

Address to the World Education Fellowship:
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Australia*

Please allow me to begin by congratulating WEF on your excellent report *Bridging the Gap* recently. It was my honour to present copies recently to the Directors of Education of both UNESCO and the OECD in Paris. I say it is excellent because it is one of the few efforts made in this country to take a truly holistic approach to lifelong learning and address the world as young people confront it. Our policies need to transcend the sectors of education, the economy, the welfare system, and the world of work. And we need to forge better links between these too segregated elements of our community.

WEF has tackled one of the most difficult areas of policy and research – interdisciplinarity. We have long had this problem in universities. They say, “old professors never die, they just lose their faculties”. And this is what we need to do – transcend the faculties, encourage truly integrated thinking among people from different disciplines. It is also a serious problem in UNESCO where the various sectors operate as fiefdoms. The silos in UNESCO are taller than any on the prairies of North America or on the plains of Central Europe, yet the problems confronting this world cannot be confined to single disciplines or sectors.

I have been invited to talk to you tonight about UNESCO and its future programming because I understand that WEF is keen to develop collaborative partnership arrangements with UNESCO.

The big news of the recent past is that the United States is to rejoin UNESCO after an absence of several years, thus taking the organization close to universality. And mention of the USA causes me to reflect on the ‘War on Terrorism’ since September 11, 2001. At its last General Conference, UNESCO passed a resolution seeking to address the causes and breeding ground of terrorism since this is the area of UNESCO’s mandate as the intellectual arm of the UN System and its global observatory. Of course, there is quite a lot of dissension over identification of the causes of terrorism, and whether any true cause/effect relationship can be satisfactorily established. And the same is true regarding any claimed ‘breeding ground’ of terrorism because, for example, if we argue that poverty is a breeding ground for terrorism poor groups may claim it is legitimate for them to adopt terrorist tactics.

So UNESCO is searching for ideas on how to tackle this mandate and would welcome suggestions. It is of course fairly clear that terrorism, is the product of lack of intercultural and interfaith understanding, lack of tolerance, injustice etc. UNESCO has played a significant role elsewhere in the world where similar conflicts have arisen e.g. Kosovo, the Koreas, Afghanistan, both sides of the Berlin Wall, the Middle East and Africa, organizing the writing of school textbooks and curriculum which, through education, will produce understanding and tolerance of different viewpoints. It has also conducted very worthwhile youth programmes bringing the young people from the warring factions together in the midst of conflict and turmoil to try to produce understanding and hence peace and tolerance in future generations. The constitution

of UNESCO begins with a preamble – “Since war begins in the mind...it is in the mind that the defences of peace must be constructed.” The same is clearly true for terrorism – it begins in the mind and this must be a key focus for the war on terrorism.

Let me turn now to what is driving UNESCO in its programming.

Firstly, the legacy of the Summits of the 1990s is a key factor. Two thousand and two was the International Year of the Mountains so you would expect to contemplate a lot of summits. The Hamburg Conference on Adult Education, the Paris Conference on Higher Education, the Budapest World Conference on Science, the Dakar World Education Forum, and in 2003 the Durban World Conference on Racism and Xenophobia, the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development and the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis 2005. These have all produced a momentum for the whole UN System – they are all of great relevance to WEF and I encourage you to read the recommendations of them all together and the seminal Delors report on Lifelong Learning and the Perez de Cuellar report *Our Creative Diversity* on culture and development.

UNESCO, like all UN agencies, is also being inspired by the so-called Millennium Development Goals. These include:

International development goals

Reducing extreme poverty: The proportion of people living in extreme poverty in developing countries should be reduced by at least one half by 2015.

Universal primary education: There should be universal primary education in all countries by 2015.

Gender equality: Progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women should be demonstrated by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005.

Infant and child mortality: The death rate for infants and children under the age of five years should be reduced in each developing country by two thirds of the 1990 levels by 2015.

Maternal mortality: The rate of maternal mortality should be reduced by three fourths between 1990 and 2015.

Reproductive health: Access should be available through the primary health-care system to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate ages, no later than the year 2015.

Environment: There should be a current national strategy for sustainable development, in the process of implementation, in every country by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015.

Note: The selection does not imply a diminished commitment to other goals accepted by the international community, including those adopted at other national conferences.

Then there is UNESCO's own Medium Term Strategy 2002-2007 *Contributing to Peace and Human Development in an Era of Globalisation through Education, the Sciences, Culture and Communication 31C/4*. In this document and the two-year programs which follow it the key themes are:

Education

Basic education, now broadened in its definition since Dakar to include not only early childhood and primary education but also lower secondary, elementary, Vocational Education and Training, and Adult or non-formal education. Australia is encouraged by UNESCO's newfound emphasis on Quality Education which we believe should include both content and measurement/performance evaluation. For content we are very keen to see values and civics education given high prominence.

