

U N E S C O

Section of Philosophy and Human Sciences

UNESCO Strategy on Philosophy

DRAFT

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This document contains the UNESCO Strategy on Philosophy, prepared at the request of the Executive Board of UNESCO at its 169th Session (ref. 169 EX/39 Rev.). The Strategy includes three main sections introduced by an Overview: i). Philosophy Facing World Problems, ii). Philosophy in Education, iii). Promotion of Philosophical Thought and Research. The Strategy is to be presented at the Executive Board at its 171st Session (Spring 2005).

Overview

Section I. Philosophy Facing World Problems: Analysis and Questioning of Contemporary Society

Section II. Philosophy in Education: Fostering Critical Reflection and Independent Thinking

Section III. Promotion of Philosophical Thought and Research

Overview: UNESCO's Role

The importance of philosophy to the work of UNESCO is evident. Philosophical analysis and reflection are undeniably linked to the establishment and the maintenance of peace, the core mission of the Organization. By developing the intellectual tools to analyze and understand the key concepts such as justice, dignity and freedom, building capacities for independent thought and judgment, enhancing the critical skills to understand and question the world and its challenges, and fostering reflection on values and principles, philosophy is a 'school of freedom'.

The necessity of a Philosophy Programme at UNESCO was underscored from the very inception of the Organization. One of the tasks proposed for UNESCO in 1946 by the Preparatory Commission of the first General Conference of that year was for a Philosophy Programme to "*imbue the public mind a certain number of philosophical and moral notions to be regarded as a minimum equipment, and which are calculated to reinforce a respect for human personality, a love of peace, a hatred of narrow nationalism and the rule of brute force, solidarity, and devotion to the ideal of culture*"¹. Philosophy, then, can also be considered a school for human solidarity².

UNESCO interprets philosophy in a *wide sense* of ennobling each individual and fostering the intellectual moral solidarity of mankind. It is not only at the heart of human knowledge, but of all human activity, and its scope is as wide as UNESCO's own fields of competence³. The major issues dealt with by the Organization, such as education for all, cultural diversity, the ethics of science, human rights, knowledge societies, democracy, and intercultural dialogue and dialogue among civilizations, need not only to have a solid philosophical foundation but also analytical and conceptual rigor. An incessant critical analysis on concepts, norms and standards implied in the major programmes of UNESCO is necessary for enhancing effectiveness and relevance.

The importance of philosophy was re-affirmed in February 1995, when philosophers gathered in Paris to adopt a *Paris Declaration for Philosophy*⁴. It was stated that all

¹ Memorandum of the Philosophy Programme of UNESCO (24 June, 1946), by the Letters and Philosophy Committee, Sub-Section for Philosophy

² With this broad vision of philosophy, the Commission set up an action plan with two aims: (i) to place adequate international instruments at the service of the advance of philosophical studies; and (ii) to place philosophy at the service of the international education of the nations. It was also added that the two aims had to be accompanied by a relentless promotion of different philosophical traditions, along with "confrontations of pure philosophy with concrete problems of the modern world" (Ibid).

³ "It is not enough to fight against illiteracy: we must also know the books which men must read. It is not enough to work together at scientific discoveries: everyone must understand that the value of science lies not so much in its applications [...] as in the emancipation of the human mind and in the creation of a vast spiritual commonwealth above all clans and empires. As for mass media, these can be used for any purpose at all [...] The ends and the values assigned to each [Sector] are the proper matter of philosophy" (Ibid).

⁴ This declaration was adopted by :

Ruben G. Apressian (Moscow Academy of Sciences Institute of Philosophy, Russian Federation), Tanella Boni-Koné (University of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire), Tzotcho Boyadjiev (University of Saint Clement Ohrid, Sophia, Bulgaria), In-Suk Cha (Secretary General of the National Commission for UNESCO of the Republic of Korea, Seoul, Republic of Korea), Marilena Chaui (University of Sao Paulo, Brazil), Donald

individuals everywhere should be entitled to engage in the free pursuit of philosophy, and that the teaching of philosophy should be maintained or expanded where it exists, introduced where it does not yet exist. Moreover, it was stated that the knowledge of philosophical insight in different cultures, and their comparison, as well as the analysis of their commonalities and differences should be supported.

