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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE UNITED
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PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Report on the formulation of a harmonized science and technology
policy for programmes within the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General of the Conference

1. By decision 19 (IV) of 4 May 1979, the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development decided that the report of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development entitled "Formulation of a harmonized science and technology policy for programmes within the United Nations system" should be circulated to the Preparatory Committee at its fifth session together with any available comments of agencies and organizations of the United Nations system on the report.

2. The views of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization are annexed hereto.

ANNEX

Views of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization

The Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology report specifically refers to the Economic and Social Council resolution 1826 (LV) which, in paragraph 7, states that the Council "Considers that the planning of activities in the field of Science and Technology of the various organisations of the United Nations should be harmonized and gradually integrated into a United Nations Science and Technology policy".

The discussion of "relevant issues" which occupies paragraph 8 to 36 of the document concentrates on the scopes and components of such a policy; its goals are the subject of paragraphs 37 to 65 and the document studies alternative approaches to the harmonization of Science and Technology policies in paragraphs 66 to 92.

In regard to two first parts of the document, Unesco has studied the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology's views relating to the bases on which an harmonized United Nations system policy could be established. The accent put on General Assembly's resolution 3302 (S VI) and 3362 (S VII) has been noted with interest as these two resolutions have been important elements in the preparation of Unesco's programme and budget for 1977 and 1978, for 1979-1980, and for the Unesco medium-term plan (1977-1982) as far as these relate to the Science and Technology sector in Unesco's activities.

The study of alternative approaches may be kept in mind when elaborating further ways and means by which the system as a whole will have, on a permanent basis, to develop further harmonization of its activities while implementing the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development. It should be however noted that the wording of paragraph 7 of ECOSOC resolution 1826 (LV) quoted above, clearly underlines the fact that planning of programmes in science and technology begins within each organisation, and that harmonization of these programmes constitutes a further step. It seems therefore that only alternative number 1 and, up to a certain point number 2, adequately answer the terms of the resolution. As regard alternative number 3 : "comprehensive decisions making", it is Unesco's understanding that the conclusion of the United Nations Conference for Science and Technology for Development will be submitted to its Member states which may, as appropriate, re-orient UNESCO's programme accordingly through decision of the Organisation's governing bodies.

To this purpose, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted at its 19th session (Nairobi 1976), resolution 2.01 which stipulates in its paragraph I (d) : "UNESCO will contribute in every possible way to the preparation, organization and follow-up of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development, as well as of other United Nations conferences concerned with the application of science and technology to specific areas of development,

such as the United Nations Water Conference and the United Nations Conference on Desertification."

UNESCO has noted that paragraphs 93 to 153 are directed to the discussion of a different question i.e, the coordination of science and technology in the United Nations system and the possibility of modifying the existing structural arrangements in the field of science and technology.

The question of institutional arrangements in relation to science and technology has been on several occasions the object of a thorough study in the United Nations system, lately while was prepared the Secretary-General's report responding to the Economic and Social Council's resolution 1905 (LVII) on institutional arrangements for science and technology.

The implementation of this resolution led the organizations of the United Nations system to make a critical study of the ways in which they co-operate with one another, to analyse the machinery for co-ordination among them, and to propose certain measures which, by improving that machinery, could make the overall action of the system more coherent.

The Secretary-General's report indicated that :

"responsibilities for science and technology as discharged throughout the United Nations system, are intimately linked to the responsibilities of the specialized agencies and other bodies in their respective fields of competence,"

and recognised that "science and technology as such cannot be compressed into a unified discipline, sectoral activity of a simple institutional arrangement."

It concluded :

"in the light of such considerations, it would appear that a United Nations Science and Technology Programme, on the United Nations Development Programme or United Nations Environment Programme model, would not necessarily meet the objectives envisaged in paragraph 1 (b) of Council resolution 1905 (LVII) namely to assist, facilitate and ensure the application of science and technology to development, particularly that of developing countries."

After examining the report, the Committee on Science and Technology for Development noted :

"Many delegations spoke on the item and there was a consensus of opinion in favour of the second alternative suggested in the Secretary-General's report, namely, the strengthening of existing machinery, rather than the establishment of a separate new programme for science and technology." (Report on the third session)

The problem was also evoked on various occasions by UNESCO's governing bodies, the latest statement of the Organizations's Member states appearing in 107 EXB decision 411 paragraph 10, adopted by UNESCO's Executive Board at its 107th session (May 1979), by which the Board declared :

"that the implementation of the results of the Conference can and should be the responsibility of the Specialized Agencies, particularly UNESCO, and other organizations of the United Nations system, duly co-ordinated for this purpose, and that it would be ineffectual and unnecessarily expensive to seek the solution to the problems arising in new institutional structures."

To conclude these remarks, it is worth recalling that for many years UNESCO's position, as expressed by its legislative body and stated on several occasions by the Director General in particular at the Economic and Social Council has been as follows :

We fully support the evolution towards harmonized and gradually integrated planning of activities in the field of science and technology within the United Nations system; to this evolution we have already contributed in staff time, money, and by steadily developing our relations with other agencies, in particular at the working level. On the other hand, we are convinced that it is not through institutional changes that present problems and difficulties may be solved : such changes may at the best, while solving a few problems, create an infinity of new ones.