

## **UNESCO's Efforts in Promotion of Remembrance and Education on the Holocaust**

**Intervention by  
Marcello Scarone Azzi  
Programme Specialist  
Struggle against Discrimination and Racism Section  
Division of Human Rights, Human Security and Philosophy  
Social and Human Sciences Sector  
UNESCO**

**Hofburg, Vienna, Austria, 10 November 2008**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, on behalf of UNESCO's Director General, Koichiro Matsuura, whose greetings I convey to you, and of the entire organization, I would like to thank the Austrian Chairmanship of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research for their invitation to take part in this important event.

As we are hearing from our colleagues from various other international organizations, there is a very important role that the international community can play and is playing in order to educate about these sad and tragic events of our history, in order that they will never repeat themselves.

UNESCO, as the "intellectual" and educational organization within the UN system is of course an integral part of this initiative and has spared no efforts to this effect. Let me then give you a brief account of what is being done and how the Organization has gone about this process of furthering education on and remembrance of the Holocaust.

As many of you know, the Preamble of UNESCO's Constitution clearly states that (and I quote): "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed".

In order that a unanimous, lasting and genuine peace may be secured, the Preamble declares that the States Party to the Constitution believed 'in full and equal opportunities for education for all, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge".

As defined by the Constitution, the purpose of the Organization is: "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations'.

Our efforts, although involving UNESCO's entire mandate, are concentrated in two main areas: First and foremost in the "education for basic values" activities and secondly in the programme of action of the "section for struggle against discrimination", which I represent.

If we look at the educational side, and although work on education for values and for tolerance, non discrimination and against racism has been a main part of UNESCO's work for many years, on the specific subject of Holocaust remembrance and education, a new impulse was taken since the adoption in 2007 of a UNESCO General Conference Resolution specifically on this subject.

By 34 C/Resolution 61, the General Conference requested the Director-General to consult with the United Nations Secretary-General regarding his outreach programme on Holocaust remembrance. This resolution was adopted in recognition of United Nations Assembly resolution 60/7, which urges "Member States to develop educational programmes that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust", and it recalls resolution 61/255, which "condemns without any reservation any denial of the Holocaust". Furthermore, in early 2008, UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Israel that identifies education and Holocaust remembrance as priority areas for joint cooperation. Within the framework of these actions, the Education Sector has therefore been developing a programme to strengthen UNESCO's role in promoting awareness of Holocaust remembrance and combating all forms of Holocaust denial through education. The education institutes will play a valuable role in this regard.

In order to expand the reach of this action, cooperation has been sought with other actors.

These include: the United Nations Holocaust Outreach Programme; the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research; Yad Vashem; Ministries of Education; United Nations partners; international and national NGOs; civil society; and education personnel. Thus, meetings held with the United Nations Holocaust Outreach Programme and the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem have led to the identification of possible areas for joint action on Holocaust Education. Informal consultative meetings have also been held with interested Member States such as the United States and Israel.

In addition, funds from the regular programme budget of the Education Sector have been assigned to:

- (a) A research project outlining the main strands of approaches to Holocaust education and the actions taken around these approaches internationally. The project included a set of references to key organizations and individuals involved and relevant websites on Holocaust education and genocide prevention; and
- (b) A consultancy position to contribute to the planning and organization of Holocaust education activities.

A working group on Holocaust education has been established, chaired by the Assistant Director-General for Education and organized by the section for the Promotion of Rights and Values in Education. Its first meeting on 6 March 2008 brought together focal points from the UNESCO Associated Schools Project network (ASPnet), the section for teacher education, the International Bureau of Education (IBE), the UNESCO-UNITWIN Chairs network, and the Sector for Social and Human Sciences. The aim of the meeting was to reach a common understanding on agreements and obligations, and to discuss the timeline and implementation of activities. The

focal points also submitted proposals for specific activities on Holocaust education, based on which a draft project proposal for funding has been prepared.

