



Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1985/WG.1/SR.7
29 April 1985

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

First regular session, 1985

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

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 25 April 1985, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. KORDS (German Democratic Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

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

Report of France (continued) (E/1982/3/Add.30 and Corr.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs. Alvarez, Mr. Berteaux, Ms. Gruot, Mr. Schricke and Mr. Talbot, (France) took places at the table.

2. Mr. SCHRICKE (France), responding to some of the points raised, said that admission to the grandes écoles was reserved for students who had passed the baccalauréat. Those institutions differed from universities in the type of higher education provided. The disciplines included science and technology, and administration. Admission to the Ecole normale supérieure was by means of a competitive examination organized by the Ministry of Education.

3. The choice referred to in paragraph 37 of the report (E/1982/3/Add.30 and Corr.1) was made on the basis of objective criteria by the institute or university concerned. The competence of candidates was, generally speaking, determined by a written examination. The selection body was composed exclusively of teachers. The same principles applied in all examinations in the field of higher education.

4. The expert from Denmark had asked for further information on the protection of the environment. The basic principle which applied was that of responsibility for damage caused; it was supplemented by principles relating particularly to damage to the environment exceeding normal pollution levels. Environmental-impact statements played a substantial role in ensuring compliance with the respective regulations. As noted in paragraph 174 of the report, article 2 of the Nature Protection Act of 10 July 1976 provided that preliminary draft plans or work projects which, owing to their significance or their influence on the habitat, might harm the latter or cause a significant change in the environment, must be accompanied by a special impact report on their consequences. Depending on the findings of the impact report, a court could be asked to suspend the project. Strict control was exercised over public utilities. The basic principle was that the benefits of a construction project to the community must not be outweighed by its detrimental aspects. Operations could be cancelled and offending facilities could be removed by court order if environmental considerations had not been taken into account.

5. Mr. BERTEAUX (France), replying to questions concerning immigrant children, said that there were no special schools in France for such children; all children were accepted into the educational system under the same conditions. Private schools had the same obligations towards nationals and foreigners. Foreign children were required to undergo the same training as French children. If they required special help, for language reasons for example, that was provided during the normal school day. Libraries, documentation centres, specialized teacher

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(Mr. Berteaux, France)

training, and the schools themselves all played important roles in the education of immigrant children. The result was that there was differentiated schooling without additional school hours; such an approach called for great competence on the part of teachers. At the end of the second cycle of secondary education, a foreigner might choose his own language as a subject of specialization.

6. The integration of foreigners into French society was without prejudice to the preservation of their own cultures. As far as the rest of the population was concerned, the study of other languages and cultures was encouraged through conventions with other countries. The number of children of foreign nationality studying at the first and second levels had increased by 24 per cent between 1976 and 1984 to almost 1 million.

7. Ms. GRUOT (France) said that the expert from Tunisia had asked for additional information regarding the Act of 1 July 1972 on anti-racism. The Act provided additional guarantees for the victims of racism. Its main purpose was to combat incitement to racial hatred through the press. It laid down penalties for those who provoked hatred against ethnic, racial or religious groups. It also provided for the punishment of those who, through public speeches or by means of written or graphic material, directly incited such hatred. Punishment could involve up to one year's imprisonment and a fine of up to 300,000 francs. The legislation also applied in the economic and social fields and provided for the punishment of such acts as refusal to provide goods and services to a person on account of his ethnic, racial or religious background. In the field of labour relations, the Act prohibited the hiring and dismissal of workers for ethnic or religious reasons. Cases under the anti-racism legislation had been brought before the courts in France, but no statistics were available regarding the judgements. Some statistics relevant to the issue of racial discrimination were contained in the report of France to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

8. As to how France applied article 13 (1) of the Covenant, she said that the teaching of history and geography in the French educational system was designed to acquaint the child with the great diversity of world civilizations and the equal worth of all. The goal was to develop in the child an attitude of complete understanding and tolerance.

