Meeting Report by the Rapporteur
Sub-regional Seminar for National Commissions of Latin America

3 to 5 September 2013, Quito-Ecuador

Ms Amparo Naranjo, Permanent Secretary of the National Commission of Ecuador to UNESCO, chaired the inaugural session, with interventions from Mr Jorge Sequeira, Director of UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean and Acting Director of UNESCO-Quito, Mr Jorge Parra, UNFPA Representative to Ecuador in lieu of the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr Eric Falt, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Public Information, UNESCO Paris, and Ms Miriam Chacón, Acting Vice-Minister of Education of Ecuador.

In the course of the inauguration, the challenges facing the region were presented as well as the emerging themes which are shaping the context of UNESCO’s and the National Commissions’ actions now and in the future.

The session continued with security recommendations by Mr Marcio Barbosa, Security Adviser for the United Nations System in Ecuador.

After a brief introduction by each of the participants, the meeting agenda was approved by consensus and the proposal by UNESCO to designate Ms Amparo Naranjo (Permanent Secretary of the National Commission of Ecuador to UNESCO) as Rapporteur of the Meeting was adopted.

In Panel 1, chaired by Mr Henry Armas, the representative of Peru, participants reviewed the Report and the Plan of Action of the Open Tripartite Working Group on cooperation with the National Commissions. Mr Falt presented the report which was followed by a round table discussion on the recommendations of the report. The participants raised the following points:

Participants believed the report was of value since it highlighted, in concrete terms, the role that the National Commissions need to develop; they appreciated the work done by UNESCO in this endeavour.

It was suggested that it would be advantageous to exchange best practices on the ways in which National Commissions operate, while recognising that there was more than one way of learning to improve the functioning of National Commissions.

Regarding the functioning of National Commissions, participants emphasised the importance for National Commissions to be financially solvent and to be consulted on programming aspects.

It was emphasised that UNESCO-HQ needed to communicate systematically with the National Commissions. Mr Falt alluded to a document on National Commission structures which he will try to
find and send to the National Commissions. Several representatives referred to their own working methods.

UNESCO resolve in providing capacity building through different means was positively received. Given the budget crisis in UNESCO, the need to find capacity-building alternatives was stressed.

Regarding the recommendations in the Tripartite Report, the comments are summarised below:

The National Commissions in the different countries have different structures and hierarchies. In this respect, the participants expressed their concern about the need for the National Commissions to have a more specific status. In order to ensure timely execution of activities, it was suggested that there is an advantage in the National Commissions developing close links to high authorities. They also expressed the need to strengthen the National Commissions’ ability to convene national authorities in the different areas of competence of UNESCO for greater impact.

It was stressed that the principal authorities in the National Commissions are high-level officials who need to have, within their organisation, stable and well-trained teams, who are the institutional memory of the respective National Commission. Generally speaking it was felt that the principle of diversity needs to be respected.

The National Commissions emphasised the need to improve communication channels. UNESCO suggested that it would be advantageous to know more about the National Commissions’ activities through reports they produce. The idea was well received by the Representatives who will make efforts in this respect. Mr Falt announced that he was thinking of producing a global report which would showcase information on the National Commissions ‘activities in a compact format and which could be disseminated opportunely. This initiative would be ready by 2014.

The representatives shared best practices on exchanges and emphasised the potential for generating alliances between National Commissions. It was suggested that National Commissions review the experience of the Nat Com of Korea as well as a manual prepared by the German National Commission, and the public policy documents published by the British National Commission on its web site.

Some of the countries covered by the UNESCO Office in San Jose referred to shortcomings in the coordination and support offered by this Office. A similar situation was highlighted in the Office in Peru. On the other hand, the participants recognised the efforts by the Regional Office in Santiago to provide support to the National Commissions, according to the means available to it. Also mentioned was the support provided by the Offices of Quito and Montevideo.

Participants insisted on the need for UNESCO to ensure it informed the respective National Commissions about any contact with national counterparts and, wherever possible, to make these contacts through the National Commission. It was considered beneficial to use the presence of UNESCO staff members in the countries for activities which support the role of the National Commissions.
Many representatives appreciated the support of the Regional Office for Education in Santiago, both to the countries and to the National Commissions. The example was given of the training sessions the Regional Office is providing to Colombia. UNESCO was urged to continue these activities and to strengthen them.

