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Scientific and Cultural Organization

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APPLICATION OF 24 C/RESOLUTION 25, CONCERNING
EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE
OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES

SUMMARY

In this document, the Director-General informs the Executive Board of the measures he has taken to give effect to 24 C/Resolution 25 and 132 EX/Decision 5.2.5. He also brings to the attention of the Board information communicated to him regarding educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories.

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INTRODUCTION

1. After considering at its 132nd session the report by the Director-General entitled 'Application of 24 C/Resolution 25, concerning educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories' (132 EX/12 and Add.), the Executive Board adopted decision 5.2.5 by which it decided to include this item on the agenda of its 134th session; and to propose to the General Conference a draft resolution which was adopted by the Conference at its twenty-fifth session as 25 C/Resolution 20. In the present document, the Director-General reports to the Board on developments concerning educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories that have taken place since the 132nd session.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

2. In a letter dated 25 October 1989, the Permanent Observer of Palestine to Unesco conveyed to the Director-General the request of the Higher Education Council in the occupied territories that he intervene with the Israeli authorities to obtain the reopening of the universities and higher education institutions. The latest information communicated in the letter was that 20 universities and higher education institutions in the occupied territories have been virtually closed for two years and 25,000 students are being deprived of their right to higher education for the third consecutive year.

3. The same communication also referred to the continuation of practices of obstruction by Israeli soldiers in the vicinity of schools: practices provoking stone-throwing by pupils and ripostes by the military in the form of shooting, arrests and closure of schools.

4. In several letters as well as in meetings with the Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Israel the Director-General transmitted the above information to the Israeli authorities urging them repeatedly to take steps to enable the Palestinian pupils to pursue their education without hindrance or disturbance. The Director-General also asked the Israeli authorities to inform him of the situation concerning this major field of competence of Unesco and of the efforts made to ensure full exercise by pupils in the occupied territories of their right to education.

5. The Director-General also wrote to the Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Israel expressing his grave concern at the continuing closure of universities and higher education institutions and referring to previous correspondence, in which he had indicated his desire to establish a meaningful dialogue with the Israeli authorities concerning the educational institutions in the territories. The Director-General expressed his conviction that the institutions of higher education could, if allowed to function normally, contribute to the achievement of a negotiated settlement in the area. The Director-General also referred to his previous proposal regarding the provision of distance education and other non-formal education facilities to mitigate the effect of the protracted closure of the institutions concerned, and noted that all his suggestions in this regard had so far failed to yield any positive results.

6. In this context, the Director-General indicated that the general closure of institutions should be avoided at all costs inasmuch as it constituted a collective punishment. In his view the application to educational institutions

of rules of the kind enforced would seem to go beyond the limits of what may be considered appropriate to maintain public order. He also expressed his readiness to consider establishing an observer mission to monitor the reopening of educational institutions and their return to normal functioning, and his hope that the Israeli authorities would judge the moment right to respond to the appeals he had repeatedly addressed to them with a view to ensuring the effective exercise in the occupied territories of the right to education at all levels.

7. In his response of 5 February 1990 the Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Israel, reiterated the continuing desire of the Government of Israel to maintain a constructive dialogue with Unesco on matters of common interest, despite the undue display of hostility manifested during the deliberations in the various forums of Unesco on questions concerning the educational institutions in the occupied territories. He recalled that it was the Government of Israel that had approved the establishment of the universities, which were non-existent before 1967. He added that Israel had refrained from any interference with the academic life of these institutions, as long as there were no abuses of academic facilities for the purpose of unlawful, hostile and violent activity. He informed the Director-General that the Civil Administration has indicated that its aim was to allow registration for classes at the universities as long as the campuses would not be exploited again for fomenting disorder and violence. Regarding the proposed observer mission the Ambassador indicated that his authorities did not view the establishment of such a mission in the territories as an effective or appropriate device. He added that if calm returned to campuses, there would be no need for any guarantee for the normal functioning of the universities.

8. The Permanent Observer of Palestine to Unesco informed the Director-General, in letters of 18 January and 8 February 1990 respectively, of continued serious disruption in the provision of primary and secondary education in the occupied territories. He indicated that a great number of primary and secondary schools were not functioning because of curfews, arbitrary closures of schools, daily searches and identity checks on pupils. He also recalled that universities and other higher educational and cultural institutions had remained closed for the third consecutive year and asked the Director-General to intervene again with the Israeli authorities so as to secure the normal functioning of all educational institutions and enable Palestinian pupils and students to exercise fully their right to education.

9. By a letter of 14 March 1990, the Director-General conveyed the above information to the Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Israel, and reiterated his concern about the situation of all educational institutions in the occupied territories. He again urged the Israeli occupation authorities to make every effort to avoid occurrences which would prevent pupils and students in the occupied territories from pursuing their education, and to inform him of the measures being taken to this end.

FATHER BONE'S MISSION

10. In a letter dated 15 December 1989, the Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Israel, referred to the question of Father Boné's mission to Israel which has been brought up by the Director-General on several occasions. He reiterated the position of the Israeli authorities regarding this visit which referred principally to the fact that teaching in institutions for higher education had come to be interrupted because of the involvement of students and faculty in the Intifada, and it was therefore considered inopportune to have the problem examined again at the present time. He referred to his meeting with the Director-General on 14 November and recalled that the Israeli authorities

would not be adverse to his meeting with Father Boné. He also indicated that such an encounter could be of greater consequence if undertaken once the situation in the territories had improved. In conclusion, he pointed out that the excellent working conditions that Israel maintained with the other Unesco emissary, Professor Lemaire, were a direct result of the mutual confidence and 'rapport' with this expert.

11. On 23 January 1990, the Director-General responded, expressing his satisfaction with the fact that the Israeli authorities would not be opposed to the Ambassador's meeting with Father Boné. He concurred that such a meeting would perhaps be more fruitful if the situation in the territories were more auspicious, but insisted that even at the present juncture, a meeting between the Ambassador and Father Boné might prove highly useful. The Director-General indicated that he was asking Father Boné to get in touch with the Ambassador in order to arrange for such a meeting as soon as possible. Father Boné has since been in touch with the Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Israel. The Director-General will keep the Executive Board informed of any further developments.