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Chairman: Mr. Moraiwid M. TELL (Jordan).

AGENDA ITEM 47

World campaign for universal literacy (A/6303, chap. XIII, sect. IV; A/6323, A/6449, A/C.2/L.926)

1. The CHAIRMAN welcomed, on behalf of the Committee, Her Imperial Highness Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, of Iran, who would introduce the draft resolution on the world campaign for universal literacy. As the representative of one of the Arab countries which shared a common culture and civilization with Iran, it was particularly gratifying to him that that country should be represented on such an occasion by one whose work in the social and cultural development of her country was renowned.

2. Princess Ashraf PAHLAVI (Iran) said that the attention the Second Committee had been devoting to the world campaign for universal literacy in recent years was a significant indication of the trend of world opinion on educational problems. It was, in fact, only during the previous decade that economists had come to regard education, not as a commodity to be reserved primarily for a mere fraction of the population, but as a determining—if not the essential—factor of development. Man was both the means and the end of development. Moreover, since development was, in the second half of the twentieth century, a synonym for peace, education could play a leading role in the achievement of world peace.

3. The sad facts of the situation were, however, that despite all the progress made since the Second World War, 50 per cent of all children of school age did not attend school. Adult illiteracy was rising steadily: in fact, two out of every five adults could not read or write. Even more serious was the economic effect of illiteracy on the poorer countries: ignorance was almost always accompanied by poverty, under-nourishment, bad health and the inability to make effective use of economic assistance because the population was not adequately educated. Illiteracy was therefore not merely the denial of a fundamental human right, but also an obstacle to economic development and a threat to peace.

4. In current circumstances, however, the resources and energies which might have been used to provide the world's illiterates with the minimum of knowledge which would serve as the instrument of their emancipation were diverted from peaceful and human pursuits. It had been calculated, for instance, that the cost of one new prototype bomber would pay the annual salaries of 250,000 teachers. She was convinced that mankind would ultimately realize the futility of the arms race and abandon the art of killing for the art of living.

5. The World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy, held at Teheran in 1965, had emphasized that the first requirement for the elimination of ignorance was a national effort on the part of the countries suffering from it and that national development plans should make provision for that effort. Success was impossible, however, without international and bilateral co-operation, such as was brought into play to deal with such natural catastrophes as earthquakes and famine. Her country's literacy campaign was a combination of national and international efforts. At the national level, the armed forces provided recruits for the so-called "army of knowledge" and funds for the development of primary education throughout the country, and a special committee had been set up for the elimination of adult illiteracy. Those efforts were co-ordinated with over-all plans for the promotion of economic and social development. The fact that \$6 million had been collected in response to an appeal for voluntary contributions was an indication of the enthusiastic national support for the campaign.

6. Her country, however, was convinced that it was not enough to eradicate illiteracy within its borders but that a general effort must be made to stamp out ignorance everywhere. Its contribution of \$700,000—the equivalent of one day's military expenditure—to UNESCO for use in the world campaign for universal literacy was intended to call attention to the importance of international solidarity in that effort. It was to be hoped that other countries, private foundations and organizations would follow the example of those Heads of State who had responded to the appeal of His Imperial Majesty the Shahinshah of Iran and had made contributions to the UNESCO fund and that they would thus provide that organization with the \$4,000 million to \$5,000 million which it needed to eliminate illiteracy throughout the world.

7. The purpose of draft resolution A/C.2/L.926 was to impress upon all Member States the need for action to remove a major impediment to the development of the third world. The text was self-explanatory and she hoped that it would be unanimously approved.

8. Mr. FILALI (Morocco) proposed that the admirable statement made by Princess Ashraf Pahlavi should be issued in full as a Committee document.