It was suggested to use the opportunity of different meetings organised within the framework of international cooperation in the region to strengthen exchanges between National Commission representatives. It was also proposed to use the presentations and information for new Staff Members, which the National Commissions already have. UNESCO-Santiago will provide an institutional summary which may be useful in this regard. In addition, the National Commission of Ecuador will make available to the participants the bibliography from the training manual for Secretary-Generals.

The representatives generally speaking requested UNESCO to make efforts to send information in Spanish. A suggestion was made regarding the possibility of the National Commissions in Latin America helping with the translation of documents.

In Panel 2 on the Participation Programme and Emergency Assistance, presented by Mr Stoyan Bantchev and chaired by the representative from Costa Rica, Ms Diana Borrás, representatives expressed the following views:

Participants exchanged information on the mechanisms used to manage the Participation Programme as well as the different stresses and difficulties they encountered.

Several representatives expressed their concern about the deadlines involved in the processes of presenting, approving, receiving transfers, implementing and financial reporting of the projects approved within the framework of the Participation Programme. A suggestion was made by the Secretariat about the possibility of the National Commissions being supported by the UNESCO Offices to review their PP reports.

Mr Stoyan responded to specific concerns and offered direct communication to help countries facing difficulties. He suggested that countries sharing similar problems could organise themselves to present a Draft Resolution to the General Conference to request a waiver. Ecuador offered to lead this process.

4th September 2013

The Meeting Rapporteur, Ms Amparo Naranjo, Permanent Secretary of the National Commission of Ecuador to UNESCO, read the report of the proceedings of the previous day. Some countries made comments that were incorporated to the report. A copy of the report was given to each participant.

Mr Vernor Muñoz, former Rapporteur of the United Nations on the Right to Education, then gave a master class on the right to education and the challenges in the Latin American context. Participants
asked questions and made comments on these issues to the former Special Rapporteur. They appreciated having the space provided by this presentation to share experiences that may help strengthen south-south cooperation between the countries of the region.

This session was followed by the first panel of the day on the Draft Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021, (37 C/4) and the Draft Programme and Budget 2014-2017 (37 C/5); the session was chaired by the representative from Mexico, Madam Ambassador Socorro Robirosa. Ms Sophie El Akremi and Mr Jorge Sequeira made presentations. Participants made the following comments:

Participants expressed the wish that both 37C/4 and 37C/5 should reflect more and better the discussions that have systematically taken place within the framework of EFA/PRELAC (Regional Project for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean). It was recommended that a mechanism such as the EFA/PRELAC should be recognised for its worth as a strategic initiative for post-2015 in the region.

It was noted that the C4 does not reflect all the themes discussed at the consultative meeting between the Director General and the National Commissions that took place in Montevideo in 2012 as well as in other regions. It was also pointed out that there were few references to the National Commissions in this document.

It was announced that the countries of the region will propose the establishment of a special working group to analyse the proposal to create a Centre on Social Transformations and to provide ideas for a decision in this regard. This initiative will be carried out in close collaboration with the GRULAC.

The Bureau of Strategic Planning was requested to present budget allocations in graphs and tables that allow for a comparison with the previous biennium in order to have a better understanding and clarity of information.

The presentation by the Director of UNESCO-Santiago was commended for being comprehensive and innovative since it summarised very well the situation of education and the progress made in this area in the region. The right to education was emphasised as a basic human right and a guide, as well as a tool that enables the exercise of other human rights. For this reason, it is a priority for the region.

Emphasis was placed on the effort to strengthen ideas, looking for the Organisation to play a role as a service platform, aligned with national public policies and using local capacity so that countries can assist one another and UNESCO can facilitate south-south cooperation and reinvigorate the exchange of knowledge and relevant information.

The importance of south-south cooperation with other regions was also underlined in order to benefit, with UNESCO support, from the technical and political capital available in countries of the region.

This session was followed by the Panel on the Global Strategy for Partnerships, chaired by the Representative of Ecuador, Ms Amparo Naranjo. Ms Sophia El Akremi presented the Strategy. The National Commissions shared their experiences on implementing partnerships, some more positive than others, and the following comments were made:
On the Global Strategy as presented, it was stated that, while partnerships are welcome, the National Commissions do not always have the capacity to manage all the opportunities available to them, given economic and human resource constraints. However, this should not be interpreted as a lack of interest. It was pointed out that private sector partnerships are appreciated when handled with care and with a clear understanding that the agreements do not comprise the National Commissions vis-à-vis private interests. Moreover, participants highlighted the benefit of partnerships in mobilising resources and noted that partnerships should also include civil society organisations.

