

28 September 2012

UNESCO is in Danger – Causes, Consequences and Solutions

An open letter to the Member States of UNESCO, the National Commissions for UNESCO, and those who believe in UNESCO's service to humanity.

Dear All:

After 40 years of active honorary engagement in UNESCO affairs in many different functions (1) I am extremely distraught about the present financial and political situation of UNESCO.

At the end of October 2011 one of the founding members of the Organization decided not to pay the dues for the given year despite the fact that according to Article 5.5 of the Financial Regulations, Member States are requested to pay their annual dues promptly, i.e. within the first month of the calendar year, and in full. At the same time, the Member State concerned decided to remain in the Organization and was elected as Member of the Executive Board until 2015.

The same decision – not to pay its dues – was also made in 2012. The consequences of this decision are alarming and going beyond the problem of sudden budgetary constraints. As of 31 August 2012, the Member State concerned owes over US \$150 million to the Organization, thereby preventing the Secretariat from implementing the Approved Programme and Budget 2012-2013 [36 C/5 Approved] as decided by the 36th session of the General Conference in 2011.

It is worth to recall the principle which is so dear to all democratic states including the Member State concerned: “No taxation without representation” also means “no representation without taxation”. If there are any doubts about this international legal norm, I suggest that UNESCO asks the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion [Chapter IV: Advisory opinions of the Statute of the ICJ].

Remaining Member State of UNESCO means that the accumulated debts have to be paid by the Member State concerned sooner or later. Unclear are only the date(s) and the level of interest to be paid. In the light of forthcoming decisions concerning the adoption of a Medium-term Strategy for the years 2014-2021 the Organization is confronted with an extremely high level of financial uncertainty.

From available information it looks that the Director-General and the Executive Board decided to apply a policy of “wait and see”. Because adopted immediate cost saving measures and the setting up a Special Emergency Fund can only be necessary short-term measures to solve certain cash-flow problems. The budget ceiling has been reduced from US \$ 653 million to US \$ 465 million which represents a reduction of almost 30 per cent implying

severe cuts of the Approved Programme and Budget 2012-2013. This looks like letting UNESCO “bleeding to death”.

I strongly argue that this policy is leading into the wrong direction. And all parties concerned are obliged to ask themselves about the medium-term consequences if the policy of “wait and see” continues. It can be easily foreseen that during the 37th session of the General Conference in 2013 we will be confronted with a much smaller Organization in terms of activities and personnel. This is why I have entitled this message “UNESCO is in Danger”. And I know that this is not only my personal view.

Based on my analytical work about financing the United Nations system (2), I consider that the highest priority is given to the **question of how to bridge the present financial gap**. Which financing mechanisms should be applied in order to assist UNESCO in fulfilling its tasks to-day? Two options are possible. In order to fill the present gap of 22 per cent of the regular budget, all other Member States should increase their assessed contributions by 22 per cent - an amount to be treated as a loan. This loan would then be repaid as soon as the Member State concerned is paying the bill. If no consensus can be reached, the host country could guaranty a loan of the missing 22 per cent offered by the *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations*.

If an alternative financing mechanism does not bridge the present financial gap, all debates about the Organization`s next Medium-Term Strategy will be without an underlying serious and secure basis. Only afterwards, new issues of priorities, major structural changes, sunset rules, etc. can be and must be discussed in order to improve the functioning of UNESCO. It would be a great pity if only because of the arbitrary behaviour without legal foundation of one Member State the future of the only global organization for education, science and culture is in danger. What the founders of UNESCO have formulated as its mission over 60 years ago has not lost its meaning and relevance to-day.

Please, don't hesitate to enter a discussion about the future of UNESCO.

Sincerely yours,



(Prof. Dr. Klaus Hüfner)

(1)

Inter alia:

- Since 1971 Member of the German Commission for UNESCO (1989-1998 Vice-president; 1998-2002 President);
- 1994-2009: Member of the Advisory Board of UNESCO-CEPES (1998-2009 Chairman);
- 1995-2003: Member of the Governing Board of UNESCO-IIEP;
- 2002-2005: Member of the Joint UNESCO/CESCR Expert Group on the Right to Education.

(2)

Most recently:

- Finanzbeiträge an das UN-System (Financial contributions to the UN system). Bonn: Global Policy Forum Europe, 2011, 22 p. (http://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/workingpaper2_gpfe.pdf)
- Multilaterale Bildungsfinanzierung durch das UNO-System (Multilateral educational financing through the UN system). Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2011, 230 p.