9. Mr. BERTEAUX (France), replying to the expert from Senegal on the issue of illiteracy, said that, as at December 1984, 300,000 persons in France could neither read nor write. The governmental task force on illiteracy had concluded that action to eliminate illiteracy must begin with young children, whose reading skills had to be fostered early. Importance had also been attached to teacher training on the basis of the most modern methods.

10. A single educational curriculum applied throughout the territory of the French Republic, but teachers were allowed some flexibility in adapting the curriculum to particular conditions. Environmental courses as such were not taught, but could be incorporated in natural sciences courses, for example.

(Mr. Berteaux, France)

11. In reply to the expert from Ecuador, he said that audio-visual aids were widely used in French educational establishments. Their use depended on the level of education. It was left to the teacher to draw on material available from local documentation centres, including slides, films and tape recordings.

12. The expert from Denmark had raised a question about the power of the rector to approve or reject applications for national scholarships, referred to in paragraph 60 of the report. The situation was that the rector, in consultation with the departmental scholarship committee, based his decision on such factors as the size and financial status of the applicant's family. The rector could also draw upon a reserve fund to meet special needs. Scholarships were granted to students in private schools on the same scale as to those in public schools. The system also applied to foreign children residing in France, but not to the non-resident children of foreign families.

13. Ms. GRUOT (France) said that the special scholarships referred to in paragraph 66 of the report (E/1982/3/Add.30 and Corr.1) were intended to meet specific needs. They were awarded on a quota basis and at fixed rates. The agrégation scholarships were awarded on the basis of competitive examinations, while the public service scholarships were given to applicants who undertook to work for the State for a number of years upon completion of their studies. As at 1 January 1984, the amounts awarded were F 4,002 a term in the case of agrégation scholarships, F 3,741 a term in the case of scholarships for study during the first year of the third cycle, and F 3,480 in the case of public service scholarships.

14. Honorary loans were a special form of assistance and could be applied for by students and research workers who did not qualify for scholarships.

15. Mr. BERTEAUX (France), replying to a question raised by the expert from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, said that the relationship between the State and private schools varied according to the type of school involved. Non-contract schools established according to the procedure outlined in paragraphs 87 and 88 of the report were free to choose and apply their own curriculum. Private schools could enter into a simple contract or a contract of association with the State. In the case of the simple contract, which applied only to schools of the first cycle, the State undertook to pay the salaries of teachers, in line with the scales set for teachers in public schools, while the school itself had to meet certain standards applicable to public schools. While the State did not set any requirements for the course content of such schools, it did carry out inspections. In the case of private schools which entered into a contract of association with the State, instruction had to be provided according to the syllabus for public schools. The teachers were paid according to the scales applicable to teachers in the State system, who could be seconded to those private schools. A sum of money to cover operating costs and the salaries of service and administrative staff was also provided to those schools. The fees were controlled.

(Mr. Berteaux, France)

16. In response to the request for additional statistical data made by the expert from the Soviet Union, he said that he would provide the Secretariat with statistics on school attendance, the number of schools, and the education budget for 1985.

17. Mr. TALBOT (France), replying to questions raised about his Government's cultural policy, said that the expert from Ecuador had asked about the publication of foreign authors in France. The publishing market consisted mainly of private companies; it was they that took the decisions on the translation and publication of foreign works. There was an old tradition of translating major foreign authors. In addition, public funding was available for the translation of French authors into other languages, and it might also be used for translating foreign authors into French.

18. The expert from Senegal had inquired about the promotion of French as a scientific language. It had been government policy for some 20 years to keep French as a major language of science. There was a State body which undertook research and gathered information on the French language, and could promote French as a language of science by, for example, providing grants for publications or the use of French at international scientific conferences. The Centre national de la recherche scientifique received grants for the translation of foreign works and the promotion of French scientific works abroad.

