

sustainable human development. The General Conference also underlined the importance of UNESCO's intellectual role, which is the defining feature of our Organization and constitutes its principle asset in the sphere of international co-operation.

8. The General Conference thereby reaffirmed the continuing relevance of the provisions of the Preamble and Article I of the Constitution, which underline the decisive role of knowledge in attaining the 'objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of mankind'. The most effective means of combating 'ignorance of each other's ways and lives' and the 'denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect for men' is by promoting the 'free flow of ideas by word and image' and by helping to 'maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge'. UNESCO's fundamental mission of promoting access to, and the transfer and sharing of, knowledge having been thus reaffirmed, the task is now to specify the most effective means of achieving these objectives in the light of the challenges that we will face in the early twenty-first century.

9. These challenges will require radical changes in the policies pursued by governments both nationally and internationally. UNESCO must therefore become a privileged partner of States as well as of the intellectual and professional communities in each of its fields of competence. It must be in a position to be present whenever decision-makers meet to consider matters within these fields, so as to offer guidance, advice and assessment. This calls for strengthening activities aimed at:

- (i) anticipating and preparing innovatory strategies; as is, for example, the purpose of such forums as the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, the World Commission on Culture and Development and the International Bio-ethics Committee;
- (ii) gathering and circulating for the attention of decision-makers reliable information on the present situation and probable trends in our fields of competence; in this context, the world reports* published by UNESCO are already authoritative;**
- (iii) encouraging political leaders at the highest level to make firm commitments. This was the purpose of the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All and of the Education for All New Delhi Summit of Nine High-Population Developing Countries. This is also the aim of the contribution made by UNESCO to the major intergovernmental conferences recently organized by the United Nations.

10. In recent years, UNESCO has devoted a great deal of effort to all these tasks; the initiatives taken have helped to enhance its international prestige and establish its credibility both with national decision-makers and with the heads of the various institutions of the United Nations system.

11. But the time would now seem right - while continuing to strengthen our co-operation with Member States - to turn our attention more to those who are the main subjects, both as actors and beneficiaries, of the United Nations Charter and the UNESCO Constitution - the peoples of the world; in other words, the essential fabric of society and its main strands - parliamentarians, town councils, grass-root communities, non-governmental organizations, associations, trade unions, enterprises and the media, giving particular importance to efforts in favour of young people.

12. At a time when functions and roles that had previously been performed by the State are being taken over almost everywhere by new actors, in societies where attitudes are shaped less and less by traditional institutions and when at the same time national policies - often dictated by short-term considerations - can be permanently influenced by mass movements of popular opinion, should not UNESCO, more than in the past, be attempting to bring about a sort of 'general mobilization' to promote the necessary changes of direction? Should it not be endeavouring to put over its messages

* World Education Report (1991, 1993); World Science Report (1993); World Communication Report (1990).

** We should perhaps explore other means of circulating regular information on the 'state of the planet' in areas vital to our common survival (population, pollution, etc.).