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Chairman: Mr. Pierre FORTHOMME
(Belgium).

AGENDA ITEM 47

World campaign for universal literacy: report of the Secretary-General (continued) (A/5830, A/6024, A/6048, A/6099; A/C.2/L.803/Rev.1 and Add.1, L.807, L.808)

1. Mr. DIAKITE (Mali) said that his delegation had joined in sponsoring the draft resolution now before the Committee in a revised form (A/C.2/L.803/Rev.1), in the firm conviction that the eradication of illiteracy was a matter of prime importance to all countries which were striving for the social and cultural development of their citizens. All human progress was dependent on the cultural improvement of the community; economic development, for instance, could not proceed as rapidly as it should in many developing countries because illiteracy prevented many potentially useful people from developing their full intellectual capacities. A successful world campaign for universal literacy, based on the conclusions and recommendations of the World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy (A/6048, annex II), would make it possible for the entire population of a given country to participate in their Government's programme of economic and social development.

2. Since attaining independence, Mali had made special efforts to raise educational standards in all parts of the country; it had received valuable assistance from UNESCO and from a number of developed countries, including France, the United Kingdom, the United States and the USSR. For certain subjects, it relied heavily on educational radio programmes, which were systematically reviewed and improved.

3. His delegation hoped that the revised draft resolution would receive the unanimous support of the Committee and of the General Assembly. He had been asked to announce that Mauritania wished to join the sponsors.

4. Mr. DJOUDI (Algeria) said that UNESCO had been helping his country to combat illiteracy since its first year of independence. Of the two conferences held under that Organization's auspices in 1965, the first

—the International Conference on Public Education, held at Geneva in July—had defined the methods to be used in illiteracy campaigns, while the second—the World Congress on the Eradication of Illiteracy, held at Teheran in September—had made it clear that the problem of illiteracy must be solved by world-wide action, and that literacy was vital to development.

5. Algeria devoted a substantial part of its budget to the campaign against illiteracy, which took two main forms: an effort to increase primary school enrolment, which had doubled in three years, and an adult literacy campaign.

6. His delegation supported the revised draft resolution, but submitted two amendments (A/C.2/L.808) designed to strengthen it. The new operative paragraph 6 proposed in the second amendment was based on recommendation 3.62 of the World Congress.

7. Mr. VIAUD (France) said that the World Congress had shown that the success of the world campaign for universal literacy depended on the solution of three main problems. The first problem was that literacy could not be dissociated from general economic and social development; it was essential that educational programmes for the young should also include vocational training. Secondly, experience had shown that existing methods and techniques needed drastic revision. Thirdly, the campaign needed more international co-operation. One of the most valuable forms of such co-operation was the exchange of information and documentation, and it was to be hoped that UNESCO would act on World Congress recommendation 3.42 and take up the Iranian Government's generous offer to provide facilities for the establishment of a documentation centre on literacy problems at Teheran. The message from the Shahinshah of Iran to the General Assembly (A/6024) testified to that country's interest in the battle against ignorance.

8. His country attached great importance to the provision of cultural assistance to the developing countries of Africa and Latin America. France maintained some 50,000 teachers in those countries and was supplying them with books, equipment and other teaching materials.

9. His delegation shared the views expressed in the draft resolution and would give the Algerian amendments sympathetic consideration.

10. Mr. FAESLER (Mexico) said that the eradication of illiteracy was a cause to which his country had given priority among its development needs ever since 1944, when the first national campaign against illiteracy had been launched. His Government had given full support to the work of the World Congress and agreed with its conclusions and recommendations.

11. His delegation supported the draft resolution and wished to join the sponsors.

12. Mr. MINERBI (Israel) expressed appreciation of the inspiring message sent by the Shahinshah of Iran to the President of the General Assembly. His delegation fully supported the draft resolution and was confident that it would win general support.