Natural Science

Here the environment figures strongly and, in particular, sustainable development. And the key target is water which is looming as the most political commodity on this earth. It has already almost replaced oil and energy as the most potent battlefield for dispute. The year 2003 is the International Year of Freshwater. In this domain, science awareness looms large, especially science education in schools and universities, where enrolments in science subjects have been displaying a disturbing, downward trend for some time. Another vital area of our own nation and region is the interface between traditional and western knowledge which, like the legal interface, must be addressed. We need to acknowledge that indigenous or traditional knowledge is not gathered or assembled or identified by the same techniques as western knowledge, yet it need be no less legitimate.

Social Science

Here the ethics of science are to the fore. UNESCO has big programmes in bioethics and the human genome and the use of genetic data, and is in fact in the process of preparing international instruments as ethical frameworks for these fast developing scientific developments which often take place without due consideration of their moral dimension. The pace of scientific and technological development is faster than the capacity of policy-makers and legislators to address these developments, UNESCO's COMEST programme is also addressing the ethics of our space, water, and energy. Of course, a basic area of UNESCO endeavour has always been human rights and responsibilities, and a new strategy is being developed in tandem with the other relevant UN Bodies. Another of UNESCO's key achievements has been an innovative major international programme called Management of Social Transformation, MOST, which is linking social science research with policy-makers in crucial fields like migration, urbanization, cities, governance etc.

Culture

The key words here are cultural diversity, and tangible and intangible heritage protection. UNESCO already has key international conventions in place in these domains such as the World Heritage Convention and the Hague Convention, and is developing more instruments at present. The key theme of the Perez de Cuellar Report, the linking of culture with development, is also a key priority.

Communication

The Knowledge Society and the Digital Divide are the key foci of UNESCO's endeavours and it will be bringing these perspectives to the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society. We all know the story about the growing gap between the know and the know-nots which, in an information era, means that knowledge will be the key determinant of wealth or poverty and yet the divide grows wider every day. We must also preserve the free flow of ideas including freedom of expression and the media. UNESCO is developing a new international instrument for preservation of digital heritage for, if we are not careful, we will lose all the material which now fills our computers rather than our filing cabinets. One other highly significant development is a new UNESCO international instrument on multilingualism and use of cyberspace in response to concerns that the English language is dominating cyberspace, and the other languages, including indigenous languages, should receive more recognition, and that intellectual property issues must be addressed, especially the difficult balance between the private and public domains.

Cross-cutting themes

UNESCO, in its Medium Term Strategy, also has two cross-cutting themes of great importance – poverty eradication and the contribution of information and communication technologies to the development of education, science and culture and the construction of a knowledge society.

So far I have been talking of UNESCO globally. Here in Australia our heart is in the Pacific and we are endeavouring to create a much greater awareness of the problems and needs of the Pacific at UNESCO Headquarters. Mention the Pacific to Europeans and they visualize either Hawaii or a Gauguin painting of tropicana, palm trees, cornucopia and paradise. It is very hard to get the message across that UNESCO, like all international organisations, should be doing more in the Pacific.

Our basic problem is data. There are 15 member states in the Pacific other than Australia and New Zealand, and very few have a statistical service. The international banks, UN and aid agencies do not collect data or publish it on most of these countries. This is my own key priority at the moment to build a statistical data base to reveal the true needs of the Pacific, especially in UNESCO's fields of competence, e.g. education, the environment, society, cultural identity, digital capacity etc. For the Pacific has enormous needs in these areas and good opportunities for more emphasis on Vocational Education and Training, cultural and eco-tourism, clearer interfaces between western and traditional culture, environment protection etc., And of course improved governance is a plank of our own aid policy in the region.

I invite WEF to join in these endeavours especially in the Pacific where we need your energy and expertise – WEF is a distinguished NGO of UNESCO and has a role to play in the formation and implementation of our strategies and budgets, attending our conferences, helping with our workshops.

Finally I invite you to join with us in focusing on youth, the hope for the future. The official UN definition of youth is 15-24 years, and, at over one billion, this is the largest group in the world. There is at present turbulence in the minds of youth all over the globe. Unemployment, irrelevant school curricula, changing role models, unethical behaviour of political and business leaders, and the values imparted on the big and small screens which cause confusion of

identity, are creating a dangerous mixture leading to suicide as the largest or second largest cause of death of young people in our region. And yet within the heart and mind of every young person is a desire to make a difference to the world, to contribute, to be involved. We must engage young people, talk to them in their language on their 'planets' and their spaces, within modalities which stress that they are part of the solution not part of the problem, and we must have their input to make the ideals of the UN system become a reality.

But then this is exactly what your excellent report *Bridging the Gap* is all about.

Biographical details

Professor Wiltshire is the Australian representative on the UNESCO Executive Board, Chairman of the Australian National Committee for UNESCO, and the J.D. Story Professor of Public Administration at the University of Queensland