al-Nashif, introduced this item. Her presentation focused on rethinking youth engagement at UNESCO. She thanked the National Commissions for their efforts in promoting youth engagement, highlighting that it was essential to foster such involvement from the local to the global level. She also stressed the importance of engaging with young women and men to scale up their actions and replicate best practices in other regions. As such, she highlighted that the 10th UNESCO Youth Forum, which is scheduled to take place on 25 and 26 October 2017, attempts to further the Organization's vision of youth engagement: engaging with youth to scale-up their actions; and engaging with youth to co-design and co-deliver UNESCO's action.

A number of successful events and fora which have been organized on these themes were recalled, *inter alia*: the "Mawaïd – Rendez-vous for the Euro-Arab Dialogue", held at UNESCO Headquarters in December 2016; the Asia-Pacific Youth Dialogue, held in China in September 2016; the regional conference on *Cultural heritage and identity: an Arab youth perspective* held in Tunisia in March 2017; the innovative youth initiative in Latin America *Comprometidos*, supported by Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay; as well as several initiatives held in Colombia in consolidation of the peace process. It was also mentioned that the second international *Conference on Youth Volunteering and Dialogue* will be held, supported by Saudi Arabia, at UNESCO Headquarters in September 2017, and that the first Man and the Biosphere Youth Forum will take place in Italy in September 2017. .

It was also noted that despite all efforts, young people remain the beneficiaries of the Organization's efforts but not the actors and initiators of actions. In this regard, it was emphasized that the UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth (2014-2021) underlines the need to engage with more diverse youth, particularly vulnerable youth and there is a great need for a more integrated approach across all areas of specialization, in cooperation with the Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP), Internal Oversight Service (IOS), Programme Sectors and Category 1 Institutes and Centres.

In addition, an assessment of the Youth Forum has been undertaken, with the feedback provided by the participants, as well as the comments provided by 17 National Commissions from Europe. Some challenges that face the Forum are: recommendations are rarely taken onboard; the follow-up commitments by youth attendees are very weak; and participants are generally selected from among the most privileged youth. Furthermore, the timing of the Forum appears to be subject to criticism, raising the question of whether holding the Forum between the Executive Board and the General Conference is the most efficient solution. In addition, the

question of how to best present the results of the Forum to the General Conference also needs to be examined.

In this regard, she emphasized that the 10th Youth Forum provides the occasion for dynamic transition, as well as an opportunity to enhance proactive engagement, serving as a springboard for the development of long-term and meaningful engagement with youth. She highlighted that it was essential to enhance the focus on concrete practical engagement rather than political declarations and to engage with more diverse youth, particularly vulnerable youth. In addition, she stressed that this year's Youth Forum could serve as a tool to establish a more effective interaction with young change-makers and youth on the frontlines of the issues addressed by UNESCO's mandate.

Finally, it was recalled that "Youth-led action enabled, from local to global, to address societal challenges and consolidate peace" is an expected result included in the UNESCO Draft Programme and Budget for 2018-2021 (39 C/5), and it was highlighted the need to enhance work at the grassroots for establishing the foundations for lasting peace and to strengthen efforts for "leaving no one behind", as it is mandated by the Agenda 2030.

In the ensuing debate, a few concerns were raised to the new format of the 10th Youth Forum.

Some Member States raised the question about the selection process of participants of the Youth Forum and how National Commissions will be involved in this selection. Additional information was requested on how diversity could be ensured in the selection process of candidates and on how to efficiently address the problems related to the fact that participants of the Forum were mostly selected from privileged backgrounds.

One Member State inquired about the themes tackled in the 10th Youth Forum and whether it could be expected to reach a concrete outcome on a topic of central relevance today, which is the issue of youth radicalization. Another question was raised on whether an actual assessment of the difficulties related to the Youth Forum has been made, stating that all reform required time.

Some Member States suggested that if the time between the General Conference and the Youth Forum would be longer, National Commissions would have more time to incorporate the recommendations of the Forum.

