

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTSSECOND SESSION

COMMUNICATION ADDRESSED BY THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION TO THE CHAIRMAN OF
THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

I.

The following letter was addressed by Mr. J.L. Havet to Mrs. Roosevelt on 13 December 1947:

On behalf of UNESCO, which I represent at the Commission on Human Rights, I have the honour to submit to you and the Commission the following information on the work UNESCO proposes to undertake in matters related to questions falling within your Commission's field of competence. I am referring to the UNESCO programme in the field of philosophy as confirmed by a vote of the General Conference at Mexico City two weeks ago.

However, in order to place this information in its proper context, it is necessary for me to give you a few preliminary explanations regarding the work undertaken by UNESCO in that field in the year 1947 in pursuance of the instructions of the first General Conference.

UNESCO's work in the field of philosophy consists mainly in trying to bring about a better understanding among men belonging to different cultures and professing different ideologies. Under this programme, the General Conference of November 1946 decided that the first centre of interest would be the difficult problem of the philosophical bases of human rights.

Of course, a purely philosophical enquiry into the bases of human rights is very different from the task of drafting an International Declaration or a Convention. However, certain of the fundamental difficulties, which it was essential to solve for the purpose of drafting such texts, sprang from the clash of opposing ideological viewpoints. It was therefore decided that UNESCO's work should be carried out in collaboration with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and that the conclusions it reached should be respectfully communicated to the Commission, in the conviction that this clarification of opposing ideologies and this attempt at a constructive synthesis could be used by the delegates to reach an agreement, without their being bound by them in any way.

May I retrace briefly the history of these contacts in our work?

The permanent representative of UNESCO at the United Nations, Mr. Darchambeau, informed the Commission at its first session of the measures UNESCO proposed to take. In January 1947, UNESCO was represented at the Economic and Social Council by a special observer, Mr. Archibald MacLeish, who stated the Organization's point of view and gave a detailed analysis of its programme of action. I would only remind you of the subsequent exchange of letters between the Director-General of UNESCO and yourself. From that time onwards liaison between the Secretariat of UNESCO and the Human Rights Division has been continuous. UNESCO was represented by a special observer at the session of the Drafting Committee last June. Finally, the Report of the Drafting Committee to the Commission on Human Rights was transmitted to UNESCO in July, and the Organization was requested to submit its comments to the United Nations in its capacity as a Specialized Agency. It was in answer to that request that the document (UNESCO/Phil/10), which was distributed to the Commission at the beginning of the present session, was sent to the United Nations.

What has been the nature of UNESCO's work?

A questionnaire on the philosophical bases of human rights was addressed to about 150 philosophers personally in various parts of the world, as well as to the National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Commissions, which constitute the liaison organs of UNESCO. About 70 replies were received by UNESCO, and the document respectfully submitted to you was drawn up by a committee of experts on the basis of these replies.

In the second stage of its various projects in the field of philosophy UNESCO will bring these ideological controversies to the notice of the public by the publication of "symposia".

Until that stage had been reached, UNESCO did not wish to give any publicity itself to this enquiry into the philosophical bases of human rights. However a number of newspapers and reviews have voluntarily published certain items of information referring to this question. These have occasionally contained factual inaccuracies, for which UNESCO has sought the publication of corrections. Furthermore, the United Nations Department of Public Information pressed the UNESCO Information Section to send it a number of the essays received on the subject of the philosophical problem of human rights, and the United Nations Weekly Bulletin has published a few samples of the material UNESCO possesses: for instance the communications received from Mahatma Gandhi, Jacques Maritain, Aldous Huxley, Salvador de Madariaga, etc.

After these preliminary explanations, I arrive at the main point of this letter, which is to inform you that at the second General Conference of UNESCO last month, it was decided to place the following item on the Organization's programme for 1948:

"UNESCO will publish, in 1948, a volume of essays on the philosophical bases of human rights, compiled from the contributions received during 1947 in response to its enquiry on this subject. These essays will first be published in languages which

are in most general use, and later in languages whose use appears most likely to serve the cause of international peace and understanding."

Although this comparison of philosophical opinions and the publication of these essays proceed from a standpoint altogether different from that of the Commission of which you are Chairman, I thought it my duty to inform you officially, on behalf of UNESCO, of the projects which the Organization is to execute, and respectfully to request you to notify the Members of the Commission accordingly.

This publication by UNESCO can in no way interfere with the work of the Commission on Human Rights. Still less does it commit the Commission in any way; furthermore, since it will be a collection of philosophical essays written by experts under their own personal signature, it cannot by any means be dogmatic in character. However, I should like to affirm the conviction, on behalf of UNESCO, that a publication of this sort, by aiding the growth of public interest in the philosophical problem of human rights, will be of assistance to your Commission in the performance of its highly important task.

I trust you will forgive me for having taken up so much of your time and for adding to an already heavily loaded programme.

I have the honour to be, etc.

Jacques L. Havet
Representative of UNESCO at the
United Nations Commission on
Human Rights.

Geneva, 13 December 1947.

The following letter, addressed to the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was annexed to Mr. J.L. Havet's letter:

July 14th 1947

Dr. Julian Huxley
Director- General,
United Nations Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization.

Sir,

I have the honour to invite the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to send a representative to participate in the second session of the Commission on Human Rights, which will convene in Geneva on the 25th of August for a period of approximately two weeks.

Your attention is directed to the provisional agenda of this session (Document 2/CN4/22) and to the report of the Drafting Committee on an International Bill of Rights to the Commission on Human Rights (Document 2/CN4/21). The latter document contains two proposed working papers: Annex F, comprising suggested articles for an International Declaration of Human Rights; and Annex G, comprising suggested articles for an International Convention on Human Rights.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is requested to send any comments it may wish to make upon the report of the Drafting Committee to the Division on Human Rights, Geneva, in time for translation and distribution before the opening of the session; and to inform the Division of the name of the representative.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

Signed: Jan Stanczyk
Acting Assistant Secretary-General
in Charge of Social Affairs.

Note. Article 33 of the draft contained in the Report of the Drafting Committee on an International Bill of Human Rights was accompanied by the following commentary:

"The Drafting Committee suggested that each Article referring to economic and social rights should be referred to the appropriate Specialized Agencies for their consideration and comment."(1)

The United Nations Secretariat has accordingly referred to the various Specialized Agencies, including UNESCO.

(1) Document E/CN.4/21, 1 July 1947 - Annex F.