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QUESTION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Since his report was issued, the Secretary-General has received the following communication, dated 10 November 1971, from Mr. Prem N. Kirpal, Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO:

"At the end of the debate on the question of the International (United Nations) University, owing to a difficulty of procedure, it was decided that only the report of the Director General (88 EX/6) 1/ and the Feasibility Study (ED/WS/257) 2/ would be forwarded officially to the General Assembly. There was, however, a general feeling in the Board that it would be desirable to forward also the summary records of the discussion together with a brief statement from the Chairman highlighting the main elements of the discussion.

"I am consequently forwarding to you 88 EX/SR.2 and 3, 2/ which reflect the substance of the discussion in the plenary of the Executive Board, with the attached note."

1/ A/8510, annex I.

2/ Text available on request in English and French.

Note by the Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO concerning the discussion on the International (United Nations) University at the eighty-eighth session of the Executive Board (October 1971)

1. There was general appreciation of the fact that the Secretariat had been able to prepare, in the short span of time available, the two documents: "Reports and comments of the Director-General on the results of the feasibility study concerning the international university" (88 EX/6) and "A study of the feasibility of an international university" (ED/WS/257). Actually, some members of the Board at the eighty-seventh session had expressed serious doubts that it would be possible to produce, for the eighty-eighth session, such comprehensive documents.

2. Several members, however, pointed out that document ED/WS/257 was not a real feasibility study, since it contained almost exclusively the arguments which could be invoked in favour of the establishment of the university and left aside those which might be put forward against it. They were of the opinion that the consultation of the academic community had not been wide enough to warrant the conclusion that universities of the world were in favour of the project. The views of those who argued against the adoption of the draft resolution can be summarized as follows:

(a) The available data are insufficient and it has not been possible, within the time available, to produce a balanced synthesis of such data;

(b) A number of fundamental problems which condition the meaning and the practical implementation of the project as a whole have not been submitted to a critical examination; among those, special mention was made of the following:

(i) the compatibility between the specific obligations of an institution forming part of the United Nations system and directed towards the quest for practical solutions, and those of a university, which has to dedicate itself strictly to careful research of the Truth;

(ii) the definition of the respective tasks assigned to the projected university and UNESCO in the fields of research and study;

(iii) the sources of financing;

(c) Before any decision is taken to establish such a university a serious investigation should be carried out to determine whether the objective proposed - i.e., a university based study, with an international and interdisciplinary approach, of certain problems of concern to the whole of mankind - could not be reached by applying more efficient and less costly methods; for instance, one might explore by

means of a documentation and programming centre established in UNESCO the possibility of stimulating universities and institutions of higher education which already exist or are to be created in countries where their establishment is contemplated.

3. On the other hand, many members were convinced that an international university, whatever its final name, level, administrative structure, etc., would be beneficial to mankind as a whole and to their own countries. They accepted the fact that some aspects of the project could not be clarified at this stage and that some of the problems relating to it would have to be solved gradually in a phased manner after the decision had been made to create such an institution. They concluded from the documents submitted that the project was feasible and that a decision to create the university could be taken without further delay, even if the study of a number of problems (in particular, those mentioned in paragraph 6 of the resolution) had to be pursued. Some members considered that the ways and means of financing the university did not fall within the scope of the present study.

4. There was unanimity in the Board to reaffirm the leading role which UNESCO should play in the implementation of this project.

5. It is in this spirit that 88 EX/Decisions 4.1.3 was adopted by 22 for, 6 against, with 4 abstentions.