One Member State recalled the successful Annual Meeting of the European Network of National Commissions for UNESCO, in Thessaloniki (Greece) (3-5 April 2017), which provided a useful opportunity to share experience and best practices. It was also recalled that, prior to the 41st session of the World Heritage Committee to be held in Krakow, Poland, from 2 to 12 July 2017, the Polish National Commission for UNESCO and the Intercultural Center in Krakow will hold the World Heritage Young Professionals Forum 2017 entitled "Memory: Lost and Recovered Heritage" from 25 June to 4 July 2017.

Another Member State stated that the Forum provided a good opportunity to exchange actions and initiatives. The representative emphasized the great importance his country places on the enhancement of youth engagement, informing that her country encourages positive exchanges between young people and policy makers and that the National Commission had organized, as part of its efforts, United Nations model games at the country's universities. Another Member State seized the opportunity to also share its experience in organizing a United Nations simulation game with the participation of Estonia, Latvia and Ukraine, which has been a very good practice to engage youth.

One Member State recalled that youth is at the core of UNESCO's mandate and suggested creating a special section on the websites of National Commissions, as well as in the Annual Report on how the respective National Commission engages with youth.

In her reply, ADG/SHS regretted to note that the changes in the selection process of candidates for the Youth Forum were perceived as less transparent and open. She highlighted that UNESCO will ensure that the highest standards are met and that the selection will occur based on merit and objective criteria. She also stated that the process will be based on consultations, starting in June, and that the Organization will of course keep the National Commissions informed on the details of the selection of candidates.

In addition, she emphasized that having one big theme for the Youth Forum would be rather limiting and frustrating for the participants. As such, she stressed that having a broader range of subjects treated will provide a better opportunity to stimulate discussion as well as a chance for the young people to express their thoughts on a number of subjects.

Moreover, she emphasized that after 20 years of existence, the Youth Forum was clearly outdated. She stressed that the changes to the format that had been undertaken for its 10th edition were based on a series of assessments and also underscored the need to have young women and men from different disciplines take part in the Youth Forum.

In conclusion, she reassured the participants of the meeting, that the changes related to the selection process of candidates of the Youth Forum will not imply a loss of transparency. She acknowledged that it is a challenge to move away from the well-known, but that these reforms are clearly needed to enhance efficiency. She emphasized that the suggested reforms are the result of a careful assessment process for which National Commissions have asked.

Furthermore, she highlighted that it had been the National Commissions who had signaled several important difficulties and problems related to the Forum's old format. She also agreed with the comments made on the importance of finding the right timing for the Forum, stating that this issue had to be addressed as part of future reforms. In addition, she suggested that it would be certainly useful to reflect on how to give the presentation of the Forum's outcomes greater visibility and room at the General Conference.

Youth movement in Italy

In his Presentation, Mr Paolo Petrocelli, President of the Youth Committee of the Italian National Commission for UNESCO, shared his personal story, which started in 2011 when he attended the UNESCO Youth Forum. He emphasized how encouraged he was after this experience and highlighted the great hope and energy he had upon his return to his country. It was at this moment that the idea of launching a Youth Committee supporting the work of the National Commission emerged.

The creation of this nonprofit organization started in 2015 with the launch of a national call, which sought to bring together young professionals, including scholars, students, researchers, artists, managers and professors, to share expertise, experience and skills. Nowadays, the Youth Committee consists of over 300 members. From the very beginning, it was clear that this initiative would be a very useful project to assist the Italian National Commission for UNESCO, as well as other governmental institutions of the country in their work.

In the last two years, the Youth Committee has organized more than 200 events in Italy and it is today represented in all regions of the country, with the aim to reduce the distance between UNESCO and the young generation. One of its biggest events was organized jointly with the Ministry of Education, providing the opportunity to meet with thousands of high school to talk about the role of UNESCO. Furthermore, the Youth Committee organized a series of events,

in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, which aimed at raising awareness of arts, culture and heritage, as “Box 336 am” after the earthquake in 2016 in Italy, as well as others related to the #United4Heritage campaign, with success.

Finally, he expressed the willing to share best practices with National Commissions for UNESCO to potentially export this model and replicate it in other countries.

