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Chairman: Mr. Ismael THAJEB (Indonesia).

AGENDA ITEM 39

Co-operation for the eradication of illiteracy throughout the world: report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (E/3771 and Corr.1 and 2, A/5527, A/C.2/L.733/Rev.1 and Add.1 and 2) (*continued*)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to continue its consideration of the draft resolution concerning a world campaign for universal literacy (A/C.2/L.733/Rev.1 and Add.1 and 2) and the amendments to that draft (A/C.2/L.752, A/C.2/L.754-759).

2. Mr. AL-NAKIB (Kuwait) said that a considerable part of the Kuwaiti budget was devoted to education. In 1954-1955, the educational system had been reorganized and modernized and a twelve-year period of schooling had been instituted. Many students attended foreign universities. In 1962-1963, school enrolment had totalled 60,000, including pupils from other Arab States. The University of Kuwait would soon be opened and would be followed by technical colleges. The nutritional needs of pupils were the responsibility of a nutrition centre. There was also an extensive programme of evening schools providing adult education.

3. Kuwait, which would continue to support the ideal of universal education, was a sponsor of the draft resolution, which it hoped would be adopted unanimously.

4. Mr. KWASA (Australia) said that Australia supported continuing efforts to eradicate illiteracy throughout the world. While those efforts should be primarily national, there was also a role for international and bilateral assistance. Mass illiteracy had long been eradicated in Australia; nevertheless, it still presented a problem in Papua and New Guinea. The existence of about 700 different languages in those territories constituted the biggest single obstacle to achieving mass literacy. Despite recent progress, illiteracy would remain widespread for some time, particularly among the adult population.

5. Mass illiteracy was a reflection of economic underdevelopment and efforts to combat it were limited by the financial and other resources available for development. It was true that a campaign against illiteracy would involve only a small proportion of the gross

national income of the developing countries, but those countries had no extra resources available for programmes below the highest level of priority. Their national resources alone were already inadequate to meet their most urgent social and economic needs. In implementing a campaign against adult illiteracy, it was important to bear in mind the need to continue the education of younger age groups, to take into account over-all development priorities and to make the best use of resources.

6. The draft resolution before the Committee took those needs into account. While stressing the importance of eradicating illiteracy, the draft recognized the importance of over-all development plans. That recognition should also be made explicit in operative paragraphs 2, 3 and 4, which dealt with bilateral and multilateral assistance. His delegation supported the objectives of the draft resolution but hoped that the sponsors would consider changes along the lines suggested by the delegations of France, the United States and Indonesia. It also supported the New Zealand amendment incorporating the idea of pilot projects (A/C.2/L.756).

7. Mrs. GINOR (Israel) said that man was both a factor of production and the ultimate aim of all production processes. Consequently, his education and skills largely determined his level of productivity and his capacity to enjoy the fruits of his labour. Industrial output was increasing because of improvements in the efficiency of labour and management. Those improvements, together with the development of new ideas and inventions, were the product of the fertile minds of the educated. The illiterate person was unable to contribute to that process and develop his own potentialities. His level of living was low because of his small contribution to production.

8. The cost of the world campaign for universal literacy seemed small compared with its benefits. Expenditure on vocational training and research had come to be recognized as being highly productive and was given priority in many national development plans. However, training and extension services were effective only if there was a basis of literacy. Adult literacy was also necessary to ensure that the results of primary education were lasting. Adult literacy programmes and general education and training programmes were therefore complementary. If a small percentage of the total resources available for education and training was devoted to adult literacy, the effectiveness of the programme as a whole would be increased. The share of the under-developed countries in the literacy programme for all persons of working age would amount to only 0.14 per cent of the gross national product. It was essential for them to make that contribution if expenditure on general education and training was to be effective. Within the adult literacy programme, it would be possible to give priority to lower age groups. Many countries were already giving

high priority to education and adult literacy programmes; the adoption of the draft resolution would stimulate further international aid in that field.

9. Her delegation supported the draft resolution, which would be improved by some of the proposed amendments. Particular stress should be laid on national efforts.

10. Mr. ARKADYEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that mass illiteracy seemed paradoxical in an age of unprecedented scientific discoveries. Two fifths of the world population were illiterate and isolated from world culture and scientific knowledge. In his statement before the Committee (899th meeting), the Director-General of UNESCO had described the alarming scope of that shameful social phenomenon. The geographical distribution and the history of mass illiteracy showed that it was the inheritance of colonialism. The Governments of many newly independent countries were sparing no effort to eradicate illiteracy. Although faced with complex economic and other tasks, they realized the need to raise the cultural level of their peoples. Proof that it was possible to eradicate illiteracy was provided by the successes of several countries, particularly Cuba and Algeria.

