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SESSIONAL WORKING GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 1 May 1985, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. KORDS (German Democratic Republic)

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by States parties to the Covenant concerning rights covered by articles 13 to 15
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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1988 (LX)
BY STATES PARTIES TO THE COVENANT CONCERNING RIGHTS COVERED BY ARTICLES 13 TO 15
(continued)

Report of Nicaragua (E/1982/3/Add.31)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Tunnerman (Nicaragua) took a place at the table.

2. Mr. TUNNERMAN (Nicaragua), introducing his country's report, said that economic, social and cultural development represented a substantial part of the revolutionary process in Nicaragua. The economy had entered a completely new phase following the revolution, in so far as mechanisms had been created with a view to consolidating the revolutionary process. The overall strategy behind the plan for economic and social development introduced in 1980 had three aims: to satisfy basic needs and provide good living standards for all, in contrast to the pre-revolutionary emphasis placed on the top 10 per cent of the population; to promote economic independence by reducing Nicaragua's 60 per cent dependence on trade with the United States and by expanding trade with other countries; and to accumulate surpluses. Before the revolution, surpluses had been used for the benefit of the oligarchy and the transnational corporations instead of for the common good.

3. The goal of the revolution was national unity through a mixed economy and a policy of non-alignment in international affairs. Educational development had been integrated with the economic and social planning of the Sandinist revolution and would not have been possible without changing the entire system.

4. The main feature of the new form of education was its emphasis on the education of the masses with a view to developing the country within a pluralist concept of society with the people themselves participating in all aspects of education, thus enhancing their creative capacity. The educational process combined physical, economic, social and esthetic aspects and was also closely associated with the concept of work. It must be both scientific and humanistic.

5. The right to education had been stipulated in the First Proclamation of the Government of National Reconstruction on 18 June 1979, which had stated that there should be a radical reform of the objectives and content of the national educational system in order to transform it into a key element in the process of humanistic transformation of Nicaraguan society and to give it a critical and liberating direction. In particular, resources were to be channelled towards the creation of rural education centres, which, in addition to providing a basic, overall education, would also provide technical training to the rural population. Rural education programmes were to be co-ordinated fully with the processes of agrarian reform and rural development. The provision for rural education was to make up for the deficiencies of the previous régime which had done little in that

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regard. Article 40 of the Fundamental Statute and the Statute on the Rights and Guarantees of Nicaraguans of 11 May 1980 stipulated that parents' freedom to send their children to schools or colleges other than those set up by the State would be respected, provided that such schools or colleges met the minimum educational standards approved by the State and that they adhered strictly to national educational plans. The fees of private teaching centres would be approved by the State and in no circumstances would educational centres be profit-making; such fees must be used for the good of the entire community. The State was also obliged to provide school meals, books and educational supplies.

6. In establishing the overall objectives of the new education, the Government had not used a group of experts but had chosen a democratic approach. A questionnaire containing 50 key questions regarding the future thrust of education had been circulated to the people through national bodies and trade unions. On the basis of that referendum, the qualities and values to be cultivated in the new Nicaraguan man stressed patriotic and revolutionary commitment to the interests of the workers and peasants in particular, anti-imperialism, internationalism, opposition to all forms of exploitation and to racism, discrimination and oppression, and the promotion of a united national stand for national sovereignty, social progress, justice, freedom, détente and regional and world peace. High moral, civic and spiritual principles were also required. Education was to be designed to help solve the country's main economic and social problems, establishing a direct link with the life and history of the people so that productive and creative work could be formative elements and constitute an integral part of curricula, through the fusion of theory with practice and manual work with intellectual work. The revolutionary process thus became a massive educational project.

7. An adult popular education programme had been launched using volunteer school-teachers recruited from among the people. All educational levels, areas and forms were linked to the tasks of production and defence because of the situation which had existed during the past few years.

8. Nicaragua was not able to supply the most advanced scientific tools to its teachers; nevertheless, every effort was made to provide teachers with basic requirements for the teaching of science. The objective was to provide higher education without luxury; in such circumstances, teachers bore a heavy responsibility.

9. Services were being expanded to make them accessible to the entire population, while the quality of education was being improved in order to adapt educational structures, curricula and human resources to the heavy demand for education generated by the revolutionary process and the decision to create a new society. The new education thus reflected new values and new goals. A basic goal was that every Nicaraguan should eventually have a minimum of 9 years of education; before the revolution the minimum requirement had been 2.9 years, which had been raised to 4 years currently as a result of a tremendous effort. Before the revolution, the rate of illiteracy had been 50.3 per cent, while in the rural areas it had been

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between 80 and 95 per cent. In 1978 there had been approximately 500,000 students; currently there were over 1 million throughout the system. Thirty religious congregations working with the poor had established free schools and imparted a Christian education consistent with the plans of the Ministry of Education.