19. With regard to the right to differ and the interaction between different cultures within France, referred to by the expert from Tunisia, he said that, apart from the educational measures already discussed, the French tradition of welcoming artists from all over the world who wished to live and work in France demonstrated that opportunities for cultural interaction did indeed exist. There were also more formal exchanges, with France participating in many cultural events abroad and hosting cultural events, individual artists and companies at home. A department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible for promoting artistic and cultural exchanges and finding the financial resources necessary to support them.

20. There existed various institutions to keep popular traditions and cultures alive. The Musée des arts et traditions populaires sought to collect and promote local traditions. On a more modern plane, there was a strip cartoon museum at Angoulême, and concert halls had been set up for rock-and-roll performances. The law on decentralization gave the regions the legal and financial possibilities for establishing their own cultural and artistic policy. A number of attempts were under way to establish links between French regions of France and regions of other countries.

21. The budget of the Ministry of Culture had doubled since the beginning of the 1980s, thus making it possible to provide increased assistance to institutions and larger grants to artists. Cultural work had therefore become more attractive and more secure. The French policy in that area was to support both institutions and the individual artists themselves. The one-per-cent formula referred to in paragraph 118 of the report (E/1982/3/Add.30 and Corr.1) meant that 1 per cent of

(Mr. Talbot, France)

the total budget for the construction of a public building would go to the artist whose project for decorative work on the building was accepted. Of necessity, the project generally involved the plastic arts.

22. Mrs. ALVAREZ (France) said that the expert from Spain had referred to activities aimed at training women in non-traditional sectors. The Ministry for the Rights of Women had taken vigorous action in that area. The objective of the Act of 13 July 1983, which had been proposed by that Ministry, was to guarantee equality between men and women in the work-place. It also stressed the need to provide women with the means to enter more varied and skilled occupations. Between 1982 and 1984, the Ministry had executed pilot projects to train women for non-traditional occupations, and a large part of the Ministry's budget was allocated for that purpose. Early in 1985, there had been a major television campaign to make the public aware of sex discrimination in the work-place.

23. An agreement on the improvement of vocational training for girls had been signed between the Ministry for the Rights of Women and the Ministry of Education on 20 December 1984. The latter Ministry had since taken steps to ensure that all teachers were aware of the problem of sex discrimination and to develop, in conjunction with the Ministry for the Rights of Women, a teaching programme on that subject to be incorporated in teacher-training courses. Measures were being taken to encourage schoolgirls to take scientific and technical courses. It was hoped that the proportion of girls studying such subjects would rise. Where new scientific and technical courses were offered, the policy of recruiting equal numbers of boys and girls would be followed. In 1985 there would be a marked increase in the percentage of girls entering specialized technological and engineering courses.

24. The two Ministries were aware that prejudice could be inculcated at a very early age and were therefore taking action to ensure that the authors and publishers of textbooks refrained from portraying women exclusively in their traditional roles. The agreement already referred to instructed teachers to avoid discriminating between girls and boys.

25. The expert from Denmark had asked about the membership of the high authority for audio-visual communication. That body was composed of nine members, from various professions, appointed for three years by decree of the President of the Republic. Three of its members were designated by the President of the Senate and three by the President of the National Assembly. The current chairman of the high authority was a well-known journalist whose own total independence guaranteed that of the high authority.

26. The expert from Denmark had referred to the illegitimate photocopying of educational materials. No satisfactory solution had yet been found to that problem. With regard to his concern about the educational burden placed on children in France, she wished to reassure him that steps had been taken in the past few years to ensure a better all-round balance between academic work and non-academic activities.

(Mrs. Alvarez, France)

27. Her delegation had tried to respond as fully as possible to the points raised. Any additional information required would be provided at a later stage.

28. Mrs. Alvarez, Mr. Berteaux, Ms. Gruot, Mr. Schricke and Mr. Talbot, (France) withdrew.

OTHER MATTERS

29. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, in order to permit a review of the records of the current session as early as possible, the Working Group should request the release of the English-language versions of the summary records as they became available, thus waiving the rule for simultaneous distribution in English, French and Spanish.

30. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.