

UNESCO and Human Development

by Quazi Faruque Ahmed

Bangladesh became a member of UNESCO in October 1972 in pursuance of Article VII of UNESCO Constitution. Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO has also been set up by the government with the Education Minister as its Chairman and 69 government and non-government members

NOVEMBER 4 was the founding day of UNESCO which gives top priority to its education programme: a) basic education for all b) education for the twenty-first century c) action for progress in education. UNESCO's constitution says that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed". Building these defences through international intellectual co-operation remains UNESCO's prime objective. The object of UNESCO, to quote its constitution, is to "contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the 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... by the charter of the United Nations."

The Secretary General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor declared last year (1997) prior to the 29th session of the General Conference of UNESCO, "At the United Nations conferences, regardless of the subject under consideration (environment, population, social development, human rights and democracy, women, housing), there has been a consensus that education is the key to the urgently needed change in the direction pursued by today's world... To invest in education is not only to respect a fundamental right but also to build peace and progress for the world's peoples. Education for all, by all, throughout life: this is the great challenge."

The educators worldwide have accepted this great challenge of the UNESCO Director General with courage. Bangladesh Federation of Teachers' Associations (BFTA) representing both the government and non-government

school and college teachers is continuously urging upon the government to implement the recommendations of UNESCO on education. Bangladesh Government also attaches importance to the valuable support being rendered by the teachers. The Secretary General of the BFTA was included in the National Delegation of Bangladesh to attend the 29th General session of UNESCO held last year in Paris. This was the first time that a teachers' representative from Bangladesh could participate in the international conference on education under the auspices of UNESCO.

The activities of UNESCO fall under eight broad headings: 1) Education: eliminating illiteracy and encouraging fundamental education, raising educational standards, promoting through education greater respect for human rights, making available information on education techniques; 2) Natural Science: creating greater collaboration between scientists and encouraging the popularization of science; 3) Social Science: encouraging the study of the psychological and social problems involved in the development of mutual understanding and such as racial prejudice and religious differences; 4) Cultural Activities: developing cultural exchanges between member states and giving people access to works of art, literature, and philosophy; 5) Exchange of Persons: Providing information as to the opportunities for work and study abroad, and

providing travelling fellowships; 6) Mass Communication: keeping the public informed about the work of UNESCO and significant events in the fields of education, science and culture, and campaigning to help people to obtain easier access to knowledge; 7) Rehabilitation: assessing and making provision for the educational needs of schools, libraries, and scientific institutions in war-devastated areas and under-developed countries; 8) Technical Assistance: providing expert advice in the fields of fundamental education, teacher training, technical and general education, scientific research, and scientific advisory services. Member states are advised in such matters as their literacy campaigns, school building programme, surveying of mineral resources, teacher training, etc.

UNESCO also contributes to the translation of certain masterpieces of world literature, recording of traditional music from all regions of the world and renders valuable assistance and advice in the maintenance of cultural heritages of nations and nationalities throughout the world and participates in the prevention of drug abuse and AIDS through education programmes and through a centre set up to gather, assess and distribute educational material on AIDS prevention.

Teacher training, access to education for girls and women, education for peace and international understanding, environmental education, education for AIDS prevention, nutri-

tional education, scientific and technology education, vocational and technical education — these are some of the important aspects of education covered by the Organization, particularly under its 'Education for the twenty-first century programme'. UNESCO publishes and distributes numerous periodicals, documents and books dealing with the various aspects of education, including the World Education Report, which first appeared in 1991 and which analyses major educational trends and policies in today's world.

Why is UNESCO in high esteem in the eyes of teachers worldwide? To recall a few words of history, it was at the first session of the UNESCO General Conference that a delegate requested to "draft and promulgate a World Teachers' Charter, which would tend to ensure the material conditions of the teacher; 2) raise his moral condition; 3) protect freedom of teaching". As a follow-up of this, a special inter-governmental Conference held in Paris on October 5, 1996, under the auspices of UNESCO, adopted the Magna Carta for teachers world-over known as "The UNESCO/ILO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers. Again, at the 26th General Conference it was decided that a World Teachers' Day should be observed and accordingly October 5 was chosen in view of its historic importance due to adoption of the "Recommendation" on the day. Bangladesh became a mem-

ber of UNESCO in October 1972 in pursuance of Article VII of UNESCO Constitution. Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO has also been set up by the government with the Education Minister as its Chairman and 69 government and non-government members including eminent personalities in the field of education, science and culture. While visiting Bangladesh last year, Director General Federico Mayor made important announcement of enlisting Bangladesh in preserving its cultural heritages under UNESCO programme.

In the international arena, UNESCO works in many fields hand in hand with other international bodies and forums. Still then, UNESCO is the pioneer and the only body that works extensively for human development through education, culture, science and technology.

UNESCO activities, centre around its headquarters in Paris and different regional offices viz. the Regional Office for Science and Technology for South and Central Asia in New Delhi (ROSTSCA), Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok (PROAP), Regional Office for communication in Kuala Lumpur, for book development in the Asia Pacific Region in Karachi. Besides these, the Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), Tokyo, Japan jointly organized by the Japanese Governmental and non-governmental Organizations, arranges for regular annual co-operative programmes of activities on culture including book development and literacy materials development in the member countries of UNESCO through the National Commission.

The writer is Principal, Shaikh Burhanuddin Post Graduate College, Dhaka and Secretary-General, BFTA.

THE DAILY STAR

06 NOV 1998

2

8