The ADG/ERI took the opportunity to underscore the uniqueness of this project, highlighting that today there is a great need to reinvent and create models. He expressed hope that this movement, which involves a considerable number of young people, might inspire some participants of the meeting to initiate similar projects in their countries.

In general, Member States welcomed this innovate partnership and one Member State highlighted the active engagement of its youth advisory groups.

In his response concerning the criteria of selection of youth who join the movement, the President of the Youth Committee said that 20-35 year-olds professionals, from areas of expertise related to the United Nations’ and UNESCO’s fields of competence, were particularly welcomed. In addition, he emphasized that the Youth Committee sought to ensure a regional balance in the selection of its candidates.

Regarding the query on the financial resources of the association, he informed that the Youth Committee does not receive contributions from the Italian National Commission; the Committee has its own fund raising group, which tackles national and local institutions to obtain financial resources. In addition, each individual member contributes with an annual fee.

He also recalled that at the beginning of its conception, the Youth Committee of the Italian National Commission for UNESCO had been inspired by the youth movement in Canada.

#United4Heritage campaign

This topic was presented by Mr Vincent Defourny, Director of the Division of Public Information, Sector for External Relations and Public Information (DIR/ERI/DPI). He recalled that the campaign was launched in 2015 by the Director-General of UNESCO at the University of Baghdad, in response to the unprecedented attacks on heritage in the country. The initiation of the campaign was a rather spontaneous initiative, having emerged from the persuasion that there clearly was a need to react. As such, the movement calls on everybody to stand up against intolerance and sectarianism by celebrating the places, objects and cultural traditions that make the world such a rich and vibrant place.

The project rapidly gained some speed in social media and allowed to develop some additional elements, including the official website¹ specifically dedicated to the campaign. The #Unite4Heritage campaign invites people to get involved by retweeting and sharing on Facebook, but it is also an opportunity for National Commissions to translate the message of the campaign into the local and national context. He suggested that #Unite4Heritage could be used by National Commissions to promote UNESCO’s Cultural Conventions and Programmes, as well as its fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

He emphasized that the campaign is a simple but a powerful way to promote UNESCO’s message and to raise awareness on the importance of heritage for the present and the future. He therefore encouraged the National Commissions to make use of the visual documents, all free, at their disposal in the website in the six official languages.

¹ www.unite4heritage.org

He also informed that the campaign's website contained specific information on how to become a partner of #Unite4Heritage campaign. He emphasized that the entire Sector for External Relations and Public Information remains at the disposal of the National Commissions to provide them with the tools to communicate this important issue.

One Member State took the floor to commend the Organization for the #Unite4Heritage campaign and to state that, as a State Party of the World Heritage Convention and as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, condemns the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage, as well as the illicit trafficking of cultural property, acknowledging the important role in this matter of Interpol and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

On the query on whether documental heritage could be included in the framework of the campaign to ensure a comprehensive approach to heritage, it was suggested to first focus the campaign on tangible and intangible cultural heritage and natural heritage, and then to maybe expand little by little.

UNESCO's Priority Africa

M. Firmin Édouard Matoko, Sous-Directeur général pour l'Afrique, a commencé sa présentation en rappelant que l'UNESCO a une longue tradition de coopération avec l'Afrique et a toujours placé cette coopération au centre de ses priorités.

La stratégie opérationnelle pour la Priorité Afrique de l'UNESCO est une réponse aux enjeux et défis actuels du développement de l'Afrique : la croissance démographique ; le développement durable et la croissance économique ; les transformations sociales et la gouvernance démocratique.

L'action de l'UNESCO est concentrée sur la construction de la paix par l'édification de sociétés inclusives, pacifiques et résilientes, ainsi que sur le renforcement des capacités institutionnelles pour le développement durable et l'éradication de la pauvreté.