It was so decided.^{1/}

9. Mr. ROOSEVELT (United States of America) expressed his thanks to Her Imperial Highness Princess Ashraf Pahlavi for her eloquent statement setting forth the problems posed by illiteracy. He observed that nations the world over had initiated functional literacy programmes, recognizing that literacy was the key to personal development and the corner-stone of national development and identity. His country's VISTA programme was one instance of its effort to eradicate the last vestiges of illiteracy and its consistent support of UNESCO and other agencies in that field had been reaffirmed by President Johnson in a message to Congress in which he had proposed that every means should be used to build new bridges of international understanding.

10. His delegation therefore endorsed the spirit of draft resolution A/C.2/L.926; it wished, however, to suggest a few amendments which might clarify the text. The final clause of the second preambular paragraph, "thus aggravating ... countries", should be deleted and replaced by the following new third preambular paragraph: "Noting further that literacy has a direct bearing on economic and social progress,". The fourth preambular paragraph should be amended to read: "Considering that the magnitude of the problem requires mobilization of considerable human, financial and technical resources,".

11. The word "continuing", in operative paragraph 2, should be replaced by "effective" and the following words added at the end of the paragraph: "taking account of the priority given to the elimination of illiteracy in development plans,". Operative paragraph 3 should be amended to read:

"Expresses the hope that additional resources will be made available to the fund for the world campaign for universal literacy to enable UNESCO, in the light of the results of the experimental programme, to expand its activities to promote literacy;".

12. In operative paragraph 4, the words following "of the world" should be deleted and replaced by the phrase "to support world-wide efforts to eliminate illiteracy."

13. Those amendments would in no way weaken the draft resolution. They reflected his country's recognition of the importance of the efforts to end illiteracy, provided such efforts were judiciously conducted in response to priority requests from Member States. If the amendments were accepted, his delegation would ask to be included among the sponsors of the draft resolution.

14. Mr. FRANZI (Italy) said that the outstanding contribution made by Iran to the fight against ignorance throughout the world would encourage other Governments to redouble their efforts.

15. The choice of an experimental literacy programme by UNESCO had been dictated not so much by the inadequacy of its resources as by the need to impress upon the Governments of the countries concerned that they themselves had to play the principal part in the eradication of illiteracy and that they were to be given complete freedom to choose the kind of programmes most suited to their needs. Clearly, no standard programme could be expected to meet requirements which varied so widely according to region, degree of development and available local resources.

16. The draft resolution acknowledged that that approach was the correct one by appealing, in operative paragraph 2, for continuing support for the world literacy campaign, without expressing a preference for any given type of support or any specific method of utilizing the resources contributed. It therefore reaffirmed that the experimental programme was not the result of a compromise, but of a deliberate decision to deal with a rapidly changing problem pragmatically and flexibly.

17. Italy used such empirical methods in dealing with its own illiteracy problem in the recent past; even in such a small country, the dimensions of the problems varied considerably from one region to another and that approach had proved its value. It would be happy to share its experience with others and it was in that spirit that his delegation was co-sponsoring the draft resolution.

18. Mr. POLIT (Ecuador) said that the draft resolution, of which his delegation was a sponsor, was an affirmation of faith in the principles contained in General Assembly resolution 2043 (XX). His country was one of those in which UNESCO's experimental literacy programme was being carried out, and the importance his Government attached to the programme was indicated by the higher appropriations for education and the importance attached to education in its national economic and social development plan.

19. The illiteracy problem was so immense, in relation to the financial resources and trained personnel available in most of the countries concerned, that only concerted action by international organizations and the advanced countries could prevent it from worsening. No parallel could be drawn between the current situation of the developing countries, in which economic and social development was increasingly hampered by population growth, and that which had existed in the industrialized countries at the same stage of the development process when employment and incomes had increased rapidly.

20. The draft resolution before the Committee appealed to all those whose help was so vital. His delegation hoped that the generous gesture made by Iran and other countries would be emulated by the Governments of all Member States.