Key Pillars of Action for UNESCO in the Field of Philosophy:

- Philosophy Facing World Problems
- Philosophy in Education
- Promotion of Philosophical Thought and Research

Global Aims for Philosophy at UNESCO:

- ❑ To serve as a laboratory of ideas and a catalyst for international cooperation and social change based on freedom, justice and human dignity;
- ❑ To foster the generation of knowledge and ground-breaking research;
- ❑ To contribute to the advancement of philosophical study and research;
- ❑ To popularize philosophy among the general public and raise awareness of the pertinence of philosophical analysis;
- ❑ To improve the quality of education by promoting philosophy in education;
- ❑ To contribute in building capacities and tools in Member States for philosophical scholarship;
- ❑ To function as a clearing house in all the above-mentioned domains.

**Section I. Philosophy Facing World Problems:
Analysis and Questioning of Contemporary Society**

UNESCO will support philosophical analysis and research that would focus on contemporary problems and its concrete consequences to social stability and peace building. Efforts will be made to encourage thinkers to tackle emerging global problems in order to foster new ideas and research. By supporting reflection by philosophers on the major problems facing humanity today, UNESCO will incite philosophers to play an influential role beyond their traditional academic sphere and participate actively in responding to contemporary problems, thus complementing on-going academic research.

Davidson (University of Berkeley, USA), Souleymane Bachir Diagne (University of Dakar, Senegal), François Dossou (National University of Benin, Cotonou, Benin), Michael Dummett (Oxford, United Kingdom), Artan Fuga (University of Tirana, Albania), Humberto Giannini (University of Santiago de Chile, Chile), Paulin J. Hountondji (National University of Benin, Cotonou, Benin), Ioanna Kuçuradi (Secretary General of the International Federation of the Societies of Philosophy, Ankara, Turkey), Dominique Lecourt (University of Paris VII, Paris France), Nelly Motroshilova (University of Moscow, Russian Federation), Satchidananda Murty (Vice-president of the International Federation of the Societies of Philosophy, India), Ulrich Johannes Schneider (University of Leipzig, Germany), Peter Serracino Inglott (Rector of the University of Malta), H.E. Mohammed Allal Sinaceur (Former Director of the Division of Philosophy of UNESCO, Rabat, Morocco), Richard Shusterman (Temple University, Philadelphia, USA), Fathi Triki (Dean of the Faculty of Literature and Social Sciences of Sfax, Tunisia), Susana Villavicencio (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina).

For UNESCO, as an intellectual and ethical organization, has a role to play in creating a public space in which dialogue can acquire an authentic international dimension, open to all. This dialogue, nourished by the concepts and ideas produced by thinkers, should also penetrate the realm of decision-makers, and give inspiration to the general public for action. The connection between reflection, debate and action will be re-enforced by bringing together thinkers, policy-makers and the civil society. The main challenge will thus be to make a link between research and action.

Objectives:

- a). Provide a forum for philosophical dialogue, with particular emphasis on inter-regional dialogue;
- b). Function as a clearing house for current research on specific topics concerning emerging global issues;
- c). Serve as laboratory of ideas and a catalyst for international cooperation and social change.

The Proposed Action Includes:

- a) Programme of Work relative to the Follow-up of the World Congress of Philosophy: Philosophy Facing World Problems – expert seminars, national and international conferences involving policy makers and publications on specific themes relative to globalization (Global Justice and Human Dignity in the Era of Globalization: topics such as responsibility, equality, collective and individual action, identity, justice). Reflection and analysis related to concrete problems of moral relevance in the contemporary society would be fostered and efforts will be made to ensure follow-up on the national level with relevant partners;
- b) Inter-Regional Philosophical Dialogues: Launched in 2004, this programme aims to establish philosophical dialogues amongst scholars of various regions of the world (e.g. the Arab world and Asia, Africa and Latin America, Africa and the Arab world);
- c) Virtual Resource Centre: A Website containing reference documents, current research papers, on-line discussions and a virtual library would be set up under the section of the UNESCO Philosophy Website to serve researchers, students and scholars in the field of political and moral philosophy.

Expected Outcomes:

- a) Development of research and production of new ideas and concept on responses to contemporary global problems;
- b) Increased knowledge on specific issues (justice, human dignity, globalization, poverty, etc.) by scholars and the civil society;
- c) Strengthened partnerships with key actors of the philosophical community;
- d) Sensitizing policy-makers on the approaches to solving world problems.