13. The impact of education in general, and of literacy in particular, on the economic and social development of a country was so great that the developing countries rightly gave high priority to educational programmes in their development plans. Experience had shown that the rapid rate of growth in many industrialized countries was largely due to heavy investment in education and training, and capital invested in education in the developing countries was bound to yield an even greater return. While evaluating expenses it should not be forgotten, however, that that return entailed some sacrifice; the longer children were kept at school, the later they began contributing to the family income. In Israel's experience, the rate of return to invested capital was higher in the elementary than in the upper grades. On the other hand, literacy made for greater mobility of labour. Hitherto, the allocation of resources to programmes of education had not been attuned, in many countries, to the demands of the labour market. It would therefore be well for international action in the education field to concentrate on eradicating illiteracy, and his delegation commended the practical approach made in documents A/5830 and A/6048. Consideration should be given to the possibility of linking literacy campaigns with vocational training.

14. His country, despite extensive efforts, still had a proportion of illiterates and would be glad to exchange information and experience with other countries. For that reason, Israel had supported the recommendation adopted at the World Congress that UNESCO should consider setting up a documentation centre on literacy problems.

15. Mr. HOO (China) fully supported the draft resolution and expressed the hope that it would be adopted unanimously. The world campaign for universal literacy was of major importance, for mass illiteracy was a serious obstacle to economic and social development. Although half the United Nations Development Decade had gone by, there were still hundreds of millions of illiterates in the world, and the campaign called for redoubled efforts. Recommendation No. 58 of the International Conference on Public Education concerning literacy and adult education (A/6048, annex I) was a welcome development, and the conclusions and recommendations of the World Congress showed how to deal with the problem. His delegation was sure that Governments would heed the appeal addressed to them by the Shahinshah of Iran.

16. While the eradication of illiteracy depended mainly on national efforts, international aid also had a large part to play. In the province of Taiwan, illiteracy was no longer a serious problem. Under the Chinese Constitution, 35 per cent of local government budgets was devoted to education, in addition to funds allocated by the central Government. Special

measures had also been adopted to promote education and literacy among adults. As a result, the proportion of illiterates had fallen from 20 per cent in 1950 to 8 per cent at the present time, while the population had increased from 7 million to over 12 million during the same period. In response to the appeal made by the Director-General of UNESCO (980th meeting), he pledged his Government's full co-operation in action to eradicate illiteracy.

17. Mr. INGRAM (Australia) said that his delegation had been encouraged to hear from the Director-General of UNESCO that there were prospects of wiping out illiteracy in a single generation. It had also been encouraged by the results of the World Congress and by the timely message from the Shahinshah of Iran. Australia was particularly pleased to learn that UNESCO had already sent missions to eight countries under resolution 1.271 adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its thirteenth session.^{1/} It was entirely appropriate that the projects concerned were largely being financed by the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance.

18. The role of literacy in economic development was now receiving proper recognition in the development plans of developing countries. However, it was important that the degree of priority given to the elimination of illiteracy should be adjusted to conditions in the country concerned. The Director-General of UNESCO, in reporting on the results of the World Congress, had rightly said that the fight against illiteracy had been recognized as an integral part of development and would be given its place among the matters deserving priority in developing planning. Nevertheless, funds were limited and must be related to other priorities. At the international level, that might best be done through the United Nations Development Programme. He shared the view expressed by the Indian representative (980th meeting) that the major proportion of international financial assistance should be devoted to the eradication of illiteracy proper rather than on subsidiary activities such as seminars.

19. The draft resolution merited unanimous support. He supported the amendments submitted by the United States at the previous meeting, which had been taken into account in the revised text, and he hoped that the sponsors would give close attention to the Algerian amendments.

20. Mr. MURGESCU (Romania) said that his delegation supported the world campaign for universal literacy for a number of reasons. First, the campaign had been conceived as an integral part of the effort to achieve full utilization of human resources. Secondly, literacy was regarded not only as a basic human right, but also as a productive investment which was essential to social, cultural and economic development. Thirdly, the campaign was to be conducted by Governments under their national development plans, the role of international co-operation being to support, and not to replace, national action. Thorough preparations had now been made and, as the Director-

^{1/} United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Records of the General Conference, thirteenth session (Paris, 1964), Resolutions, p. 16.

General of UNESCO had shown in his statement, the time had come for action.

21. His country wished to join the sponsors of the draft resolution and would contribute to international co-operation to achieve the aims of the proposal. Romania had borne the burden of illiteracy for many years, but the programme of national reconstruction launched by the People's Republic had soon put an end to that situation. His country's experience led it to take an optimistic view of the prospects for eradicating illiteracy in one generation, and it would gladly share that experience with other countries.