21. Mr. OLUMIDE (Nigeria) said that his delegation, which was a sponsor of the draft resolution, appreciated the valuable work done by UNESCO in the campaign for universal literacy. Both training in new skills and education were important for economic growth. The relationship between literacy and national income was an established fact, and it was therefore

^{1/} The complete text of the statement made by Princess Ashraf Pahlavi was subsequently circulated as document A/C.2/L.934.

gratifying that, in accordance with UNESCO's new approach of linking functional literacy programmes to development priorities, forty-five countries, including Nigeria, had decided to accord high priority to work-oriented literacy projects linked with economic development, and that UNESCO was assisting Governments in the preparation and implementation of pilot functional literacy projects. The specialized agencies could play an important part in the five-year experimental programme, and it was to be hoped that other agencies would follow FAO's lead in integrating literacy programmes into the development projects for which they were responsible.

22. In addition to promoting economic growth, education was one of the basic social services necessary for over-all development. Literacy programmes should therefore include preventive health measures.

23. Although it was true that not enough resources were being allocated to adult education, many developing countries had little choice in the matter, and the problem of priorities was further complicated by the fact that such wealth-producing resources as were available could not be exploited without improved educational, health and other social services. Universal primary education could be attained in many countries within a reasonable time only through large-scale foreign aid. All States, and particularly the affluent countries, should therefore respond to the appeal for more funds.

24. The world campaign for universal literacy should not imply a total transplantation of foreign values and cultures into the societies of developing countries: teaching methods should, as far as possible, be related to the specific requirements of the country concerned and the cultural traditions of its people. The principal medium of instruction should be the national language. Thus, the programme would not only educate the people but also preserve their culture; in that connexion, his delegation noted with satisfaction the work being done on African linguistics and the transcription of vernacular languages.

25. The Nigerian delegation would give serious consideration to the amendments proposed by the United States representative.

26. Mr. VILFAN (Yugoslavia) said that his delegation, which was a sponsor of draft resolution A/C.2/L.926, attached the highest importance to the fight against illiteracy. Every contribution, in whatever form, was precious. Increasing emphasis had rightly been given to the functional role of literacy in economic development, and agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), FAO and the ILO should be encouraged to integrate appropriate literacy programmes into their projects. At the national level, it was important that literacy programmes should form an integral part of the economic system as a whole, as Yugoslavia's own experience in overcoming illiteracy had shown. His delegation fully supported United Nations efforts to achieve universal literacy, in which UNESCO, which had already scored notable successes, would naturally play a central role.

27. Mr. KOCHUBEI (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that despite strenuous, and to some extent

successful, efforts on the part of international organizations and Governments, illiteracy remained one of the world's most urgent problems. The fact that in some countries access to education was denied to the poor or on racial grounds made it essential for the United Nations, and particularly UNESCO, to do everything in its power to eliminate illiteracy, which many countries had inherited from the colonial era. If the developing countries were to have suitably trained personnel in sufficient numbers, those restrictions would have to disappear.

28. Instead of consisting of a mere study by international organizations, the world campaign must be firmly rooted in practical national efforts. In that connexion, the experience of a number of countries which had overcome illiteracy should be fully utilized. Countries should make the best possible use of their internal resources rather than relying on external aid. In the Ukraine, where only one in four had been literate before the 1917 Revolution, illiteracy had been fully eradicated in 20 years through the adoption of legislation instituting universal compulsory education for seven years and special institutions to eliminate illiteracy. Today, 13.8 million persons, or one third of the population, were receiving various grades of education in the Ukraine, and 50,000 secondary-school teachers graduated annually from the establishments of higher education.

29. The United Nations and UNESCO should continue to study ways and means of supporting national efforts to improve literacy and publicize the experience of Governments which had been successful in eradicating illiteracy. Educational planning, where it did not already exist, could play a significant role in the important work of raising educational and cultural levels through greater literacy. More rational use should be made of multilateral aid, which should come from existing voluntary contributions to United Nations technical assistance programmes, by avoiding unjustified overhead and unproductive expenditure.

30. The Ukrainian delegation supported the ideas and objectives of the draft resolution, but believed that greater clarity, particularly in operative paragraphs 2 and 3, would be required before the texts could receive unanimous support.

