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First Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FOURTH MEETING

Held at Lake Success, New York,
on Tuesday, 22 August 1950, at 11 a.m.

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<u>Chairman:</u>	Mr. Shiva RAO	India
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mr. SPITS	Netherlands
<u>Members:</u>	Mr. HAY)	Australia
	Mr. GRAVES)	
	Mr. WENDELEN	Belgium
	Mr. JOBIM	Brazil
	Mr. SVEISTRUP	Denmark
	Mr. EL MESSIRI	Egypt
	Mr. GARREAU	France

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Members

(cont'd):

Mr. de ARACZ	Mexico
Mr. van BAAL	Netherlands
Mr. LAKING	New Zealand
Mr. LOPEZ	Philippines
Mr. WOLLIN	Sweden
Mr. WARD	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Mr. CALIVER	United States of America
Mr. ALAMO-BLANCO	Venezuela

Representatives of specialized agencies:

Mr. EVANS	International Labour Organisation (ILO)
Dr. KAUL	World Health Organization (WHO)
Mr. DESTOMBES	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
Miss WEHRWEIN	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Secretariat:

Mr. HOO	Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Trusteeship and Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories
Mr. BENSON	Secretary of the Committee

EDUCATION IN NON-SELF-GOVERNING TERRITORIES: THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION AND REPORTS OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES: (a) ERADICATION OF ILLITERACY (A/AC.35/L.11, A/AC.35/L.11/Add.1, A/AC.35/L.16); (b) LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION (A/AC.35/L.15) (continued)

1. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the debate on the questions of eradication of illiteracy and the language of instruction was not closed. He suggested that, as the Committee proceeded to discuss other topics under the general heading of education in Non-Self-Governing Territories (item 5 of the agenda), representatives should feel free to return to topics already covered. A certain amount of elasticity would permit the Committee to expedite its business.

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2. He informed the Committee that, in response to his appeal for pictorial material, the United Kingdom representative had given him the three latest issues of an illustrated periodical, "Overseas Education", and the Belgian representative had supplied a number of photographs. That material was available to members of the Committee for inspection.
3. Mr. SPITS (Netherlands) introduced his delegation's specialist in education, Mr. van Baal.
4. Mr. van BAAL (Netherlands) drew attention to the fact that, since Netherlands New Guinea had previously been administratively part of the Netherlands East Indies a separate information paper on New Guinea (A/1273/Add.1) had been submitted for the first time. To supplement that information, he would endeavour to sketch the background and describe some of the educational problems of the area.
5. The Netherlands Administration had discovered that orthodox teaching methods, which had been successful in the case of Indonesians, had failed when applied to the Papuans in New Guinea. The so-called People's Schools, which were modelled on those of Indonesia, had been unable to impart even the rudiments of knowledge to the Papuans.
6. Such poor results were due, however to the peculiar mental outlook and the cultural and religious background of the Papuans, and not to low intellectual capacity as evidenced by the fact that after a decade or so of contact with western civilization definite progress could be noted.
7. A great obstacle to education was the fact that the indigenous inhabitants firmly believed in the all-pervading power of magic. They went to school not with the rational expectation of acquiring knowledge which would permit them slowly and gradually to raise their standard of living, but with a dim expectation of somehow learning to compel the objects they wanted to come into their possession. The so-called "Cargo-cult" was another aspect of the same attitude. Followers of that cult arranged feasts combined with prayer and dancing, expecting that the celebration would be followed by the arrival at their shores of a ship loaded with coveted goods.
8. The schools had to proceed with great caution, lest the Papuans should conceive that they were learning magic; on the other hand, education was

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urgently needed. Papuans had been uprooted by their contact with modern civilization, their religious and spiritual life had suffered a collapse, and tribal customs were breaking down. The Papuans had begun to realize that they were no more than a small and backward people in a vast and profoundly alien world; their moral needs were great and must be supplied.

9. For those reasons, a special approach to education had been made in New Guinea. The carrying out of that programme had been entrusted to the missions; all the schools -- of which there were 531, with 25,883 pupils out of a population of 269,000 -- were subsidized mission schools. It should be noted that the schools had not yet reached the greatest part of the population in the almost inaccessible mountainous interior. 358 of the schools were of an entirely new type, adapted to local conditions and to the mental attitude of the people; they were so-called civilizing schools, which had no age-limit for pupils and taught largely agriculture (with particular attention to new agricultural methods and the cultivation of new crops, preferably cereals), Malay, flute-playing and religion. Reading, writing and arithmetic were treated as of secondary importance. It was only when the civilizing school had done its work of accustoming the people to the idea of education that the usual three-year programme of the people's schools was introduced.

10. A vocational school had been opened for teachers in agriculture, and great attention was paid to every possible way of developing the economy of the region, since the Netherlands Government was convinced that successful acculturation was possible only when economic conditions had been improved. The schools were one means to that end. Great importance was attached to the collaboration of the missions in the work of education, since by becoming part of a world-wide community -- the Church -- the Papuans made a first step towards meeting that great world with the civilization of which they had only recently become acquainted.