11. The Soviet Union had also achieved notable successes in eradicating illiteracy. In pre-revolutionary European Russia, the situation had been similar to that currently prevailing in many developing countries and 76 per cent of the population had been illiterate. The situation had been particularly bad in the other territories of the Russian Empire. Immediately after the revolution, despite its many other problems, the Soviet Government had launched a decisive campaign against illiteracy. For that purpose, special State and local commissions had been established and schools had been opened throughout the country. Efforts had been concentrated first on the population from sixteen to thirty-five years of age and had subsequently been extended to citizens up to fifty years of age. Special schools concentrating on the eradication of illiteracy had been opened in 1926 and had been widely attended. Illiteracy had been completely eradicated in the Soviet Union in the 1930's. The rapid success of the literacy campaign had been ensured by the participation of State and people's organizations and had been achieved without external assistance. The campaign had been closely linked with efforts to ensure the widest participation of the population in the economic and cultural life of the country and in the building of a new society. The outlying areas of Tsarist Russia had been transformed into republics with universal literacy, a high cultural level and wide attendance at educational establishments.

12. The right to education was set forth in the Soviet Constitution and was guaranteed by the provision of universal, free and compulsory education for eight years and by State grants for all types of educational activity. In 1962-1963, 227,000 schools were providing general education to 42 million pupils, compared with 9.7 million in 1914. Two million pupils were studying at State boarding schools.

13. The Soviet Union therefore had considerable experience in education, which it was willing to share with other countries. Indeed, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries were already giving considerable assistance to many developing countries in various aspects of their educational development. However, multilateral aid should also be given to those countries

through the technical assistance programmes of the United Nations, UNICEF and UNESCO, as well as through other multilateral schemes. The most rational and effective use should be made of the resources available and there should be no unjustified administrative expenditure.

14. The major effort to combat illiteracy should, however, be made by Governments of the countries concerned. The newly independent countries should regard the provision of educational facilities as a basic element of their over-all development and should take a pride in eradicating illiteracy, providing universal education and training cadres. The active participation of the Government was essential. It was the duty of the Government to enact effective legislation on the organization of education and the eradication of illiteracy and to mobilize all national resources for that purpose. The co-operation of all social, cultural and political organizations, of trade unions and, indeed, of all intellectual workers was also essential.

15. The unanimous adoption of the draft resolution, which could be improved by the acceptance of some of the amendments, would encourage joint efforts to eradicate mass illiteracy.

16. Mr. ALI (Pakistan) emphasized that the development of human resources was the most important prerequisite for economic and social progress. His delegation therefore attached very high priority to the draft resolution. It was paradoxical that, while man was making spectacular scientific advances, he had failed in some of his basic obligations to his fellows. Compared with the colossal figures spent on defence, the amount required for the world literacy campaign was small. The advanced industrial countries were extending assistance to developing countries but very little was earmarked for education. The addition of a few million dollars for the purpose of eradicating illiteracy would not impose a tremendous sacrifice and might have far-reaching effects.

17. The developing countries themselves must find the bulk of the resources for the literacy campaign and relate it to their over-all development plans and to local conditions. The Government of Pakistan had increased its efforts to eradicate illiteracy but so far had not achieved very satisfactory results. Many children relapsed into illiteracy after leaving school. As a result, the percentage of adult literacy had shown a tendency to rise very slowly.

18. The international assistance visualized in the draft resolution was expected only to stimulate and supplement national efforts. The sponsors were not trying to introduce a new scale of priorities within national development plans; rather, they were seeking to arouse interest in the basic problem of illiteracy. The adoption of the draft resolution and the co-operation of the advanced countries in the world campaign for universal literacy would open a new chapter in world economic and social progress.

19. Mr. PUGA (Chile) said that lack of education was at the very root of under-development. At the beginning of the century, Chile had adopted a law making primary education compulsory; as a result, the number of illiterates in the country had dropped to 15 per cent. Because of the population increase, it was becoming difficult to maintain that figure. In 1961, a national movement had been started for the eradication of illiteracy and was now in full swing.

20. His delegation did not share the pessimism voiced by many delegations concerning the prospects of eradicating illiteracy throughout the world. The efforts being made by individual States and the assistance to be given by the United Nations and UNESCO were encouraging. Furthermore, the amount requested by UNESCO for a ten-year period was equivalent to only one sixth of the money spent on armaments in a single year. The snowballing effect of educational development was perhaps not sufficiently realized.

21. He hoped that it would be possible to incorporate the amendments that had been made to the draft resolution without sacrificing its fundamental principles.

22. Mr. OCHIRBAL (Mongolia) said that the eradication of illiteracy was of paramount importance for both economic and cultural development. Neither the developed nor the developing countries could afford to waste their human resources. In an era of unprecedented scientific progress, it was paradoxical and challenging to note that two fifths of the world's people were illiterate and that in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the illiteracy rate was between 70 and 90 per cent.