31. Mr. TADJO (Ivory Coast) said that his country had been host in 1964 to the Regional Conference on the Planning and Organization of Literacy Programmes in Africa and the Conference of Ministers of Education of African countries. The Ivory Coast attached particular importance to literacy, not only as a fundamental human right, but as an essential factor in economic development. All available resources must be mobilized against illiteracy, which greatly hampered advancement in agriculture, industry and trade. Despite the allocation by many developing countries of substantial proportions of their national income to education, and the adoption by a number of African and Latin American countries of long-term educational plans, it was improbable that there would be universal education in those countries within twenty years, and the number of illiterates was therefore likely to grow.

32. It was to be hoped that greater resources would be made available for the world campaign for uni-

versal literacy, which would be one of UNESCO's most important programmes. The significant gesture of the Shahinshah of Iran in donating to the world campaign the equivalent of one day's military budget showed that funds being used for military purposes could be released for development in other ways than through disarmament. In that connexion, it was to be hoped that the Committee would in future take a new and dynamic approach to the conversion to peaceful needs of resources released by disarmament.

33. Mr. ABE (Japan) said that his delegation fully shared UNESCO's concern at the increase in the number of adult illiterates in the first half of the United Nations Development Decade, although the campaign to eradicate illiteracy had brought about percentage decrease in the number of illiterates.^{2/} His country's success in eliminating illiteracy had been a major factor in its rapid social and economic advancement, and Japan fully recognized the urgent need for greater literacy as well as the importance of adult and vocational education in the developing countries in the promotion of their economic development. His delegation therefore welcomed the functional approach being taken by many developing countries, which were overcoming illiteracy with UNESCO's help.

34. While his delegation had had insufficient time to study the draft resolution, it did not anticipate any difficulty in supporting it.

35. Mr. VIAUD (France) said his delegation fully realized that education could serve as the basis for improving the material well-being of mankind. It was the policy of the French Government to bestow the benefits of French culture on any country desiring it and France's total budget for technical and cultural assistance amounted to \$100 million a year. There were at present 50,000 French teachers in foreign countries, some of them paid by the French Government and others by the recipient Governments. Recently his Government had decided to use some of its military personnel for the purpose of technical co-operation, and there were now several thousand soldiers serving abroad in that new army of knowledge. Much more, however, remained to be done and the struggle to stamp out illiteracy must be waged unremittingly.

36. France gave its active support to UNESCO and would vote in favour of draft resolution A/C.2/L.926.

37. Mr. USTUN (Turkey) said that item 47 was one of the most important on the Committee's agenda. The economic, social and political implications of literacy were obvious. Turkey had made enormous efforts to combat illiteracy during the last decade but had not succeeded in stamping it out. The situation had been aggravated by the high population rate of nearly 3 per cent per year. The Turkish Government had set aside 3.7 per cent of the gross national product for education, a figure which would rise to 4.7 per cent in the near future. Since the adoption of the Experimental World Literacy Programme by UNESCO in 1964, Turkey had given priority to literacy projects directly related to economic development.

It hoped that its domestic efforts would be supplemented by international action.

38. While illiterate nations would never become rich, well-educated nations soon achieved affluence. Literacy must be the foundation of all economic and social development and, since resources were limited and the needs vast, concerted international action and the help of the developed countries were essential.

39. The adoption of draft resolution A/C.2/L.926, of which Turkey was a sponsor, should succeed in mobilizing public opinion both in the developed and developing countries. He paid a tribute to the contribution made by Iran and by UNESCO and other international bodies to the campaign for universal literacy and hoped that the draft resolution would receive unanimous support.

40. Mr. EGUINO LEDO (Bolivia) expressed his country's deep interest in and willingness to contribute to the world campaign for universal literacy. Illiteracy, poverty and hunger were three of the major problems facing the developing countries and the campaign against them must be waged simultaneously. Bolivia hoped that it might be selected for one of the pilot studies being organized by UNESCO since its rate of illiteracy was high. It was mobilizing all its domestic efforts to combat illiteracy and eventually hoped to win the fight with international assistance.

