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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Second regular session of 1990

Letter dated 12 March 1990 from the Permanent Representative of
Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to attach herewith the text of the Aswan Declaration, dated 13 February 1990, entitled "The revival of the Library of Alexandria" (see annex).

I kindly request you to circulate this letter and its annex as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 12 of the preliminary list and of the Economic and Social Council, under the item entitled "Co-ordination questions" of its second regular session of 1990.

(Signed) Amre MOUSSA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/45/50.

ANNEX

Aswan Declaration on the revival of the Library of Alexandria

At the beginning of the third century before our era, a great meeting of peoples and cultures was conceived in ancient Alexandria: the creation of a library in the lineage of Aristotle's Lyceum, transposing Alexander's dreams of empire into a quest for universal knowledge. On the eve of the third millennium and under the patronage of President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt is seeking, in co-operation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and with the financial support of the United Nations Development Programme and other public and private sources, to revive and ancient library of Alexandria by restating its legacy in modern terms.

The library was a testimony to a decisive moment in the history of human thought, the attempt to constitute a sum of knowledge and to assemble the writings of all peoples. It will bear witness to an original undertaking that, in embracing the totality and diversity of human experience, became the matrix for a new spirit of critical inquiry, for a heightened perception of knowledge as a tool, and the quest for knowledge as a collaborative process.

The ancient library of Alexandria and its associated museum gave birth to a new intellectual dynamic. By gathering together all the known sources of knowledge and organizing them for the purposes of scholarly study and investigation, they marked the foundation of the modern notion of the research foundation. Within this haven of learning, the arts and sciences flourished for some six centuries along with scholarship. The classification and exegesis of the classical literary canon nourished the poetic wit of Callimachus and the pastoral muse of Ocritus. The theorems of the masters of Greek thought, informed by the new Alexandrian spirit of critical and empirical inquiry, yielded major insights and advances in those branches of science associated with the names of Euclid, Herophilus Erashenes, Aristarchus, Ptolemy, Strabo, Archimedes and Heron.

Constructed on the site of the palace of the Ptolemies, the new Alexandria Library will give modern expression to an ancient endeavour. A splendid contemporary design for the library has already been adopted through an international architecture competition. Detailed plans now exist for a facility containing the latest computer technology and serving as a public research library. Conceived in the spirit of the world decade for cultural development, this institution will be open, not only to researchers from the Mediterranean countries, but from all over the world. Its specialized collections will relate to the Egyptian, Middle-Eastern and Greek civilizations, the birth of Coptic Christianity, and the theo-Islamic heritage, with special emphasis on the history of science and on works likely to have been contained in the original library. Subsequently, the library will expand to cover other disciplines in keeping with its universal vocation. It will thereby contribute both to the development of the region in which it is situated and the understanding of that region throughout the world.

Bibliotheca Alexandrina will be a link with the past and an opening into the future. It will be unique in being the first library on such a scale to be designed and constructed with the assistance of the international community acting through the United Nations system.

We, the members of the International Commission for the Revival of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, meeting at the inaugural session in Aswan in February 1990, under the leadership of Mrs. Susan Mubarak, pledge our support and commitment to this project, and reiterate to this end the appeal made by the Director-General of UNESCO in 1987 to all Governments, international and non-governmental organisations, public and private institutions, funding agencies, librarians, archivists, and the people of all countries to participate by means of voluntary contributions of all kinds, in the effort initiated by the Egyptian Government to revive the library of Alexandria. To help assemble and preserve the collections, to train the necessary staff, and to ensure the library's functioning, we call upon all scholars, writers, artists and those whose task it is to inform through the written and spoken word to help generate awareness of the international project for the revival of the library of Alexandria and support this historic venture. Finally, we urge all Governments to donate to Bibliotheca Alexandrina such works in their possession as will help to constitute and enhance the library's collection in recognition of the unique gift made by the ancient Library of Alexandria to our common heritage.