22. Mr. BHABHA (Pakistan) said that his delegation whole-heartedly supported the draft resolution. It congratulated the Director-General of UNESCO on his report to the Committee, and greatly appreciated the personal interest displayed by the Shahinshah of Iran in the world campaign for universal literacy.

23. In the United Nations Development Decade all Member States should make special efforts to eradicate illiteracy, and the conclusions and recommendations approved by the World Congress contained some valuable suggestions on ways of reaching that objective. However, the problem was not an easy one to solve, and assistance from the developed countries would be required. In developing countries such as his own, little financial provision had been made in the past for the promotion of adult literacy. As Governments came to realize the importance of education to economic and social development, they gave it a bigger share of their budgetary appropriations; even so, the resources available would be inadequate for many years to come.

24. In his own country it had not been possible to make adequate financial provision in the second five-year plan for the promotion of adult literacy, and the work had been entrusted largely to local communities and private organizations. It was expected that education would receive a larger allocation under the third five-year plan but, owing to the pressing demands of various development sectors on the limited resources available, it would still not be possible to provide adequate funds for adult education. In that important task, his country was seeking co-operation and financial assistance from external sources, including the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Special Fund and the Technical Assistance Board.

25. Mr. BOIKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) considered it a disgrace to mankind that, in an era of great scientific achievements, illiteracy still deprived two fifths of mankind of the full benefits of human culture.

26. The documents before the Committee provided ample information from which to assess the present situation and recommend measures for the eradication of mass illiteracy. According to the Secretary-General's report (A/5830), both the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East regarded mass illiteracy as a serious obstacle to economic and social development, and recommended Governments to make due provision, in their national development plans, for its gradual elimination. Other international meetings had

confirmed the view that the campaign for literacy was a prerequisite of development. His delegation greatly appreciated UNESCO's activities in that direction, and endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of two representative international conferences, as set forth in annexes I and II to document A/6048.

27. Overcoming illiteracy was a complex process, but a number of newly independent countries had shown that it could be done, within a limited period, by mobilizing the efforts of all the people. Great effort was necessary, both on the part of the individual illiterate and on that of the country as a whole. The experience of States which had successfully overcome the problem could be of great help; international organizations and bilateral agreements both had a part to play. The key to success was the right combination of national effort with external aid, as his country's experience had shown. Before the 1917 Revolution, some 76 per cent of adults in the Ukraine had been illiterate, and only 9 per cent of women had been literate. In 1918, the Government had passed a law requiring people between the ages of eighteen and fifty to learn to read and write; by 1937 through organizational measures to enlist the co-operation of the public, that aim had been achieved, leaving only 3 per cent of the population—mainly among the very old—illiterate. That experience had prompted his country to propose what had become General Assembly resolution 1677 (XVI) on co-operation for the eradication of illiteracy throughout the world. The Ukrainian SSR was proud that the campaign was now getting under way on a world-wide scale.

28. His delegation fully supported the draft resolution and wished to join the sponsors.

29. Mr. Saad KHALIL (United Arab Republic) said that the solution of the problem of illiteracy was a prerequisite for sound and steady economic development. His country had taken steps to eradicate illiteracy in the shortest possible time. In 1952, the Ministry of Education had undertaken a comprehensive study. Inter-ministerial committees had been formed to analyse and delimit the problem and to draw up a nationwide programme of action. Ministry staff had visited factories and rural areas to study the attitude of workers and farmers to illiteracy, their response to current efforts to solve the problem, and their suggestions as to future methods. The experience of other countries had been evaluated, students had been asked to suggest how they could help in the campaign, and women's organizations had been consulted. The committees had been informed of the national aim to provide primary schooling for every six-year-old child by 1970. As a result, a national plan for combating illiteracy was now in application. Its main features could be classified under five main headings.

30. First, the acquisition of literacy was recognized as vital to a sound democratic way of life. Primary education must be made universal and adult illiteracy must be eradicated. An integrated nation-wide campaign had been launched, with the aim of bringing illiterates to functional literacy within ten years. The campaign was to cover all the illiterate population between the ages of eight and forty. Secondly, functional literacy was to be achieved in two stages: acquisition of the basic skills, and the reinforcement

of skills already acquired. Thirdly, the plan dealt with requirements for teaching materials, the use of mass communication media and teacher training. All the educated human resources in the country were to be mobilized. The teachers were paid, but voluntary assistance was also encouraged. Fourthly, the per capita cost of the plan was estimated at about \$7.00 in the eight to fifteen age group and about \$3.50 in the fifteen to forty age group. Fifthly, a law had been passed to give effect to the plan.