Section II. Philosophy in Education

The teaching of philosophy contributes to the development of free citizens. It “encourages one to judge for oneself, to confront all sorts of arguments, to respect what others have to say, and to submit only to the authority of reason”⁵. This, in other words, is a ‘practical training in basic rights’ – building the capacity for individuals to have a genuine freedom of thought, freedom from dogmas and unquestioned ‘wisdom’. It also fosters the ability for human beings to make judgments concerning his/her situation. This is inevitably linked to the possibility for evaluation, critique and choice for action or non-action⁶.

Objectives:

- a) Working at the policy-level with governments to foster the teaching of philosophy and philosophical research;
- b) Advocacy on the necessity of teaching philosophy in the world;
- c) Developing materials to assist Member States in developing their programs for teaching philosophy;
- d) Fostering research on the philosophy of education and the teaching of philosophy in the world.

The Proposed Action Includes:

- a) An advocacy program on the teaching of philosophy;
- b) Policy-recommendations on the teaching of philosophy;
- c) Curriculum development: teaching of the various philosophical traditions, giving a comprehensive overview, and providing the means for professors to teach the different traditions⁷. Particular emphasis will be put on uncovering ways to promote and teach lesser-known philosophical traditions. This would be done with the Education Sector to

⁵ Philosophy and Democracy in the World: A UNESCO Survey, UNESCO Publishing, 1995, p. 8

⁶ The importance of philosophy education was affirmed in 1950 at the fifth session of the General Conference which decided that UNESCO should make “an inquiry into the place occupied by the teaching of philosophy in the different educational systems, the way it is taught and its influence on the training of the citizen” (Resolution 1212). The first survey produced in 1953 under the direction Georges Caguilhem on nine countries was followed-up in 1995, with a more complete survey on 66 countries. However, there has not been a systematic follow-up to the recommendations of the experts on the survey regarding philosophy education.

⁷ The teaching of philosophy in the world largely remains an exercise of teaching its European tradition, rendering the learning of philosophy limited in terms of the other traditions. This in turn influences the vision of philosophy as a European phenomenon, universal but uniquely rooted in the Greek tradition. This has questionable consequences in the understanding, not only of the philosophical significance and contribution of other cultures, but also in establishing a distorted perception of the nature of philosophy itself. This issue could be examined at University level, where non-European philosophy is deeply ‘ghettoised’ to the respective area-related departments (East Asian department, African studies department, etc.), but excluded from philosophy departments. Non-European thought is thus considered to be part and parcel of a ‘cultural study’, but not as an integral part of learning philosophy.

develop a comprehensive curriculum and reference text for teaching the various traditions of philosophy in the world, as well as to develop a curriculum and reference text for comparative philosophy. Seminars on the development of region-specific curricula will be organized, aiming to develop a curricula and recommendations for the teaching of philosophy. The results will be published, and disseminated to Member States;

d). The development of International Philosophy Olympiads: The Olympiads, initiated by the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP), gathers students in the high-school level from over twenty countries. It is an essay competition in philosophy on two levels. One is national and is organized in each country through relevant NGOs and the Ministries of Education. The winners of the countries are then invited to participate in an international competition. This fosters philosophical awareness among youth and gives occasion for intercultural encounters. Nevertheless, the countries, especially the developing countries, could be further encouraged to organize such events, and the annual international Olympiad could be held during Philosophy Day at UNESCO;

e) Creating a UNESCO Network on Teaching Philosophy Today.

Expected Outcomes:

a) Curricula for philosophy teaching developed, with particular emphasis on the characteristics and traditions of the different regions;

b) Co-operation with National Commissions developed with a view to fostering the teaching of philosophy in Member States;

c) Development of the International Philosophy Olympiads;

d) A network for the teaching of philosophy developed.

Section III. Promotion of Philosophical Thought and Research

Popularization of philosophy is essential in developing a democratic and peaceful culture. Linking the knowledge generated in philosophy and fostering independent thought in the minds of the general public is crucial to peace, especially in countries where philosophy is not yet formally taught. Special emphasis will be put on the promotion of lesser-known traditions of philosophical thought.

Objectives:

a) Engaging the general public in philosophical reflection;

b) Popularizing philosophic culture;

c) Imbuing popular culture with the importance of philosophy and its relevance to everyday life.