10. Basically the Government's cultural policy was to involve the entire population in participation in, and generation of, culture. Through such means as mobile cinemas and expanded educational establishments, culture had ceased to be the heritage of the élite and had become an integral part of the development process as a whole.

11. Mr. TEXIER (France) expressed admiration for the progress accomplished by the Nicaraguan Government in the field of education in so short a time. It was significant that that Government had ratified virtually all the main human rights instruments within months of its accession to power. It had complied strictly with the reporting requirement. It was very important that the fundamental principles of education should be proclaimed formally, and that pluralism should be maintained. Given the importance of religion in Nicaragua, he would like to know whether religious instruction was given in the public as well as the private schools. It would also be interesting to know the relative sizes of the public and private educational sectors.

12. He wondered how the system outlined in paragraph 7 (f) operated in practice and whether it worked satisfactorily. He would also like to know what was being done in Nicaragua to improve the material conditions of teaching staff, in accordance with article 13, paragraph 2 (e), of the Covenant, and whether the resources spent on education were considered to be sufficient. Information on higher education, the development of universities and the number of disciplines taught would also be useful. He noted with interest the "nutrition supplement" programme mentioned in paragraph 12 (h) of the report.

13. Turning to article 14 of the Covenant, he said that he would like to have more information on progress towards making education completely free of charge and on the criteria employed for granting the subsidies mentioned in paragraph 16 (d).

14. Noting that the legal provisions listed in paragraph 23 of the report included an agreement between Colombia and UNESCO, he said that he would like more detailed information on the effect of that agreement on Nicaragua.

15. The situation of the Indian minority had been the subject of much discussion in his country. There had even been suggestions, which he was sure were incorrect, that Nicaragua was engaging in ethnocide. He would appreciate some assurances on the matter, together with some information on the efforts being made to preserve the cultural identity of those indigenous groups.

16. Mrs. BUTRAGUENO (Spain) said that she was impressed by the efforts of the Nicaraguan Government to promote literacy and compulsory education. She would like to know about the presence of women throughout the educational system, especially in higher education, and whether they had equal opportunities at all levels. It would also be interesting to learn more about the relationship between education and work.

17. Mr. HOPPE (German Democratic Republic) said that it was clear that many changes had taken place in Nicaragua in the short period since the revolution. The figures in the report testified to the tremendous success of the literacy campaign, while the laws on education showed the high priority that Nicaragua accorded to the implementation of the Covenant.

18. He would like additional information on the impact of the counter-revolutionary forces in Nicaragua on the country's educational programmes. He also wondered what categories of skilled personnel were most needed in Nicaragua and whether there were any special programmes to train such people. Further information might also be provided on the Government's policy for the protection of Nicaragua's rich cultural heritage.

19. Mr. AIDARA (Senegal) said that the Nicaraguan Government was to be commended for the efforts that it had made in a difficult situation to make education free and open to all and to promote literacy. He was gratified that the representative of Nicaragua had mentioned pluralism, a mixed economy and non-alignment as three key elements of his Government's policy.

20. While he was impressed by the achievements of Nicaragua as reflected in the report, he felt that the report itself was geared more to the future than to the present. It might have included an introduction placing education in its context and comparing the current state of education with the past, as the representative of Nicaragua had done in his introductory statement.

21. He would like to know whether a system of grants existed in Nicaragua and, if so, the percentage of students benefiting from them. The report lacked information on higher education, the number of universities, the number of disciplines that could be studied and the number of students. It would be interesting to know about vocational training and technical schools, as well as the actual percentage of children enrolled in schools according to age group and sex.

22. Noting the reduction in illiteracy mentioned in paragraph 11 of the report, he asked how long literacy training lasted, how the programme operated in the indigenous communities and whether textbooks were provided in the indigenous languages, and how the Government had reduced illiteracy in areas in which rebel forces were present.

23. He asked whether education was currently free in Nicaragua and, if so, to what level. Information on the percentage of private higher and secondary education establishments and on how subsidies were provided to those establishments would also be useful.

24. Mr. DE ALBA (Mexico) commended the Nicaraguan Government's efforts to eliminate illiteracy and to bring education and culture to the whole population, particularly to the linguistic minorities and the rural classes. The report began with a description of the difficult situation which had confronted the new Revolutionary Government in 1979 and provided information about the progress that had been achieved since that time. The report was forward-looking and realistic as well as business-like and constructive.