The MoU with Israel encourages the mobilization of networks of professionals, academics, scientists and civil society including UNESCO/UNITWIN university chairs and ASPnet. The promotion of Holocaust remembrance is specifically mentioned with a view to enhancing international outreach of educational programmes in this field and special attention is called for concerning teacher training activities on the Holocaust carried out with Yad Vashem and other relevant institutions.

The working group on Holocaust education held its second meeting on 19 June 2008, participants now also including the Culture Sector. The group reviewed the draft funding proposal for UNESCO-run activities and regrouped the proposed activities into the following areas of action:

(a) Organize, with Yad Vashem, and other relevant organizations, professional training for Associated Schools Project network coordinators, teachers and teacher trainers from various world regions on teaching methods and learning materials related to Holocaust education, remembrance and combating Holocaust denial. Training would involve the participation of UNITWIN/UNESCO university chairs with expertise in Holocaust studies and education. Furthermore, cooperation with other experts and teacher trainers in this field, as well as with international institutions and programmes dedicated to Holocaust education and remembrance, would be envisioned.

(b) The joint organization between the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE) and the UNESCO Education Sector of an Expert Meeting on international case studies in curricula, learning materials, and textbooks related to Holocaust remembrance and education, as well as the cultivation of values such as peace, tolerance and the fight against discrimination, including anti-Semitism. The outcome of the meeting would be the publication of a UNESCO Handbook of good practices in textbooks and learning materials in this field. Different international organizations would be invited as well as Yad Vashem.

UNESCO has also created a web page outlining aspects of the Organization's promotion of Holocaust remembrance through education. The web page presents links to educational programmes and projects on the Holocaust in order to broaden awareness on existing learning materials in this field. Links to such sites as United Nations Outreach Programme, International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Museum, the Anne Frank Center in Amsterdam and the Shoah Memorial in Paris will also be on the web page and serve to strengthen ties between UNESCO's efforts in education on the Holocaust with the work of these, and other institutions.

UNESCO gives utmost weight to the development of a culture of peace and intercultural understanding, and Holocaust remembrance is an important part of this. The Director-General therefore often appeals to Member States to show their support for it through a voluntary contribution to enable the project proposal developed by the Organization to be realized.

-----

Turning now to the area of Social and Human Sciences, in particular the actions to combat racism, anti-semitism and all forms of discrimination, this has also been at the core of UNESCO's activities and in recent years UNESCO has dedicated most efforts in this area in

working with municipal authorities. Following the adoption by the General Conference in 2003 of a UNESCO Integrated Strategy to combat discrimination, racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, the Organization has developed a programme of action to fight these evils (which of course include anti-semitism and education on tolerance values) in cooperation with municipal authorities, bearing in mind that very often these problems and evils occur at the urban level and therefore it is best to find solutions at this level as well, working together with the authorities which have the most direct contact with the population, that is the municipal level authorities.

It was in this context that the initiative to create an International Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination was first conceived, just after the World Conference against racism and all forms of related discrimination, held in Durban in 2001, and in which UNESCO actively participated. The project aims at assisting municipalities in developing and strengthening their policies for greater urban social inclusion. This network should be mobilized to encourage partnership building in the struggle against discrimination and exclusion in cities around the world.

In a few years time, 50 per cent of humanity will be living in cities. It is in cities that the greatest diversity prevails. Migrants, when they come to a country, go not to rural areas, but to cities. Cities are places where people from different backgrounds, different origins, different religions, different social classes, different ethnic groups and different nationalities live together and work together. It can be a place where fear, hatred and discrimination prevail or can be a place of inclusiveness, harmony and mutual respect. Therefore, even though governments have responsibilities and legal obligations, cities can play a major role in building inclusive societies, including through the promotion of education and remembrance, such as with the subject of the Holocaust.

Cities around the world are increasingly becoming international actors and developing their own international relations. They also have growing capacities to formulate their own policies in the social sphere, in education, policing, housing, mass transit, etc. Municipal policies can affect the lives of people and the nature of the interaction between people living in the same place. Therefore, action taken by cities, along with action taken by government, non-governmental organizations, teachers, universities, etc., can take us a long way in building inclusive societies.

Starting in 2004, and given the specificities of each region, UNESCO first proceeded to facilitate development of the initiative in different regions of the world.

