

# SEARCHING FOR REFORMS AT UNESCO

by Edwin J. Feulner, Jr., Ph.D.

**M**r. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear before you this morning as you consider the future role of the United States in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). As a member of the U.S. Reform Observation Panel for UNESCO since its creation in 1985 through March 1988, I have followed the organization's performance very closely.

First, it is important to review the reasons why the U.S. decided to end its participation in UNESCO.

Primarily, the U.S. was fed up with the excessive politicization of the agency, which was statist in its approach to problems and virulently anti-American in its rhetoric. Perhaps most offensive of all its many anti-Western projects was the attempt to establish a "new world information and communications order." Under the guise of controlling the Western "monopoly" on news, UNESCO called for restrictions on the Western media and the licensing of journalists -- in effect, censorship. Naturally, it had no criticism for the real news monopolies: those owned and operated by communist and Third World dictatorships.

In addition, UNESCO actively promoted the New International Economic Order, trumpeting the socialist policies that have proved so disastrous to Third World economies. The free market, which has proved so successful in the Pacific rim countries, was condemned by UNESCO as the cause of Third World poverty.

**Violating Its Charter.** With regard to human rights, UNESCO twisted this Western concept into "the rights of peoples," such as "the right to solidarity" and "the right to cultural identity," which in fact justify governments suppressing minority groups and dissenting opinions. No U.N. agency so flagrantly violated its own charter and original purpose. The bill for all this was paid largely by Western member-states.

UNESCO further exasperated the U.S. by running one of the most mismanaged, wasteful, and corrupt of all U.N. bureaucracies. In October of 1984, shortly before the decision to withdraw was finalized, the U.S. General Accounting Office issued a 177-page report on UNESCO's management. In precise and restrained language, the GAO laid out the centralization of decision-making, the wide use of short-term contracts, and the concentration of staff at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters that had allowed Director-General Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow to cow the staff into complete submission, and to ensure his own security by enhancing his ability to punish or patronize individuals favored by UNESCO member-states.

Program planning and budgets were purposely kept vague and confusing, making it impossible for member-states to oversee developments at UNESCO. Massive duplication of activities, wholly inadequate oversight of payrolls and UNESCO fellowships, and incredible cost overruns (the 1982 conference in Mexico City cost ten times the original

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estimate) pointed to an institutionalized system of waste and abuse. All in the name of promoting Third World development and education.

After repeated warnings went unheeded, the U.S. threw up its hands in disgust and withdrew from the organization on December 31, 1984, and set up the Reform Observation Panel for UNESCO, on which I served since its inception.

This panel was created by then Secretary of State George Shultz to “assess and report on the UNESCO reform process and to encourage reform efforts that advance continuing U.S. interests.” In December 1985, we submitted our initial report to the Secretary of State, which concluded that UNESCO had “failed to take any major step that would provide a basis for the United States to reconsider its decision [to withdraw].”

The second report by the Panel noted not only that “there was no significant reform activity at UNESCO in 1986,” but that “...a change of leadership, by and of itself, would not be sufficient to lead us to reassess our decision to withdraw. For the United States to consider rejoining UNESCO, it would have to see evidence of far-reaching reform, consistent with its overall views about the need for a more responsible and responsive UN system.”

**Disturbing Exchange.** So far, the only change of which we can be certain is the election of a new Director-General, Dr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, who has been at this post for less than 18 months. On February 22, several of my senior staff colleagues at The Heritage Foundation met with UNESCO’s new Director-General at his request. The exchange was — in language traditional to diplomacy — open, frank, and cordial. And very candidly, it was also quite disturbing. Dr. Mayor assured us that his own senior staff is being strengthened but could cite only two specific instances. He readily agreed that UNESCO’s real work should be focused not in Paris, but in the field — but, again, he gave us no specifics. As for particular programs, they were at best “still on the drawing board”; he supplied no detail, although pressed to do so, and no budget numbers. UNESCO, he told us, is going to target illiteracy as priority number one. But precisely how UNESCO plans to amass resources, and what resources, and why UNESCO at all (as opposed to other specialized agencies), he could not or would not say. In all fairness, the meeting was very brief; charts, graphs, and budget projections doubtless would have been inappropriate. But, although pressed repeatedly, Dr. Mayor’s response was “details to follow.” Beyond this, any claims that UNESCO deserves renewed U.S. support at this time is purely speculative. Among the reasons:

- ◆ ◆ The new Medium Term Plan exists only in crude draft form and has only recently been published and distributed.

