

# DECLARATION ON ERADICATION OF ILLITERACY IN THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT DECADE

(GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO AT ITS THIRTEENTH SESSION,  
19 NOVEMBER 1964)

An appeal to the nations

- (1) The presence in the world today of more than 700 million people who are unable to read and write and have therefore no means of communication by written language or access to the world of ideas in written language is a continuing challenge to the governments and peoples of all Member States who have dedicated themselves to the promotion of human progress in the United Nations Development Decade.
- (2) All the material achievements of the United Nations Development Decade will lose their lustre if millions of people in the world continue to grope for light and are not given the means to find it.
- (3) Not having the basic tools of literacy, half the adult population of the world is today denied the exercise of man's inalienable right to education, and is committed to live unaware of the new vistas that the advancement of knowledge, science and technology are rapidly unfolding to make man's struggle for freedom from want, hunger and disease less arduous, and to remain isolated even from its own common heritage enshrined in the moral, cultural and artistic achievements and the noblest aspirations of each nation.
- (4) The central purpose of development is to release the creative and productive energies of all humanity. This purpose cannot be achieved in darkness. It cannot be achieved so long as humanity is divided into those who possess and those who are denied the means that education and literacy provide for enriching this life and seeking new ways of knowledge, so long as the human mind is not freed of the intolerance, mistrust and fear that are born of ignorance.
- (5) This is an issue of vital importance not only to the developing nations who today carry the burden of illiteracy, but also to the entire international community, which cannot stand divided before the doors of its history.
- (6) Literacy is not an end in itself; it is a means for the acquisition of those fundamental skills through which education can develop and grow as a continuing and self-renewing process. It provides both the motive and the medium for self-development, attainment of new skills and ideas, and adaptability to a rapidly changing environment. As such, it is a factor of crucial importance in accelerating the social and economic transformation that the developing process implies. Therefore, literacy and adult education form not only an integrated part of the programme of educational growth, but also a critical sector in the strategy of human resource development. Together with formal education, it is basic to a developing economic and social order. The eradication of mass illiteracy and provision for the maintenance and widespread use of literacy should therefore be treated in development plans as an essential complement of formal education as one of the foundations of self-sustaining economic growth.

- (7) The magnitude of the task that needs to be carried out if illiteracy is to be wiped out, is as vast as it is urgent. So is the promotion of human welfare and happiness.
- (8) The main responsibility for this task rests on the governments of Member States in which the incidence of illiteracy is acute. They have to mobilize the resources and constructive energies of the people and guide them to effective and determined action at the national and local levels. In this challenging undertaking, however, they will need and should be given a substantial measure of international assistance, which in its various forms, multilateral and bilateral, should be concerted and co-ordinated so as to secure the maximum benefits to States that are engaged in this task.
- (9) Recognizing the interdependence of mankind, solemnly declaring that the doors of knowledge and history must be opened to all its members, the General Conference of Unesco appeals to the governments and peoples of all Member States, to social, cultural and political organizations, to trade unions and voluntary organizations, to men and women of goodwill everywhere, to aid, assist and support a world-wide movement for the eradication of mass illiteracy in the one and indivisible cause of human progress and fulfilment, so that through their united efforts this vital task may be achieved in the shortest possible time.