The Proposed Action Includes:

a) UNESCO Philosophy Day: This is essentially a forum for reflection, aiming to promote and popularize philosophy. Launched in 2002, events to celebrate philosophy are organized at Paris Headquarters and in Member States in cooperation with various

partners⁸. Special emphasis will be made to working with various cities initiatives on popularizing philosophy;

b) “Philosophers Today: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers”: A series of interviews with philosophers from all regions of the world will be launched. The interviews which will be recorded and filmed will be published in a booklet with a CD-Rom attached for wide dissemination. This can also be used as a teaching material in the Member States. The aim is to establish an evolving Encyclopedia of Philosophers;

c) Support the development of programmes for television and/or radio on philosophy, especially for the people in the developing countries which would complement the work already done through Internet sites on philosophy. The best way to ‘educate’ the public mind and to instill philosophical awareness is through the media of television and radio;

d) UNESCO Fund for Philosophy: a fund would be created in order to support the participation of scholars in developing countries to seminars and international conferences, as well as to give small grants for research at Doctoral level;

e) UNESCO Chairs in Philosophy: in addition to giving coherence to existing Chairs, efforts will be made to establish Chairs in Africa and South-East Asia, as well as other regions in the world.

Expected Outcomes:

a) Awareness raised amongst the general public on current philosophical debates;

b) Philosophic culture fostered;

c) Visibility of UNESCO in the field of philosophy increased.

⁸ At Headquarters, the event gathers philosophers from the world for thematic debates and conferences. In addition, there is an international book fair on philosophy, exhibitions (live art), concerts, philosophy cafés and philosophy lunches. Papers presented during the event are published for wide dissemination. In the Member States, events included public conferences, public debates, radio shows, exhibitions, lectures and philosophy cafés, mobilizing the general public and especially the youth. In parallel to working on the event, this action will be geared towards working with National Commissions to integrate the celebration in the national public school system. In many regions, the framework of this action was the occasion for free public debate under the umbrella of UNESCO.

ANNEX I

A Philosophy Strategy: The Process

At its 169th Session, the Executive Board of UNESCO requested the Director-General to propose an inter-sectoral strategy on philosophy to be drafted in close consultation with the Member States and their National Commissions, relevant NGOs and eminent personalities. During the discussion in which nineteen countries took the floor, the speakers stressed the importance of philosophical reflection and analysis for all societies in confronting current contemporary problems, and underscored the need for UNESCO to give greater impetus to its work in the field of philosophy⁹.

The present document is a result of a two-year consultation process in which all Permanent Delegations to UNESCO, every National Commission for UNESCO, 500 NGOs, 600 Universities, and 150 independent philosophers, eminent personalities were invited to contribute.

Virtual consultations were made in two-phases. First, the relevant stakeholders were invited to contribute by responding to a questionnaire. A draft Strategy was produced in response to the contributions. Second, the draft Strategy was sent to the same stakeholders for comments. This resulted in over a 300 replies, suggestions and comments.

In order to establish an inter-sectoral Strategy, two meetings were held with all the Sectors, and a Working/Drafting Group was established. The Group met twice, and reported back to the inter-sectoral meeting with a draft Strategy.

The following (non-virtual) consultations were made:

- World Congress of Philosophy (Istanbul, 16-17 August 2003) – consultations with the members of the Congress, as well as with the Steering Committee;
- Brainstorming session for elements of a Strategy with Permanent Delegations to UNESCO (Paris, 3 June 2004);
- Two inter-sectoral consultations (Paris, 10 September 2004 and 1 December 2004);
- Two Working/Drafting Group meetings (20 October 2004 and 5 November 2004);
- Regional consultations in the Developing Countries (Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo).

⁹ Several speakers highlighted the dire need for philosophical analysis and critical reflection today, and emphasized the need to foster independent and rigorous philosophical thought in the world, especially amongst the youth. Many speakers underlined that UNESCO, as the only agency within the United Nations to have a philosophy programme, needs to strengthen its activities in order to live up to its mandate as the intellectual agency of the U.N. and to give visibility to its role as such. Many Delegates addressed the necessity of philosophy education at all levels, and some speakers noted the need to sensitize policy-makers on philosophical analysis, thereby nourishing the policy-making process with philosophical thought. Several Delegates stressed the importance of the variety of philosophical traditions in the world and urged UNESCO to consider the philosophical diversity in all societies.