25. Mr. YAKOVLEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the achievements of Nicaragua over the past six years had been truly amazing. When the Revolutionary Government had come to power in 1979, the country had been almost completely illiterate but, owing to the Government's vigorous measures and investment of considerable financial and human resources, illiteracy had been reduced to almost 10 per cent. Even the large capitalist country which was waging a slander campaign against Nicaragua could not boast such a low rate of illiteracy. The Government of Nicaragua had made great efforts to teach its indigenous communities to read and write their own languages. What could the country bent on defaming the Nicaraguan revolution say about its own Indian population? Every aspect of the report showed that, despite external aggression, an economic boycott and bands of mercenaries attempting to overthrow the Government, Nicaragua was striving to implement the most important provisions of the Covenant regarding the right to education.

26. In Nicaragua, as had been the case in Chile under the Allende Government, everyone participated in all aspects of development of the country, including political and economic development. The Sandinist Government also followed the example of the Chilean revolution in its emphasis on the ability of the revolution to defend itself, particularly since the main obstacle to the revolution was the hostile activity directed from outside the country.

27. There had been much talk about pluralism. All the measures which the Nicaraguan Government had taken with regard to education had been carried out on the basis of public discussion in which all social strata and all organizations - both religious and non-religious - had participated. That was the greatest proof of the democratic and pluralist nature of the measures taken by the Nicaraguan Government.

28. He requested additional information about pre-school education and about the preparation of educational programmes and of teachers for the non-Spanish-speaking minorities. He also wished to know what was the exact nature of the Government's co-operation with private schools and, what efforts the Government was making to develop the higher educational system in agricultural areas.

29. Mr. IIYAMA (Japan) asked how the educational situation of minorities differed from that of other Nicaraguans and how the Government was addressing the needs of minorities. To what extent could minorities determine the shape and substance of their education? He also inquired about the process by which textbooks were written and selected for use, and whether that was done at the national or regional level. He requested more information about the national referendum, in particular

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with regard to the selection of participants and the people responsible for drawing up the aims, objectives and general principles of education. Finally, he asked whether the competent United Nations organs and specialized agencies could do anything to help achieve the objectives of the relevant articles of the Covenant in Nicaragua.

30. Mr. BENDIX (Denmark) noted that article 15, paragraph 4, of the Covenant had received little attention in the report, and he hoped that Nicaragua would provide more information in that regard in a future report. Nicaragua's new educational system had done much to instil and promote respect for human rights, and that was of great importance, since individuals could claim their rights only when they knew what they were. He asked whether the National Literacy Crusade was still in operation and whether the efforts undertaken in that area were proceeding on a continuous basis. What was the ratio between men and women with regard to illiteracy? With regard to the 7.5 per cent increase in educational opportunities since July 1979 referred to in paragraph 11 (k), he inquired whether the figure given for 1979 had been based on the two-and-a-half-year school enrolment, and whether the figure for 1983 had been based on the new four-year enrolment. Or did the 7.5 increase represent a real increase in the number of pupils? He wished to know the total number of school-age children, and asked what was the teacher-pupil ratio in Nicaraguan schools throughout the country. What was the distribution of schools in indigenous population areas? With regard to paragraph 13 (d) (vii), he requested more information about what had been done to introduce and consolidate the regionalization of education and inquired what the aim of that programme was.

31. Mr. DICHEV (Bulgaria) asked what were the results of the National Literacy Crusade, and what was the present status of adult education. He also requested more information on the expansion of school enrolment at all levels, on the Government's efforts to improve education in general, on the Government's part in the production of school books, and on government policies regarding culture and mass participation.

32. Mr. TUNNERMAN (Nicaragua), replying to a question by the expert from France, said that religious education was not given in State schools in Nicaragua. However, there was a large private educational system which provided religious education at all levels and which covered about 10 per cent of the students at the primary level, 20 per cent in the middle schools and 25 per cent at the secondary level. With respect to higher education, there were three State universities and two private institutions run by the churches. In short, religious teaching was permitted in private schools, even those whose budget was provided by the State. In addition, the Government had made arrangements with private educational institutions to use their facilities and teachers for State schools.

33. The Government provided scholarships to enable students from poor families to attend school on a par with the wealthy. In addition, it was attempting to ensure that education was open to all, including adults. To that end, the Government had attempted to improve the material conditions of graduate teachers. Following the revolution, it had been found that primary-school teachers earned less than a

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doorman at a ministry. Accordingly, it had been decided that the salary of primary-school teachers should be established at the mid-level of the civil service and, in some cases, that had meant an increase of from 100 per cent to 150 per cent. Furthermore, teachers were now able to join trade unions in Nicaragua.

34. Health and education accounted for about 25 per cent of the national budget, though the health allocation was somewhat higher because of the war against the counter-revolutionary forces. It was for that reason that 40 per cent of the budget was devoted to defence, in order to protect the irreversible revolution.

