

# Executive Memorandum

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## Advancing U.S. Interests at UNESCO

*Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., and Jennifer A. Marshall*

The United States rejoined the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2003 after a 19-year absence. The U.S. withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 to protest the organization's rampant budgetary mismanagement and its radical agenda, including policies opposed to democracy and freedom of the press. From 1985 through 1997, the United Kingdom joined the United States in boycotting UNESCO.

The Bush Administration decided to rejoin UNESCO after the new Director-General, Koichiro Matsuura, implemented a series of reforms. Matsuura halved the number of divisions within the agency, removed all special advisers, and replaced the senior management. Since taking office in 1999, Matsuura has reduced the organization's staff by 25 percent.

The U.S. Congress has approved \$71 million in funding for UNESCO in 2004. The Bush Administration will need to ensure that this money is well-spent and should press for further reform of UNESCO. Long-term U.S. membership should be conditioned on a strict program of reform and on clear evidence that continued membership is in the U.S. national interest. Continued membership in UNESCO should also advance U.S. values and ideals and work in tandem with U.S. national security goals. The fostering of free societies should ultimately reduce the threat posed by international terrorism.

**U.N. Reform.** The United Nations today looks more like a glorified debating society than a serious

global body designed to confront the world's growing threats and problems. U.S. efforts to reform UNESCO should be part of a wider strategy to reform the entire organization. In many ways, UNESCO is a microcosm of the U.N.: a complacent bureaucracy with a culture of inefficiency, secrecy, and unaccountability. U.N. bureaucrats need to be held far more accountable to the taxpayers who fund their salaries—particularly American taxpayers, who foot 22 percent of the UNESCO budget.

**A Constructive Role for UNESCO.** In the re-entry process, the Bush Administration has appropriately highlighted education as a key mission for UNESCO. First Lady Laura Bush's September 2003 speech to UNESCO emphasized four educational priorities: literacy and basic

primary education; quality education that promotes cross-cultural understanding; rebuilding education systems in post-conflict situations; and HIV/AIDS education.

The Bush Administration has paid considerable attention to several of these issues—particularly literacy and the global HIV/AIDS epidemic—and should take a leadership role in shaping how

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- The Bush Administration should report annually to Congress on the progress of reform at UNESCO.
  - Future U.S. funding of—and membership in—UNESCO should depend on evidence of successful reform.
  - UNESCO's culture of secrecy should be brought to an end.
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UNESCO addresses these matters. America's \$15 billion global AIDS initiative is the world's most generous program for dealing with the problem, and UNESCO's efforts should be implemented in concert with the Bush Administration's initiative.

The U.S. should also pay special attention to UNESCO's educational role in post-war Iraq. While the provision of supplies and the physical restoration of schools are extremely important, the successful transition from a Baathist educational system to one that prepares students for self-government and the creation of civil society is of paramount concern. Whether bilaterally (through the U.S. Agency for International Development) or multilaterally (through UNESCO), the U.S. must ensure that its educational aid bolsters liberal democracy by equipping Iraqi citizens for a free society.

**Advancing Free Societies.** UNESCO also has an important role to play in strengthening and protecting freedom of the press and freedom of expression around the world. It should be committed to advancing Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

UNESCO should draw international attention to restrictions on free speech in repressive countries such as Zimbabwe, Cuba, China, Libya, and Iran.

**What Should Be Done.** The Bush Administration should report annually to Congress on the progress of UNESCO reform. Future U.S. funding of—and membership in—UNESCO should depend on evidence of continued reform. The Administration and Congress should encourage UNESCO to undertake reforms in five key areas:

- **Transparency.** UNESCO's culture of secrecy should end. UNESCO operations and finances should be subjected to an independent annual

audit, and key budget information should be prominently published on the UNESCO Web site.

- **Accountability.** UNESCO should make a full accounting of the sources of all its finances, and the influence of special-interest groups at UNESCO should be investigated. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should not be allowed to use the U.N. as a vehicle to advance radical agendas.
- **Hiring System.** The Bush Administration should highlight and oppose UNESCO's 30-day closed hiring policy. The U.S. should also advance more candidates for senior positions in UNESCO.
- **Education and Literacy.** The Bush Administration should continue to emphasize the educational priorities outlined in the First Lady's speech, with particular attention to basic education and literacy. De-Baathification in Iraq should also be a priority.
- **Freedom of the Press.** UNESCO should not silently accept restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of the press in totalitarian societies. It should take a more proactive approach in advancing the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Conclusion.** The next two years will be critical to the future of UNESCO. The Bush Administration should make a concerted effort to ensure that UNESCO undergoes fundamental and lasting reform. Long-term U.S. membership in this organization should depend on implementation of key reforms. The United States should not hesitate to withdraw from UNESCO once again if it becomes evident that U.S. membership is not in the national interest.

—Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., is Visiting Fellow in Anglo-American Security Policy in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, and Jennifer A. Marshall is Director of Domestic Policy Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.