31. His delegation fully supported the draft resolution and attached particular importance to operative paragraph 7. His country's universities had welcomed students from many developing countries and about 8,000 teachers had been sent to such countries to help in combating illiteracy. He welcomed the statement by the United States representative (980th meeting) to the effect that countries should be prepared to bear a high proportion of the cost of literacy projects; it was to be hoped that international contributions for that purpose would be increased.

32. Mr. EL-SHEIBANI (Libya) said that, when his country had been under foreign domination, its people had been denied access to almost every kind of education. Since the attainment of independence, his Government had spared no effort to provide education for all citizens. Evening classes had been arranged for illiterate adults, and opportunities were provided for farmers and nomads to learn to read and write and to continue their education according to their abilities. Adequate funds were available for the campaign against illiteracy. The courses were free of charge, and the cost per adult learner varied from area to area. The total number of students at schools of all kinds in the academic year 1964/1965 had been 220,000.

33. His delegation whole-heartedly supported the efforts of UNESCO to eradicate illiteracy, and appreciated the contribution made by the Shahinshah of Iran and the Iranian authorities to the success of the World Congress on the Eradication of Illiteracy.

34. The provisions of the draft resolution were wholly acceptable to his delegation, which would like to join the sponsors.

35. Mr. TAIB (Malaysia) expressed his delegation's appreciation of the message received from the Shahinshah of Iran. The World Congress had adopted a realistic and dynamic attitude to the problem of mass illiteracy. A selective and progressive approach to the problem might be criticized as utilitarian; however, it was better to make a modest but practical start than to launch an ambitious campaign which would be thrust aside by other priorities in the developing countries.

36. Malaysia had launched a special literacy campaign under which classes for adults had been started throughout the country. The subjects taught included reading and writing, better home management, basic health measures and ways of co-operating with the Government in the development of rural areas. In spite of a shortage of teachers, considerable progress had already been made with the help of such countries as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, which had supplied teachers

and educational experts and had assisted in the establishment of a school broadcasting system.

37. His delegation supported the draft resolution, particularly operative paragraphs 7 and 8. Its adoption would be the first step taken by the United Nations to integrate international literacy programmes, and would help to strengthen the infrastructure of economic development.

38. Mr. ARKADYEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) expressed his delegation's appreciation of the statement made by the Director-General of UNESCO in the preceding meeting, and of the service rendered by the Iranian people and their Shahinshah in organizing the World Congress on the Eradication of Illiteracy. Iran's contribution to the Congress showed that it had already acquired useful experience in the eradication of illiteracy and was anxious that experience of that kind should be made available to all interested countries.

39. There were still some hundreds of millions of illiterates including, in countries subjected to colonial oppression, a considerable proportion of the population. A solution to the problem of illiteracy was therefore an essential factor in accelerating the social and economic development of the newly independent countries and in eliminating the last vestiges of colonialism.

40. General Assembly resolution 1677 (XVI) had focused the attention of the United Nations on the problem of illiteracy; it had been followed up by further United Nations decisions and by national and regional campaigns for the eradication of illiteracy. Under its programme for 1965-1967, UNESCO was intensifying its efforts in that direction, and the World Congress had adopted some useful recommendations on the subject.

41. His country supported the decisions taken by the General Assembly and UNESCO and the recommendations of the World Congress, for it considered the eradication of illiteracy throughout the world to be an urgent task; its position had been clearly expressed in a message from the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to the Shahinshah of Iran. At the same time, due credit should be given to the individual efforts which many of the newly independent countries were making to eradicate illiteracy among their own peoples; the successes achieved by Cuba, Iraq, Algeria and other States merited serious study in countries where the problem had still to be solved. His own country had gained extensive experience which it was prepared to share with others. It was already helping many developing countries to set up educational systems at various levels, by establishing training centres and institutions, seconding Soviet professors and teachers for service in the developing countries, supplying laboratory and other educational equipment, and training teachers from the developing countries at educational establishments in the USSR.