11. In conclusion, he noted that the foregoing remarks provided no more than a superficial account of the situation. The Netherlands Administration was aware that it was only at the beginning of a long and difficult road. It was to be hoped, however, that the exchange of experience which was taking place would help it to improve its methods and to attain its goal.

12. Mr. HAY (Australia) said that his delegation would make a statement with respect to the language of instruction at a later meeting; but Mr. Graves, the education expert on his delegation, would address the Committee on the subject of eradication of illiteracy, with special reference to Papua.

13. Mr. GRAVES (Australia) said that he was fully aware of the urgent nature of the problem of eradicating illiteracy. It was the view of his Government, as well as his own, that in order to be effective, efforts to eradicate illiteracy should be connected with some other vital aspect of development of the community. It was immaterial whether literacy campaigns were linked with health education campaigns or with some other facet of community life but the link was essential in order to enlist and focus community interest and support.

14. The experience of the Australian Government in Papua clearly showed that literacy in that region could not be combatted alone, but must be envisaged in relation to other and possibly more urgent development requirements of the Papuan people. Furthermore, a demonstration project recently conducted in New Guinea by Dr. Lauback in association with a mission showed that, while a literacy campaign might at first bring spectacular results, if pursued with too much zeal it might eventually produce disappointment on the part of the pupils and thus militate against the proper development of the general programme of education. The project had been conducted in one of the more remote highlands areas; it had met with great enthusiasm on the part of the inhabitants, who had then clamoured for further material, which it had not been possible to prepare in time. Steps had since been taken to follow up the demonstration project; an intra-departmental committee had been set up to have detailed studies made of techniques of the mass pursuit of literacy and its consequences on social development.

15. One lesson to be derived from the experience was that a literacy campaign should not be pressed harder than resources permitted. Moreover, if taken seriously, it could occupy a disproportionate amount of the time and effort of the Department of Education, which, as the Australian Government conceived its function, should not merely run schools but should concern itself

with all aspects of social development. He noted in passing that he himself was in part responsible for the fact that his Government accepted the functional interpretation of education, a point of view which was also shared by the Research Council of the South Pacific Commission.

16. As the Netherlands representative had made clear, the problem of education in New Guinea and Papua was quite different from the conventional pattern. An intensive course designed to enable Australian teachers who were sent to Papua to adapt themselves to local requirements and to learn special techniques was therefore given at the School for Pacific Administration. An orientation course of that type was an absolute necessity. In the matter of education, the very first steps were being taken, and since it was clear that any false step might bring about a reaction of disappointment, which would imperil the wider programme of education, steps were being taken with great caution. In fact, the propaganda in favour of literacy included warnings to the effect that learning to read was an extremely difficult process.

17. A method of approach which had been tried out -- and which he hoped it would be possible to apply more widely -- had been to set up a so-called area education centre, where a specialist in social anthropology and linguistics had been installed. It would be for the specialist himself to find his ways, to establish the syllabus and indeed to decide in what manner he would be most useful to the population. Teaching the people to read and write would be only one aspect of the programme which, it was hoped, would touch on every facet of their existence.

18. Mr. Graves trusted that it would be possible at a later time to report to the Committee on the results of that experiment. It was planned in the near future to set up a number of similar institutions; the Government would provide funds and guidance, but full use would be made of voluntary organizations which had familiarized themselves with the culture of the people.

19. Another possible approach to which serious consideration was being given was to organize community development projects, wider in scope than the area education centre, among people who had had relatively greater contact with Western culture. The success of such an enterprise would depend largely on finding a leader able to achieve real co-ordination of the activities of the various departments and agencies concerned. The Research Council of the South Pacific Commission had recently instituted such a project in one of the Fiji Islands. A similar project was started in a community in Papua.

20. His Government was acutely aware of the difficulties involved; it neither sought nor expected spectacular results. It was not yet convinced that any technique which would be easily applicable to all cases of illiteracy could be found. One of the major problems was to supply adequate and suitable follow-up material, of preparing it for publication and of publishing it. Efforts had therefore been made to impress the existence of such difficulties upon the indigenous inhabitants in order to curb their impatience.

21. These general considerations were relevant to the conclusions reached at a recent meeting of six experts on the Research Council of the South Pacific Commission. It had instructed a research officer to gather all available information on mass literacy campaigns with a view to their possible application in the South Pacific area. Although a very large amount of information had been gathered, the research officer had found considerable difficulty in obtaining really useful data on training techniques. The representative of UNESCO would be interested to learn that it had been particularly hard to obtain information on the "global method" recommended by that organization's rural education seminar in India in 1949. On the basis of the information received, however, it had been possible to conclude that mass literacy campaigns should not be undertaken except in relation to other social projects; they should be neither the first nor the most important parts of general campaigns for community education.

22. Dealing with the relative merits of the vernacular, a lingua franca or an international language, such as English or French, the experts had concluded that the first approach to the inculcation of literacy should be through the mother-tongue.

23. The experts had been disturbed by the expense and complexity involved in preparing follow-up material, particularly when the campaigns were carried on in the vernacular and had therefore urged that provision should be made for a continuous flow of such material before the campaign was set in motion.