Les programmes phares de la stratégie opérationnelle prennent en compte les priorités du continent et les grands objectifs définis pour la période à moyen-terme 2014-2021 : (i) Promouvoir une culture de la paix et de la non-violence ; (ii) Consolider les systèmes d'éducation en vue du développement durable en Afrique : améliorer l'équité, la qualité et la pertinence ; (iii) Mobiliser la STI et les connaissances au service du développement socio-économique durable de l'Afrique ; (iv) Favoriser la science pour une gestion durable des ressources naturelles de l'Afrique et la réduction des risques de catastrophe ; (v) Mettre le pouvoir de la culture au service du développement durable et de la paix dans un contexte d'intégration régionale ; et (vi) Promouvoir un environnement propice à la liberté d'expression et au développement des médias.

La stratégie opérationnelle de l'UNESCO pour l'Afrique est en alignement avec les Objectifs de Développement Durable de l'Agenda 2030 ainsi que les Objectifs définis par l'Union Africaine dans l'Agenda 2063. Par ailleurs, le projet de Programme et Budget pour 2018 - 2021 (39 C/5) identifie les domaines de priorité de l'Organisation. En éducation : l'alphabétisation ; les enseignants ; l'enseignement et formation techniques et professionnels (TVeT) ; et les politiques sectorielles et planification. En sciences exactes et naturelles : le soutien aux cadres et politiques de STI, en particulier à travers l'Observatoire global des instruments politiques de la science, de la technologie et de l'innovation (GO-SPIN) ; l'éducation à la science, la technologie, l'ingénierie et les mathématiques (STEM), en particulier pour les filles ; la gestion durable des ressources naturelles, notamment à travers le programme l'Homme et la Biosphère (MAB) et le Programme hydrologique international

(PHI) ; l'établissement de Géoparcs mondiaux en Afrique ; et la résilience au changement climatique, aux risques et catastrophes naturels, y compris les questions liées à l'eau. En Sciences sociales et humaines : le processus pour la paix et la réconciliation nationales au Mali ; et l'histoire générale de l'Afrique. En Culture, le soutien aux pays africains pour le renforcement des cadres institutionnels et juridiques dans le domaine du patrimoine culturel et naturel et des industries créatives, à travers les conventions. En Communication et Information : la liberté d'expression et l'accès à l'information ; l'éducation et savoirs ; la formation des journalistes ; et l'éducation aux médias et à l'information

Il a été également souligné l'importance du réseau des bureaux hors siège de l'UNESCO en Afrique, avec cinq bureaux régionaux multisectoriels ainsi que 11 autres bureaux nationaux.

In the ensuing debate, African Member States thanked UNESCO for a long history of cooperation with Africa and for always placed this cooperation as a core priority. They also suggested that the Priority Africa topics be adapted to the current challenges, called for the South-South cooperation and asked for regional initiatives to involve Africa as a group.

One Member State being a post-conflict country thanked UNESCO for the continuously benefits from UNESCO's programmes. However, the representative stated that his country mostly faces issues in the culture of peace, even though a specific school has been created to address this problem. It was underscored that the country also suffers from violent children, not only in schools but also on the streets. In this regard, it was suggested that the Priority Africa topics should be adapted as time changes.

One Member State asked for information on the partnership existing among African National Commissions and other regions' National Commissions.

Some Member took the floor to thank Turkey for the organization of a recent regional meeting with African National Commissions for UNESCO on cultural issues, the *Round Table Meeting for Experience Sharing between Africa and Turkey: Natural, Cultural and Intangible Heritage*, held in Antalya, Turkey, on 21-22 April 2017 with the participation of 37 African Member States. It was underscored that Turkey decided to arrange this kind of meeting every year. The main objective is to discuss on the UNESCO Cultural Conventions and share Turkish experience in this area.

One Member State highlighted the importance of the South-South cooperation. In this regard, it was stressed the importance of education and proposed to share expertise regarding literacy campaigns.

One Member State underlined the important cooperation of his country with African National Commissions. It was highlighted the involvement of youth and the promotion of young entrepreneurship taking place by the African National Commissions. It was also mentioned that a capacity-building seminar for Africa will be held in June 2017 sponsored by his country.

One Member State offered expertise and knowledge on national development and education to the African countries. Teachers of secondary schools and learning centers, and college scholarships to young Africans are some of the proposals. It was also suggested a leadership training programme in African countries, notably for the leaders of the country and the community, with a particular focus on women leadership.