23. No Government could ignore the problem of illiteracy. The Mongolian People's Republic had completely eradicated illiteracy as part of its cultural revolution. Before 1921, most of its population had been illiterate and only a privileged clique had received the benefits of education. Subsequently, the Government had launched a literacy campaign which had been brilliantly successful. The 1963 census showed that 365 persons in every thousand over the age of twelve had reached a level of education which included primary, secondary and higher studies. Numerous institutes of higher learning had been established. Primary education was now compulsory in the rural areas and a plan was being prepared for a compulsory seven-year course of secondary education in the towns.

24. He submitted some amendments (A/C.2/L.759) to the draft resolution which stressed that the eradication of illiteracy was substantially a national problem and that emphasis should be laid on the expansion of national networks of primary education.

25. Mr. GHAS (Afghanistan) said the report of UNESCO (E/3771 and Corr.1 and 2) revealed the grim facts of world illiteracy. From its inception, UNESCO had been studying the problem, which was of vital concern to the developing countries. Those countries had given serious thought to the matter and in nearly all of them literacy campaigns were in progress. But, inevitably, they lacked financial resources and personnel.

26. In Afghanistan, an intensive campaign for the eradication of illiteracy had been launched and a commission would soon be appointed to draw up a comprehensive plan for accelerating it. Primary education was compulsory and free. Secondary and university education was also free. Books and other school materials were provided without charge by the Ministry of Education. The number of libraries and other educational facilities was constantly growing. Such measures would progressively eliminate illiteracy and would create the basic conditions for economic and social change.

27. In order to eradicate illiteracy, the developing countries must launch a threefold programme covering compulsory primary schooling, a national campaign for adult literacy and adequate follow-up work for the bene-

fit of newly literate adults. The time had come to give a new impetus to national efforts and to encourage all States to give appropriate priorities to the problem of illiteracy as part of an over-all development plan.

28. The sponsors of the draft resolution were not advocating any crash programme for the eradication of illiteracy and were not seeking any financial commitments at the present stage. They were merely inviting the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the Director-General of UNESCO, to explore ways and means of supporting a world campaign for the eradication of illiteracy.

29. Mr. KOMIVES (Hungary) whole-heartedly welcomed the draft resolution. He agreed with previous speakers that the eradication of illiteracy was an essential prerequisite for development. Of course, the developing countries themselves must make the main effort and their literacy plans must be closely integrated with their plans for general development.

30. After the Second World War, the Hungarian Government had nationalized the schools and opened the gates of secondary and higher education to the children of workers and peasants. The age-limit for compulsory schooling had been extended from twelve to fourteen years of age and, in 1961, to sixteen. The Government was thus paving the way for the implementation of compulsory secondary schooling. Primary school enrolment had risen from 78.8 per cent in 1938 to more than 99 per cent in 1962. Before the Second World War, one out of every fourteen children had attended secondary school; today, the figure had risen to one out of three. In 1962, there had been six times as many students attending universities as there had been in 1938. The State had done all it could to promote the advancement of the educational system and, as a result, Hungary had been able to help the developing countries in the educational field, particularly by welcoming foreign students to its universities.

31. The inclusion in the draft resolution of the various amendments submitted would help to achieve a more balanced text. In particular, greater stress should be laid on national literacy campaigns and on primary education. His delegation would find it difficult to support the operative paragraph 5 because international financial aid should be organized, not by the establishment of additional funds, but by the improved utilization of existing resources.

32. Mr. KARAKOYLU (Turkey) expressed his delegation's appreciation of the efforts made by UNESCO to solve the problem of illiteracy in the world. It was his delegation's earnest hope that those efforts would be intensified. The UNESCO report contained useful information for future action. UNESCO was also to be congratulated on its valuable recommendations for national and international literacy programmes.

33. Nevertheless, as was stated in the annex to the report, the primary responsibility for effective, energetic action against illiteracy must be borne by the Governments of Member States in which that problem was still acute. Turkey had adopted a series of measures designed to eradicate illiteracy. Its development plan provided for the extension of education to all children of school age. The percentage of children attending school at present was 73 per cent; under the plan, that figure would rise to 100 per cent in ten years. Primary education was free and had long been compulsory.

34. With regard to adult education, the plan also provided for appropriate measures within the framework of community development and vocational guidance programmes. In addition, servicemen had for some time been taught to read and write during their military service so that when they were demobilized they would no longer be illiterate. Illiteracy would no longer be a problem when the development plan ended, in fifteen years.

35. His delegation associated itself with the previous speakers who had congratulated the sponsors of the draft resolution. It supported that draft in principle. However, some of the amendments submitted would improve it considerably. In view of the number of amendments and the fact that the sponsors had not yet made known their position with regard to them, his delegation would state its views at a later stage.