- ◆ ◆ The Plan will be presented to the UNESCO Executive Board, which meets from May 17 to June 23, where it may be approved, amended, or even rejected.

- ◆ ◆ The General Conference will ultimately adopt a final Medium Term Plan when it meets in October-November 1989.

- ◆ ◆ The rhetorical themes of a Medium Term Plan cannot substitute for concrete program and budget information, which alone will indicate what kind of organization UNESCO intends to become.

So it is quite clear that there are no concrete data on which to base any reconsideration of U.S. non-participation in the organization.

In addition to my conviction that any consideration that the U.S. rejoin UNESCO is premature, what evidence I have seen points to the fact that sufficient reform is not even seriously being attempted by the organization.

While the rhetoric of the draft Medium Term Plan does not necessarily reflect the actual work of the organization, it is the only approximation now available to us. If this document does in fact provide an accurate summary of the programs UNESCO will be implementing, I would not encourage U.S. participation.

**Cause for Alarm.** The Plan recognizes "the legitimacy of the call for a new world information and communication order," which was one of the major programmatic areas that prompted U.S. withdrawal in 1984. As you may recall, this was the frontal attack against the world's free press launched some years ago by UNESCO. While the rhetoric has been toned down in the new Medium Term Plan, the very mention of the strategy is cause for alarm.

The Plan also states that assistance is to be provided to "national liberation movements." In U.N. jargon, this refers to Soviet-backed guerrilla groups such as the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO), the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-African Congress (PAC), and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). In fact, UNESCO, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), will spend over \$1 million "in favour of ANC" and over \$2 million "in favour of SWAPO" for "educational projects" in 1987-1991. Total expenditure through UNESCO for "educational projects" benefitting "national liberation movements" for this same period will come to more than \$7 million. Included in this figure is assistance to the PLO, now referred to as "Palestine" in the UNESCO Medium Term Plan.

**Bureaucratic Juggling.** The Plan reduces the number of major programs from fourteen to seven, but this appears to be more the product of bureaucratic juggling than of any substantive refocusing or change, since all of UNESCO's current activities are to be continued under the new plan.

Keeping all of this in mind, I must stress that it would be unfortunate and indeed unfair to UNESCO to draw any conclusions based on the evidence of this draft document.

Accordingly, I intend to recommend to Secretary of State Baker that he obtain a very detailed account of all the activities of UNESCO before any consideration is given to U.S. re-entry. This will not be possible for at least seven months, at which time the General Conference should have adopted a final version of the Medium Term Plan and a program budget.

When adequate data do become available, the following criteria, stipulated in the UNESCO Reform Observation Panel's last report, should be used to determine if a review of U.S. policy toward UNESCO is warranted.

**First, budgetary and financial reform must have been implemented.** This includes elimination of the current deficit, real reductions in administrative and programmatic costs, and establishment of a budget decision-making process that provides the major financial contributors with influence commensurate with their support of the organization.

**Second, the UNESCO Secretariat must be thoroughly reformed.** There should be substantial progress toward establishing a competent, professional staff, free of favoritism, and committed to the principles of the international civil service.

**Third, there must be major programmatic changes with the intention of returning the organization to the original ideals of its charter. This requires the termination of politically motivated programs including support for so-called national liberation movements and a complete cessation of all attempts to implement a "new world information and communications order" or any other strategies to foster state control of the international press.**

And Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I emphasize that this series of conclusions was unanimously agreed to by the nine members of the Panel. Only when these three criteria have been met should the United States initiate a formal reconsideration of its non-participation in UNESCO. Even then, the decision should not be based on the mere cessation by UNESCO of objectionable practices and programs. U.S. participation in and financial support for UNESCO must be looked at anew. The requisite questions which we must ask ourselves are:

- ◆ ◆ To what extent are UNESCO programs commensurate with U.S. policy goals?
- ◆ ◆ Do these activities warrant the expenditure of millions of U.S. tax dollars?
- ◆ ◆ Even assuming that it does provide one means of achieving certain U.S. goals, is UNESCO the best, or is there some other, more effective way of pursuing those goals?