The *European Coalition of Cities against Racism*, created in 2004 in its lead city, Nuremberg, with all the symbolism it represents, has so far brought together about 80 municipalities in Europe (including the cities of Vienna and Graz in Austria). It is very encouraging to see that the European Coalition project receives good echo from many committed local authorities. Throughout the years 2007 and 2008, crucial steps have been made or will shortly be made in order to enable the European Coalition to become an operational network.

In North America, *the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination* has been launched in 2005 in close collaboration with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Over 20 municipalities have officially joined the network.

The *African Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination* has been launched in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2006 during the Africities 4 Summit and more than 55 municipalities have already joined the network. The City of Durban, in particular, has been very active in helping the

Coalition to develop this network and has taken over the role of leader in further strengthening the Coalition in the Southern part of the African continent, where interest has been strongest.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, an official launching of *the Latin American and Caribbean Coalition of Cities against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia* took place in October 2006 under the auspices of the City of Montevideo that plays the role of the Lead City. More than 200 municipalities joined this network which already includes its own internal statutes, steering and technical committees and projects aimed at fighting racism and discrimination.

In Asia and the Pacific, the *Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination in Asia and the Pacific* was launched on the occasion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress of UCLG in the Republic of Korea in October 2007. So far almost 30 cities and regional organizations from 13 countries have come on board, including Bangkok, the lead city. A series of consultations on regional priorities and joint action are being carried out during 2008.

Finally, for the Arab Region, the *Arab Coalition of Cities against Racism, Discrimination Xenophobia and Intolerance* was launched in June 2008, in Casablanca, Morocco, which has taken over the role of lead city.

UNESCO has now, therefore, achieved the first phase of the initiative, that of establishing regional coalitions in every region of the world. The time has come to move forward to the second phase and to start implementing the original objectives of this initiative and, thus, create a truly International Coalition.

*The International Coalition of Cities against Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance* which will federate the six regional coalitions was created on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2008, on the occasion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Forum on Human Rights in the French city of Nantes.

The coalitions are regional or even sub-regional because each region or sub-region has its own specificity and challenges to be addressed within a certain cultural and political context and this will continue to be so, but the creation of the International Coalition will add the bigger dimension of being able to share experiences and information between and across the regions as well. All of them are based on the commitments they adopt by way of a 10-Point plan of action, specific to each region, but in all of them the notion of promoting education and remembrance of great mistakes of the past, on examples of intolerance and of genocide, is prominently included.

The coalition allows cities to exchange experiences and information, to learn from one another, to see what works and what does not, to evaluate together the impact of certain policies, and to commit to undertake certain actions collectively. If cities are together in a coalition that enables joint action, they would have more incentive to keep on developing, implementing and evaluating policies that will ensure peaceful coexistence between different groups in society. Education and remembrance is the cornerstone of such action.

I thank you very much for your attention.

ANNEX:

Resolution GC34/61

## **Holocaust remembrance<sup>1</sup>**

*The General Conference,*

*Remembering* that the Holocaust, which resulted in the murder of one third of the Jewish people, along with countless members of other minorities, will forever be a warning to all people of the dangers of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice,

*Recalling* United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/7 of 1 November 2005, which condemned any denial of the Holocaust,

*Noting* that 27 January has been designated by the United Nations as the annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust,

*Also noting* that the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, adopted in the aftermath of the horrors of the Second World War, states that “the great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races”,

*Bearing in mind* United Nations General Assembly resolution 61/255, adopted on 26 January 2007, and, in particular, its recognition that the Secretary-General has established a programme of outreach on the subject of “the Holocaust and the United Nations”,

1. *Requests* the Director-General to consult with the United Nations Secretary-General regarding his outreach programme with a view to exploring, in consultation with Member States, what role UNESCO could play in promoting awareness of Holocaust remembrance through education and in combating all forms of Holocaust denial in accordance with the United Nations General Assembly resolutions mentioned above;

2. *Further requests* the Director-General to report on the results of this consultation and his recommendations to the Executive Board at its 180th session.