42. Multilateral international assistance in the eradication of illiteracy could undoubtedly be provided from existing resources, for instance, out of the voluntary contributions made by States to the United Nations technical assistance programmes; but those

resources must be used as efficiently as possible. However, active participation and guidance must be forthcoming from the Governments of the countries concerned in order to eradicate illiteracy among adults and to provide educational opportunities for all children of school age; those Governments, in their turn, needed the help of political parties, trade unions, voluntary agencies, cultural societies, training institutes and all educated people in their countries. In giving effect to the provisions of General Assembly resolution 1937 (XVIII), the United Nations and UNESCO secretariats could not do better than study and disseminate the experience gained by countries which had already conducted successful campaigns against illiteracy.

43. Speakers at sessions of the regional economic commissions and at UNESCO conferences had rightly suggested that literacy programmes should be included in national development plans and that a larger share of national income should be devoted to education. Planning in the field of education was essential, particularly technical and vocational training.

44. It was to be hoped that new decisions by the United Nations and the combined efforts of UNESCO and individual countries, with international assistance, would succeed in solving the problem of mass illiteracy. The adoption of the draft resolution, with the various improvements which had been suggested, should prove a practical step in that direction.

45. Mr. SUAREZ (Philippines) said that the eradication of illiteracy was essential to the full development of human resources, which in turn was an integral part of the process of economic development.

46. His Government had been one of the sponsors of General Assembly resolution 1937 (XVIII) and, at the twentieth session of ECAFE, had joined other countries of the region in expressing the hope that adequate means would be found by the United Nations to launch a world campaign for universal literacy.

47. Recent developments in that field, especially the preliminary work done by UNESCO and the conclusions and recommendations of the World Congress, were extremely encouraging. The resources at present available for a world literacy programme were limited, and the experimental programme suggested by UNESCO seemed likely to ensure the best use of available resources and at the same time to provide information which could be used for a more ambitious and extensive campaign later on.

48. The selection of countries and projects to serve as experimental areas under the UNESCO programme should be such as to ensure that the programme covered a wide variety of situations, so that the information obtained could be used in as many countries as possible.

49. His delegation supported the draft resolution and, if the sponsors agreed, would like to join them.

50. Mr. PIZHKOV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) considered that the draft resolution was a logical continuation of the work done on the eradication of illiteracy since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1937 (XVIII). His delegation endorsed the decisions taken by the regional economic commissions and UNESCO, as well as the conclusions and recommendations adopted by the World Congress, with a view to mobilizing the efforts of countries where illiteracy was still a serious problem.

51. There were still more than 700 million illiterate persons of fifteen years of age and over, and in many of the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America 70 to 90 per cent of the population was illiterate. In many such countries, of course, illiteracy was a heritage of the colonial past; its eradication called for vigorous economic and social action by the Governments concerned. In view of the scale and urgency of the problem, it was essential that the resources allocated by the developing countries to the campaign against illiteracy should be used as efficiently as possible; and one of the most important features of the campaign was the study and application of experience already gained in that field by some of the developing countries which had already managed to solve the problem within a relatively short period.

52. The representatives of some developing countries had referred to the difficulties they were encountering in their struggle against illiteracy. His delegation well understood those difficulties, for the Byelorussian SSR had had to contend with an illiteracy rate of nearly 80 per cent at a time when the country had been devastated by the First World War and the ensuing Civil War. Economic development had provided the necessary funds; legislation had been passed to improve the structure and organization of the educational system; nearly all the literate population had actively supported the campaign; and, in a veritable cultural revolution, illiteracy had been eradicated completely. Now all school-age children in the Republic were receiving education, and the adult population were also improving their knowledge in various schools and institutions.

53. His country was already sharing its experience with other countries, and would continue to do so in the future. It had suggested that a seminar might be held at Minsk in 1966 for representatives of developing countries on problems relating to the organization and structure of educational systems.

54. His delegation supported the draft resolution.

55. Mr. FIGUEROA (Chile) said that his country was carrying on an intensive literacy campaign; it hoped to reduce illiteracy to negligible proportions in the near future.

56. His delegation fully supported the draft resolution and wished to join the sponsors.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.