In his response, the ADG/AFR highlighted the importance of the support of the National Commissions of Germany, Republic of Korea and Turkey, to the less advanced African National Commissions. He also mentioned that capacity building programmes for African National Commissions are part of the current plans and looking into pushing the collaboration between the UNESCO Offices in African is also in the current agenda.

In response to the enquiry about the percentage of the extrabudgetary resources allowed to Africa, he informed that more than 50% of these kind of resources are allocated to the UNESCO Field Offices for implementation. He stated that UNESCO collaborates closely with National Commissions and tries to include them in meetings that take place in Africa as much as possible. Concerning the issue of the General History of Africa, he thanked Cuba and Brazil for their definitive support.

In conclusion, he emphasized that the Africa Department remains at the disposal of the National Commissions to dialogue with all National Commissions on this important issue.

Announcement by ADG/ERI

The ADG/ERI took also this opportunity to inform the National Commissions of the launching of the renewed Courier of UNESCO as well as the forthcoming major events such as the International Jazz Day in Havana, Cuba on 30 April, and the World Press Freedom Day in Jakarta, Indonesia on 3 May.

As regards the new measures to clarify the legal framework of the cooperation with the Clubs for UNESCO, he advanced that a meeting will be convened at UNESCO Headquarters in June 2017. Therefore, he called for the participation of Member States, at least two from each region, in order to establish an open working group.

Regarding the issue of UNESCO Clubs, several Member States offered their expertise and help in preparing the new comprehensive guideline of cooperation to be approved by the governing bodies of UNESCO.

UNESCO Fellowships Programmes

This item was introduced by Mr Eric Falt, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Public Information (ADG/ERI). He presented the UNESCO Fellowships Programmes as a means to learn and live together and stressed that every year more than 200 fellows benefit from them .

The Fellowships Programmes consist in one Funds in Trust fellowships programme and six co-sponsored programmes, for which UNESCO covers travel expenses and allowances, while the studies and living expenses are covered by donor countries. They are: UNESCO/People's Republic of China (The Great Wall); UNESCO/Poland (two programmes); UNESCO/Republic of Korea; UNESCO/Israel (Mashav); UNESCO/ISED (Russian Federation); UNESCO/Czech Republic. In addition, there is one extra-budgetary (FIT) Fellowships Programme, the UNESCO/Keizo Obuchi (Japan), entirely funded by Japan.

In 2016, 232 Fellowship took place with a total value of US\$ 4 million, included US\$ 440,400 from the UNESCO ordinary budget.

Member States stressed the importance and success of the Fellowships Programmes. They expressed how these Programmes constitute a major benefit for many people and is a concrete example of international cooperation for development and of promotion of cultural diversity.

One Member State announced that in 2017 the new Fellowship Programme in the fields of Archeology and Conservation of cultural heritage was launched.

One Member State proposed that the Fellowship Programmes should now create an alumni network, to connect with each other and share experiences after completing the programme.

In response to questions raised on the delay of some announcements for the Japan or Czech Republic Fellowship Programmes, Mr. Stoyan Bantchev, Chief, Participation Programme and Fellowships Section stated that while the delay for the first case was due to a re-evaluation of the programme by the donor and will be launched shortly, for the second one, he indicated that not all the countries were invited under this programme but only three. He also noted that all the deadlines for the submission of applications were fixed for the National Commissions.

Information by Canada and France: Strengthening the Relationship with Indigenous Peoples

At the end of the meeting, Canada took the floor to express their commitment to work on strengthening ties between indigenous people. They started working on a framework with three main objectives: celebrate initiatives, reflect indigenous culture, knowledge and perspectives in the work of National Commissions and foster them in UNESCO's programmes. Canada invited all interested National Commissions to work with them in this framework. In this regard, France mentioned that they also worked in collaboration with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO to stress similar issues. They are also currently setting up an overseas project. More details on this project can be found under [this link](#).

Closing

The Chairperson expressed appreciation for the organization of the meeting and for its fruitful results. He also thanked the participants for their active participation and collaboration and declared the meeting closed.