41. Mr. HOGENDORP (Netherlands) said that literacy was not an end in itself but a means of helping individuals to play a full part in their own societies and hence in the international community. His delegation endorsed the view, expressed at the World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy and further emphasized by UNESCO, that functional programmes should be linked with development priorities. Indeed, the link between literacy and development was becoming increasingly clear. For example, the chief representative of the Netherlands at Teheran had been the Minister in charge of development aid and a former Minister of Education.

42. His delegation approved of the decision taken by the Governing Council of UNDP to finance the pilot projects for Algeria, Iran, Mali, Ecuador and the United Republic of Tanzania. The results of those projects would be particularly valuable in showing the relationship between education and productivity. He was glad to note that UNDP was also assisting FAO and the ILO in similar projects. The Netherlands delegation would prefer the bulk of the funds for educational projects to come from UNDP rather than from any new and separate voluntary fund.

43. It fully supported draft resolution A/C.2/L.926.

44. Mr. LOBANOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) agreed that there was a close link between literacy and economic development. Iran had made an important contribution to the study of the subject by acting as host to the World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy and by contributing \$700,000 for the world campaign. That campaign must be based on the national efforts of individual States and on their widest possible participation.

^{2/} See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-first Session, Annexes, agenda item 19, document E/4214, para. 5.

45. The Soviet Union realized the importance of the subject and had participated actively in discussion of it in various international forums. In its early history, the USSR had faced similar problems to those now confronting the developing countries. Before the revolution of October 1917, 76 per cent of the people had been illiterate and illiteracy had been particularly rife on the borders of Czarist Russia and in the regions of north-east and central Asia. In spite of enormous difficulties and without any assistance from abroad, the young Soviet State had waged a tremendous battle against illiteracy, the result of which had contributed to the economic, social and political transformation of Soviet society.

46. The State had played the main role in the campaign and special commissions had been set up at the State and local levels. Schools for literacy had been established throughout the Soviet Union and millions of workers had attended them. At first the campaign had concentrated on people between sixteen and thirty-five and subsequently the age-limit had been raised to fifty and over. The activities of the State had been complemented by those of public organizations and intellectual associations and the campaign had been pursued simultaneously in all the Republics of the Union. The success of the campaign had been partly due to the fact that instruction was given in the vernacular so that the various national groups were able to retain their own literature and cultural institutions. By 1930 illiteracy in the Soviet Union had been wiped out.

47. The Soviet Union was now doing everything in its power to help other countries do likewise. It was assisting the developing countries by the establishment of educational centres at different levels, the secondment of Soviet teachers and the provision of laboratory equipment and other teaching aids. It was participating actively in the training of national educational cadres

in the developing countries and welcomed large numbers of foreign students who would become teachers on their return home and thus help eradicate illiteracy.

48. Other methods of promoting literacy were seminars, exhibitions, and the exchange of scientists and teachers. In 1965, large-scale cultural exchanges had taken place between the Soviet Union and the countries of Asia and Africa. In May 1966, the International Seminar on the Eradication of Illiteracy had been held at Tashkent in which forty developing countries had taken part. Multilateral aid could also play an important role but it must be carefully organized with no waste of resources. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization had done much to promote the world campaign for universal literacy and, in its budget for 1967-1968, had opened a special account for voluntary contributions for that purpose. Nevertheless, UNESCO should devote more attention to the links between literacy and development.

49. At the same time, it was the duty of Governments in the developing countries to enact legislation to ensure the effective organization of nation-wide literacy campaigns based on the experience of other more advanced countries. Those national efforts should be supplemented by multilateral and bilateral aid so that, by the end of the present decade, the number of illiterates throughout the world would be reduced. For that purpose, large amounts of money would be necessary and it was unfortunate that the present tense international atmosphere had made it more difficult to obtain such funds.

50. He hoped that additional consultations on draft resolution A/C.2/L.926 would lead to the formulation of a generally acceptable text.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.