35. Higher education had developed immensely since the revolution. Young people who had formerly had no access to schooling could now attend two-year courses in order to gain the equivalent of a secondary education and thus enter university. The main areas of higher studies in Nicaragua were health, education, agriculture and engineering. Medical education too had improved since the revolution and students were now able to specialize in various disciplines. The revolution had also ensured that all who completed their studies would be able to find jobs. However, the military service necessitated by the war had led to a decrease in enrolment in higher education, especially because young people did not attempt to evade their responsibilities to defend the country.

36. The Government also provided books and other school supplies free of charge. The textbooks were prepared by teachers in accordance with guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Education. In that connection, Nicaragua had benefited from the co-operation of various countries, in particular, Cuba and the German Democratic Republic. With respect to private schools, the authorities had first attempted to help those in poor neighbourhoods, usually religious schools that charged no fees. The curriculum was formulated by the State for the entire country. With respect to the literacy campaign, Nicaragua had received help from many countries, in particular Sweden, the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, Spain, Mexico and France.

37. Several questions had been asked about education for linguistic minorities in Nicaragua. The Government had fulfilled its promise to the Miskitos to educate them in their own language. There was also a sizeable black population on the Caribbean coast that was taught in English. In short, for the first four years at the primary level, teaching was provided to those two groups in the mother tongue of the inhabitants. Spanish was then gradually introduced into the curriculum to ensure that no section of the population was isolated from the rest of the country because of inability to use Spanish. It should be pointed out that no one had heard about the Miskitos until the Government had attempted to help them. Under the Somoza régime, they had been completely ignored and had not been regarded as newsworthy by the international media. It was true that the Government had made mistakes, but it was now finding a good solution in order to enable the Miskitos to exercise some autonomy without endangering the unity of the Nicaraguan State. Their culture was important to the enrichment of the culture of the entire country.

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38. Several experts had asked about the status of women in Nicaragua. Nicaraguan women had distinguished themselves in the fight against the dictatorship and today they participated actively in all areas. For example, most of the teachers in Nicaragua were women, and women were now well represented in professions that in the past had been reserved for men.

39. Mobilization for the literacy campaign had been regarded as a type of popular movement and had been carried out from March to August 1980. More than 100,000 secondary-school students had spent their holidays plus two months in the rural areas living with the peasants and teaching them. It had become apparent that, for the moment, health was more important than education and it was for that reason that health had been given the second highest priority in the budget after defence. The students had again been mobilized to work with the peasants and provide them with health education. That had been followed by adult education, in which the students again had been the teachers.

40. The literacy campaign had been a type of cultural revolution in which the students had learnt a great deal from the peasants. Moreover, in 1980 Nicaragua had had a record harvest: the students had worked with the peasants in the fields during the day and had taught them at night. As a result, the bond established between the students and the peasants was a strong one. That relationship had sometimes been criticized by outsiders as being too politicized. Nicaragua regarded it as being revolutionary.

41. As stated before, education was free in Nicaragua and the authorities were endeavouring to make basic education compulsory. Pre-school education, which formerly had been given to a very small percentage of children in Nicaragua, had been a creation of the revolution. The Government believed that that was a very important level of education and had endeavoured to involve the mothers themselves as the teachers, under the supervision of a graduate teacher. While that type of education had been extended to agricultural areas and among the Miskitos, difficulties were being encountered because of the war, and the Miskitos had to be taught in settlements.

42. With respect to international co-operation, UNESCO and UNICEF had rendered valuable assistance in various projects and Nicaragua had received technical assistance from various countries.

43. The referendum on education had been rather unique because the only similar experience had been in Mexico and a tentative venture in Chile. Parents had been asked to meet and exchange views on education and had helped to define educational objectives. It had been discovered from the questionnaires that people wanted a new type of education, different from the type imparted under the Somoza régime. They wanted their children to be imbued with ideas such as patriotism, solidarity and the fight against racism.

44. Several experts had asked about the lack of statistics in the report. That was a problem that existed throughout Latin America, and Nicaragua was currently

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attempting to establish a statistical service to provide information more rapidly. There were now nine regions in Nicaragua, six in the Pacific and the north and three special zones on the Caribbean coast. There was a minister for each region, and the Government had attempted to decentralize the administration as much as possible and to rationalize the educational budget. It had attempted to adjust educational programmes to the special features of each region.

45. The expert from Bulgaria had asked what was the status of adult education and whether that had been the area that had suffered most in the war against the counter-revolutionaries. Those forces had killed nine brigade leaders in the hope of creating panic. However, even in areas where teachers had been assassinated, their colleagues had met and sworn to continue their work in the name of their fallen comrades. In other words, the efforts of the counter-revolutionaries had failed and the adult education programme was a great success.

46. Nicaragua believed that it was worthwhile to report to the Working Group every two years, because that schedule gave countries an opportunity to confront their own realities and see what they had done or had not done.

47. The CHAIRMAN said that the Working Group had thus concluded its consideration of Nicaragua's report.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.