36. Mr. DIMBU (Romania) said that the problem of the eradication of illiteracy throughout the world reflected the desire of the masses to acquire knowledge in order to take their proper place in contemporary life. Faced with the contradiction between the tremendous technological progress of the modern world and the inability of many people to benefit from that progress, all States must combine their efforts to further economic progress and raise the general cultural level of mankind. The United Nations and UNESCO had done a great deal to inform the world of the problem of illiteracy and to solve it by means of experts, missions and scholarships. However, while those efforts were noteworthy, illiteracy must be regarded as a national problem of the countries concerned. In many countries, it was only by combined international and national efforts and by organizing a truly multilateral campaign, in which the competent governmental bodies co-operated with social organizations, that illiteracy would be overcome.

37. In 1945, there had been 4 million illiterates and semi-illiterates in Romania. The Romanian People's Republic had embarked on a major campaign and had eliminated illiteracy within a short period. At the same time, the necessary material conditions had been created to enable all children of school age to be included in the educational process and thus reduce the sources of illiteracy. Since Romania's liberation from the fascist yoke in August 1944, there had been radical changes in the social and economic life of the country. The literacy courses had been organized by the trade-union organizations in August 1944. In 1948, the State had undertaken to eradicate illiteracy in order to fulfil important social and economic targets and to raise the cultural level of the people. Under a law of 1948, the responsibility for solving the problem of illiteracy had been assigned to the Ministry of Education, and a special department had been set up in that ministry to deal with the problem.

38. One of the principal methods used to enlist the co-operation of the millions of illiterates and ensure their regular attendance at literacy courses had been the explanatory work carried out by individuals or small groups of intellectuals and workers. A campaign had also been conducted by means of newspapers, radio broadcasts, pamphlets and posters to inform the population of the advantages of and need for education. Cultural evenings had been organized in enterprises and houses of culture to convince the people of the benefits of culture. The Government had not confined its activity to basic literacy courses; it had also taken steps to encourage the former illiterate to pursue his studies

in evening schools offering general courses or in vocational and technical schools.

39. Although the Romanian People's Republic had virtually solved the problem in its own country, it had continued to be concerned with the international campaign for the eradication of illiteracy. Its delegations to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other international meetings had actively participated in debates on the subject and had submitted many specific proposals. In the past few years, Romania had granted assistance in education to the developing countries, particularly those which had recently attained independence. Romania had awarded scholarships through the Economic and Social Council for the training of teachers from African countries and a number of delegations had visited his country to study the organization and operation of its educational system.

40. The achievement of general and complete disarmament would release resources which could be used for the benefit of educational and cultural development. The campaign for the eradication of illiteracy must also take into account the need to educate youth in the ideals of peace, mutual respect and understanding among peoples.

41. The Romanian delegation appreciated the initiative and concern of the sponsors of the draft resolution. The eradication of illiteracy required the mobilization of national human and material resources, in combination with technical assistance granted for that purpose by other States. The Romanian People's Republic was ready to share its experience in that field with other countries and to make its contribution to the world campaign for the eradication of illiteracy.

42. His delegation reserved the right to state its position on the revised version of the draft resolution which was to be submitted shortly.

43. Mr. PRIMELLES (Cuba) said that his delegation had a special interest in the subject under consideration since Cuba had faced the problem of illiteracy less than two years previously. Many social and economic reasons had been given for the high rate of illiteracy that existed in the world. It would not be difficult to eradicate illiteracy if the States concerned took appropriate action and mobilized the necessary resources.

44. In March 1959, the revolutionary Government of Cuba had launched a massive campaign against illiteracy. The campaign had been directed by the Ministry of Education through the National Literacy Committee, composed of representatives of various sectors of the population. One of the slogans had been: "If you know, teach; if you don't know, learn!" The campaign had been a complete success. When the revolutionary Government had come to power, only 15 per cent of the children of school age had been receiving primary education; by 1961-1962, the figure had risen to 100 per cent. The number of illiterates had dropped from 979,207 in 1961 to 271,995 in 1962, which represented an illiteracy rate of 3.9 per cent for the total population, one of the lowest in the world. In four years, Cuba had succeeded in fulfilling UNESCO's main objective in Latin America and had made six years of primary education available to all children of school age. The decisive factors had been the large-scale mobilization of different sectors of the population and the efficient management of the revolutionary Government.

45. The work had been financed by State funds and voluntary contributions from revolutionary organizations. Teachers from almost all the countries of Latin America had come to help. Regular teachers and brigades of volunteers had given literacy courses throughout the country. Believing that it was not enough to be able to read and write, his Government had drawn

up an educational plan which enabled former illiterates to continue their studies.

46. He hoped that the sponsors would agree to some of the amendments submitted, which would improve the draft resolution and ensure its unanimous adoption.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.