

*Opportunity
to identify
common aims*

Conference have not necessarily constituted a homogeneous group, owing to the diversity of their views on the world, on mankind, on knowledge, freedom and democracy, and even on peace. This diversity and other factors such as tension and conflict and unequal development of member states give rise to numerous divergences, which can lead to harsh exchanges during debate, causing the majority to arrive at decisions that are unfortunate for member states individually and as a group.

An observer would probably conclude that UNESCO was losing sight of its true calling. On the surface this seems true, but it seems less so if it is admitted that UNESCO not only can but does provide its member states with an opportunity to "invent a concrete set of beliefs", not for the purpose of denying these tensions and conflicts but in order to go beyond them and to identify common aims in the achievement of which all might co-operate.

Ever since the initial sessions of the General Conference, UNESCO has, more or less intentionally, been inviting the member states to formulate such a set of beliefs and to put them into practice in their working methods. The nineteenth session in Nairobi continued along this path. The General Conference had planned to come to a decision on the draft program for the 1977-78 biennium and to give final approval to the corresponding budget, proposed by the Director-General. Also on the agenda was the examination of a number of Executive Board reports and others prepared by the Director-General on questions arising from specific decisions made in previous sessions. In addition, there were decisions to be made concerning draft recommendations to the member states and international conventions to be ratified by the member states in accordance with the procedures for each instrument, as specified in the constitution and regulations of the Organization.

Key functions

Such normative activities are among the key functions of UNESCO and the General Conference, so far as the attainment of their objectives is concerned. For example, the General Conference approved a recommendation to member states on the development of adult education. This recommendation was the result of three non-governmental conferences on adult education — in 1949, 1960 and 1972 —, studies on the technical and legal aspects of the project, consultations with member states, and an intergovernmental

conference of experts to compile a draft submitted for examination at the General Conference. As a further example, in the regional context, there was the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, signed by Mexico in 1970. This instrument gave concrete form to a hypothesis that had been advanced by some ministers of education in the countries of the region — that one day be possible, with the help of UNESCO, to "promote the joint use of available educational resources by their training institutions at the level of the integral development of the peoples in the region". Work is already in progress in other regions with the same in mind.

In addition to this statutory task, the nineteenth session of the General Conference in Nairobi contained two other elements: a draft medium-term (1982) plan based on problem areas and the establishment of a drafting and coordination group.

The draft medium-term plan was presented to the General Conference with an annex containing a document devised in accordance with the method by which it could fully assume constitutional responsibility to define "the policies and the main lines of work of the Organization" so as to guide the preparation of future biennial plans by the Director-General was called for. Here we need only mention that the General Conference was able to express its opinion on the ten problems that were examined because of their importance for the future of mankind, on the activities accompanying them and on the relative amounts of money to be allocated for the activities of programs in accordance with a view to attaining these objectives.

To the drafting and negotiation of the plan fell the task of deadening the over-optimism of the inevitable "political jockeying" that takes place in the sessions of the General Conference and was referred to by Huxley, UNESCO's first Director-General, in his memoirs. The creation of the plan was meant to control the chain of events set off by the debates rather than to prevent the debates themselves.

This fairly representative group was composed of heads of delegations, was entrusted with the task of preparing, for the sessions of the conference, draft resolutions on the following points, the aspects of which generally dominated the proceedings: