

PROPOSED JOINT CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED AT THE UNESCO GENERAL  
CONFERENCE, PARIS, OCTOBER 2003



The biennial General Conference of UNESCO, to which WEF has consultant status as a Non Government Organisation (NGO), was held in the first two weeks of October. Denis Feeney, Secretary of the WEF Australian Forum and Anne Feeney, Past President of the Australian Forum represented WEF Australia at the Conference

The Conference was genuinely historical in that it marked the return to UNESCO of the United States of America after a 17 year absence. Mrs. Laura Bush, First Lady of the USA attended the Conference and delivered a very well received address setting out America's commitment to the UNESCO values of Education For All and the global fight against illiteracy, especially amongst women.

The highlight of the conference for WEF Australia was the address by Professor Ken Wiltshire from the Business School of the University of Queensland, who is the Chair of the National Commission of UNESCO in Australia. He was the Head of the Australian Delegation and presented the Australian 'intervention' in the general plenary debate. During that presentation he announced the joint conference which WEF, UNESCO and APNIEVE (the Australia Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education) propose to hold in Adelaide in the second half of 2004.



He said:

Exactly two years ago, in this very hall, we passed a resolution –31 C/Resolution 39. The Director-General had inspired us to take up the struggle against terrorism. Then UNESCO was given the leading role in the United Nations campaign against terrorism, especially through education and inter-cultural understanding. But we have not risen to this challenge sufficiently. Australia believes that a major focus must be on educational curricula and teacher-training material aimed at educating for peace, tolerance, shared values, and inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding. In collaboration with our UNESCO partners, particularly in the Asia and Pacific region, we are planning a regional workshop to begin this urgent task. As the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, said in launching the new Asia-Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education (APNIEVE) Centre: “values and education for understanding different cultures are going to be central to holding the world together for the next one hundred years and will be fundamental to education across the board.



The background to this announcement was the set of initiatives taken by UNESCO and the UN since 2001. The General Conference in 2001, just after the World Trade Centre disasters, passed the resolution to which Professor Wiltshire referred. It stated inter alia:

The General Conference...

6. Affirms that the values of tolerance, universality, mutual understanding, respect for cultural diversity and the promotion of a culture of peace, which are central to UNESCO's

mission, have acquired new relevance for inspiring action by international organizations, States, civil society and individual citizens;...

9. Expresses its firm conviction that , based upon its mandate and within its areas of competence – education, science, culture and communication – UNESCO has a duty to contribute to the eradication of terrorism. Drawing on its character as an intellectual and ethical organization and invites the Director –General to take appropriate action through UNESCO programmes and studies

Subsequently, the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, set up a Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism. This Group presented a Report in August 2002 to the UN General Assembly. Recommendation 10(b) referred to the role of “educational initiatives aimed at increasing understanding, encouraging tolerance and respect for human dignity, while reducing mutual distrust between communities in conflict”. It was decided that UNESCO should be the agency of the UN leading the UN’s response to the recommendations of the Report. UNESCO’s charter had famously included the sentiment that since war begins in the minds of men, the defences of peace have equally to be built in the minds of men, principally through education.

Koichiro Matsuura, the Director-General of UNESCO then called a meeting of various UN agencies which might work with UNESCO, in Paris in February 2003. The speech he delivered at that meeting makes clear that UNESCO is conscious of its mandate to implement key resolutions of the Report, especially Recommendations 10 (b) and 21. He refers to Kofi Annan’s distinction between ‘structural prevention’ and ‘operational prevention’ and confirms that educational initiatives and “promotion of dialogue between and within cultures and civilizations” are crucial to the longer-term efforts to achieve peace through education. He refers to the Delors Report and the pillar, *Learning to Live Together* which was the theme of an international event proposed at the WEF AGM in January 2003 in Sydney:

The heightened tensions and insecurity in the world today also lead us to recognize that education, as often practiced in schools, families, and communities often fails to fulfill its promise of promoting social understanding and civic responsibility. In 1996 the Delors Commission identified “learning to live together” as the third pillar of education, but it requires much strengthening in this new century. In this regard, a key concern for UNESCO is the promotion of quality education to prevent violence, to strengthen a climate of tolerance and security and to foster the development of values of peace, tolerance and mutual understanding as well as capacities for the non-violent resolution of conflicts. This action requires substantial time and resources, as it calls for far-reaching changes in teacher training, the revision and development of textbooks and curricula, and the general improvement of learning environments so that stereotypes, violence, prejudice, discrimination have no place...It is essential to encourage the acquisition by all learners of a basic level of knowledge and understanding of the world’s main cultures, civilizations and religions.

With this background in mind, it was not surprising that the Australian proposal for a regional conference to explore the ways in which education could contribute to the eradication of terrorism found favour at the UNESCO General Conference.

Professor Wiltshire arranged two key meetings. One was a lunch to which Sir John Daniels the Assistant Director General for Education in UNESCO was invited, along with a number of

UNESCO personnel who were working in values education or the Associated Schools Project Network. The other was a working breakfast on Saturday morning which brought together representatives from the National Commission for UNESCO in the Philippines, Korea, Indonesia and Australia, the field managers for UNESCO from Jakarta and Bangkok, representatives from the International Bureau of Education in Geneva, a subsidiary of UNESCO, representatives from the Associated Schools Project Network and a consultants who had been working on related areas. This meeting was remarkable for the meeting of minds which it produced and the consensus that the proposed conference was not just timely but an urgent activity that must be implemented.

We will pursue funding for the conference from the relevant National Commission for Programme Participation grants from UNESCO.

Denis Feeney  
Queensland Section