Special mention was made of the difficulties encountered, in some countries, in working with UNESCO Clubs, though some good experiences were also highlighted. In the same way, reference was made to the use of the UNESCO logo and the role of the National Commissions in this respect, referring to the serious way in which these processes are handled.

It was suggested that it would be beneficial to include, as partners, communication media and prominent persons who can help promote UNESCO’s messages, as is the case with the Goodwill Ambassadors.

UNESCO was requested to continue its efforts to inform countries correctly and in a timely manner through the National Commissions, either directly or via the Permanent Delegations.

The next panel on “Good practices for National Commissions for greater UNESCO visibility at the country level” was chaired by the representative of Uruguay, Ms Andrea Vignolo. The panel took the form of a round table with open participation in which representatives talked about their different experiences in managing UNESCO Chairs, Associate Schools, UNESCO Clubs, NGOs, etc. The following comments were made:

Greater flexibility was requested for the processes of approving UNESCO Chairs.

The excellent work done by most National Commissions with regard to the Associate Schools was emphasised and several notable experiences highlighted. It was suggested that it would be advantageous to use ICTs (Information and communications technologies) in the Associate Schools so that they could have relevant and timely information. UNESCO was requested to recognise the importance of this network and to ensure the network continued to be strengthened, given the impact it had in the classroom and the fact that it was in line with the Organisation’s goals.

The panel on “Good practices for National Commissions for greater UNESCO visibility at the country level” continued under the chair of the Representative of Nicaragua, Ms Claudia Valle. Presentations were made on some concrete practices and there was an exchange of experiences. The following presentations will be included in annex to the report and circulated to participants:

- México: Confirmation of the MOST Committee
- Argentina: Associate Schools’ Network, Heritage and Qhapaq Ñan
• Costa Rica/México: Meeting of National Coordinators of the UNESCO Associate School Network in Mexico and Central America
• Uruguay: Blue Planet from a Uruguayan perspective. (www.planetaazuluruguay.org); Drafting of the National Report on the Convention for Safeguarding the Intangible Heritage 2003; and Geopark “Palace Caves” (www.grutasdelpalacio.org.uy)
• Perú: MOST Summer School

5 September 2013

The Meeting Rapporteur, Ms Amparo Naranjo, Permanent Secretary to the National Commission of Ecuador to UNESCO, read the report of the proceedings of the previous day. Some countries made comments that were incorporated to the report. A copy of the report was given to each participant.

The first panel of the day on “Activities for resource mobilisation for activities, interaction and cooperation between UNESCO- Quito and UNESCO-Santiago with National Commissions and development partners” was chaired by the Representative of Colombia, Ms Maria Fernande Forero, with a presentation by Jorge Sequeira, Director of UNESCO-Santiago and Acting Representative in Quito. The following comments were made by the participants:

UNESCO was congratulated for the work it had done in Bolivia and in particular for its ability to work in a team with national counterparts, thus responding to the country’s needs and national capacities. The work accomplished in developing intercultural education and indicators was highlighted as was UNESCO’s effort to put cooperation at the service of people.

The benefit of harmonising the agendas of regional and sub-regional organisations in Latin America was also emphasised.

The positive experience of working within the ONE UN framework was noted, since this is helping national counterparts to work under one coordination framework and to work together.

The Director of UNESCO Santiago insisted on the importance of National Commissions contributing and sharing information about the agendas of other organisations with UNESCO, since this would help strengthen and harmonise programmes.

Generally speaking, he also recommended that we should remember that the current context, with its dynamics and its difficulties, offers opportunities that we need to seize.

It was suggested that it would be beneficial to organise a joint meeting of UNESCO National Commissions and Permanent Delegations some time during the 37th General Conference for a dialogue on priority themes for the region.
Countries should ensure that, during the General Policy debate, they use their six minutes to deliver a message stressing their main points with regard to UNESCO’s strategy and programme. The objective is to acquaint the plenary as to the countries’ priorities on the themes of the Organisation’s work.

Participants were reminded of the Leaders’ Forum that would be organised during the General Conference on 6th November this year to discuss “UNESCO mobilising for and contributing to the post-2015 agenda through education, the sciences, culture and communication and information”

The Secretariat made a special appeal to the National Commissions to participate actively in the General Conference.

Finally, UNESCO was thanked for its efforts in organising the Meeting, especially with regard to the format. It was agreed to create a group (for example in Google) to share documents and exchange information.