24. The final recommendation made by the experts had been that a literacy information bureau and a literature bureau should be set up to meet the needs of the South Pacific Territories. The experts -- although not necessarily the South Pacific Commission -- believed that the establishment of such bureaus was the only possible realistic approach to the problem in that area.

25. There was no easy solution in the area under consideration. It would be most unwise to assume that once the requisite techniques had been found, the sole remaining problems would be of an administrative character. The principal prerequisite for success was a virtually missionary zeal and the realization that the main objective was to build upon the indigenous culture and then add to it what was necessary for the equipping of the indigenous inhabitants to cope successfully with contemporary conditions.

26. Mr. CALIVER (United States of America) supplied details of a demonstration project set up in his country for eradicating adult illiteracy.

27. Six public and private institutions of higher education in three States had been asked to sponsor the project and to select persons on the basis of their qualifications to attend adult education institutes for six weeks during the summer; additional assistance had been obtained from philanthropic and similar organizations. The institutes had divided their time equally between the study of the principles of adult education and the study and production of instruction materials. The 35 to 40 persons attending had included specialists in psychology and the establishment of curricula, administrators, directors of education and teachers. In selecting the subject matter for such materials, four basic readers had been developed, dealing with the association between parents and children, schooling for parents and children, the study of occupations and community interests and relations. Arithmetic books and teachers' manuals had also been produced. Supplementary material had been prepared, based on the actual interests of persons attending the institutes, besides more general readers dealing with such diverse subjects as the registration of births and citizenship.

/28. After preparation,

28. After preparation, the material had been used in classes organized by institutions of learning in the neighbourhood of the institutes, which had recruited illiterates on the basis of their interest in learning; it had also served as basic text material for neighbouring night schools. Criticism of the material had been invited from those attending, particularly on the basis of their own needs. Supervisors had been sent from the central and regional offices of the project to assist teachers to use the material in accordance with the experience acquired by the institutes. Subsequently a conference had been held to evaluate the results so far achieved. The material had been used, with very little revision, for the remainder of that year and for the following year. At the end of two years, the material had been completely revised in the light of comments and experience.

29. Some difficulty had been encountered initially in obtaining commercial publication; publishers had been sceptical of success and the institutes had been suspicious of possible editing by publishers. A small publisher had finally been found, who had issued the material in the form of pamphlets printed in large primer and illustrated; they had obtained considerable commercial as well as educational success. A number of schools had considered using the pamphlets for backward children. UNESCO had initially wished to use the institutes as an associated project, but had been unable to do so, since they were merely demonstration projects.

30. The project had been designed to profit by the experience of other agencies, particularly the Army training units during the Second World War. The Army units had been able to raise illiterates to the level of the fourth grade (in the United States school system) in 150 to 260 class-hours working four hours a day five days a week. Undoubtedly, there was a greater variation inside a civilian than inside an Army group; in the Army variable factors were more favourable. The institutes had adopted the principal characteristics of the Army system, which included an emphasis on practical results rather than the methods to achieve them, learning by doing, constant supervision, constant evaluation, vocational examination and small classes. On that basis, the institutes had found they could raise civilian illiterates to the fourth-grade level in 250 class-hours.

31. The principal conclusions to be drawn were relevant to the problem in the Non-Self-Governing Territories. It could be concluded that the majority of pre-literate adults could be educated; that attendance had been enthusiastic; that those adults who desired to learn were relatively young -- from 30 to 50 years of age; that teachers should be given more stimulus to creative personal efforts; that a great deal more instruction material for pre-literate adults was needed; and that literacy campaigns were of little value unless adequate follow-up material was available.

32. The demonstration project described had a certain amount of universal application because an attempt had been made to study the process rather than the product. The main interest had been to encourage teachers to produce material on the basis of the real needs of those taught and to use their classes to produce material of immediate value on the spot. The lesson to be drawn had been that functional illiteracy was really an anachronism.

33. Mr. DESTOMBES (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), replying to the Australian representative, stated that his organization had published three pamphlets, containing information on the methods used in mass literacy campaigns in its series known as Occasional Papers.

34. Mr. KAUL (World Health Organization) agreed with the Australian representative on the importance of integrating various aspects of development in the Non-Self-Governing Territories and under-developed countries. The experience of WHO had shown that it was difficult to make progress in the field of health unless there was a parallel development in other social and educational fields. In view of that fact, WHO had set up a section to deal with social anthropology and had appointed an officer who had already visited some Territories and was advising not only WHO but also the Territories concerned.

35. WHO was indirectly interested in the problem of education, because it had found that it was difficult to interest illiterates in health education. In that connexion, it might be suggested that malnutrition and disease might be one cause of persisting illiteracy, particularly the difficulty in concentration.

36. In connexion with the remarks of the Australian representative, he observed that WHO had sent a representative to the South Pacific Conference as an earnest of its interest in social questions in all parts of the world.

37. Mr. WARD (United Kingdom) thought that the representative of WHO had very correctly emphasized the connexion between education and health. There was a vicious circle in the under-developed areas: education lagged as a result of the prevalence of malnutrition and disease, whereas it was impossible to eradicate those evils without adequate education.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.