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UNESCO Committee
Topic 2: Promoting democracy in order to grant free access to education for all.
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I.   DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Democracy:
A form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system and a state of society characterized by formal equality of rights and privileges.

Human Rights:
Fundamental rights, especially those believed to belong to an individual and in whose exercise a government may not interfere, as the rights to work or education.

Education:
The act or processes of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life.

Right to Education:
Has been recognized as a human right in a number of international conventions, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which recognises a right to free, compulsory primary education for all, an obligation to develop secondary education accessible to all, in particular by the progressive introduction of free secondary education, as well as an obligation to develop equitable access to higher education, ideally by the progressive introduction of free higher education.

Democratic education:

Educational ideal in which democracy is both a goal and a method of instruction. It brings democratic values to education and can include self-determination within a community of equals, as well as such values as justice, respect and trust.

I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of a human rights-based approach to education is to assure children a quality education that respects and promotes their right to dignity and development. Achieving this goal is, however, enormously complex. The right to education is high on the agenda of the United Nations. It is affirmed in numerous human rights treaties and recognized by governments as essential in the pursuit of development and social transformation. This recognition is exemplified in the international goals, strategies and targets that have been set during the past 20 years. The Education for All goals were established in 1990 and reaffirmed at the 2000 World Education Forum In the Millennium Development Goals, established in 2000, the world's governments committed to achieving universal access to free, quality and compulsory primary education by 2015. However, in some countries free access to education is limited due to the political system governing that country. Therefore the idea of democratic education was conceived, which provides for the union of democratic values with the educational process.

Democratic education infuses the learning process with the fundamental values of participation, empowerment and democracy of our society. Democratic education sees young people not as passive recipients of knowledge, but rather as active co-creators of their own learning. They are not the products of an education system, but rather valued participants in a vibrant learning community. Democratic education begins with the premise that everyone is unique, so each of us learns in a different way. By supporting the individual development of each young person within a caring community, democratic education helps young people learn about themselves, engage with the world around them, and become positive and contributing members of society.

The topic in discussion is about promoting democracy to grant free access to education, however the topic could be seen also the other way around. Through an empowerment of people thanks to education, the society becomes more aware of the values of the society. Free access to education could therefore also help to promote democracy.
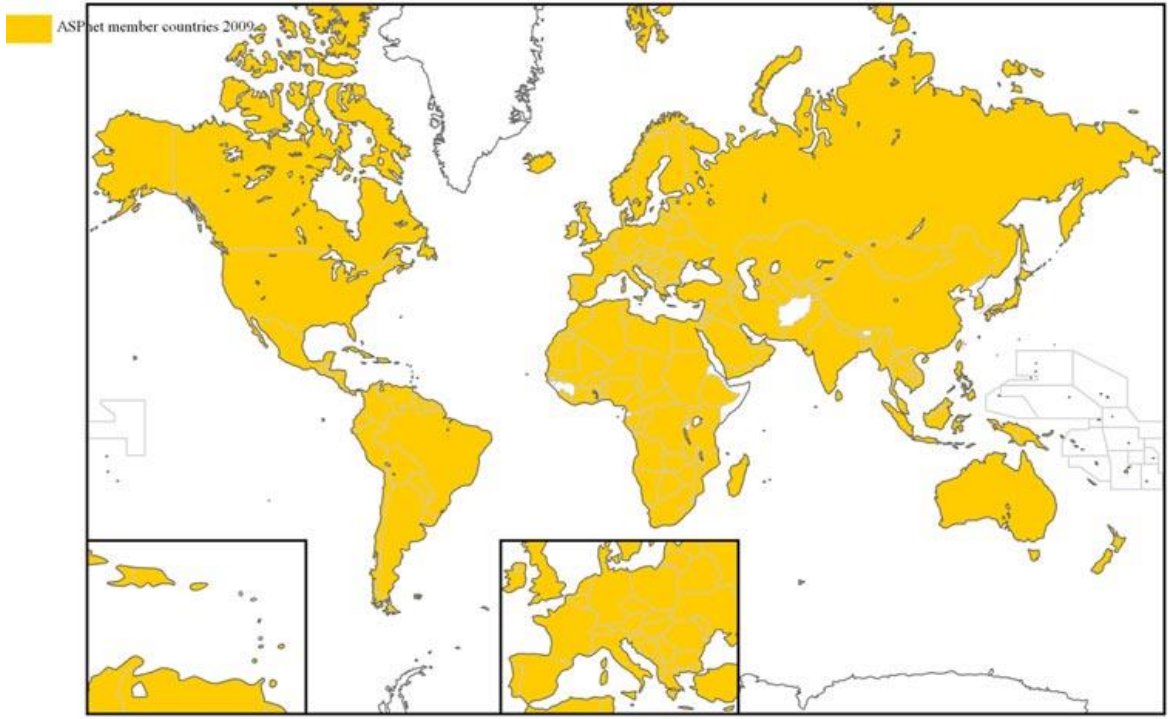
I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1953, it was decided to set up a Scheme of co-ordinated Experimental Activities in Schools of Member States (UNESCO Associated School Project Network – ASPnet) in order to encourage the development of education in the aims and activities of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies and in the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

ASPnet participating countries 1953

The scheme started out at the grassroots level with 33 schools in fifteen countries. Driven over five decades, by a growing number of enthusiastic and creative teachers committed to reinforcing the humanistic, cultural and international dimensions of education in view of world developments, this modest initiative has now developed into one of the world's largest and most unique networks of schools.

ASPnet participating countries 2009

As part of the Global Review conducted by the Centre for International Education and Research at the University of Birmingham in the UK to mark the 50 years of ASPnet, brief accounts of ASPnet national networks are given in the Country Profiles, which are organised by region. In the overall sample of 575 schools and colleges from 89 countries, just fewer than 79.7 per cent were state or government schools and 20.3 per cent were private schools. Within those categories, 58 per cent were secondary schools, 25.5 per cent were primary schools, 8.4 per cent were pre-primary schools, 5.3 per cent were vocational schools and 3 per cent were teacher training colleges. The sample was therefore generally in proportion to the types of school in ASPnet, so the country profiles may be read with the overall picture in mind.

As part of the Global Review 2003, 25 countries were asked to provide in-depth profiles of two ASPnet schools to demonstrate the range of schools in the network and highlight activities of interest. The snapshots of schools are realistic and include challenges faces by some schools. While some are better funded than others, none of the schools are 'elite'. All have in common the four ASPnet themes and activities reflecting commitment to UNESCO ideals (international days, human rights, democracy, non-violence, intercultural learning and protection of the environment).

IV. MAJOR COUNTRIES INVOLVED

Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected area with over 32 million children of primary school age remaining uneducated. Central and Eastern Asia, as well as the Pacific, are also severely affected by this problem with more than 27 million uneducated children. Additionally, these regions must also solve continuing problems of educational poverty (a child in education for less than 4 years) and extreme educational poverty (a child in education for less than 2 years). The lack of schooling and poor education have negative effects on the population and country. The children leave school without having acquired the basics, which greatly impedes the social and economic development of these countries.

V. UN INVOLVEMENT

At each of the key moments that have marked contemporary history, UN has supported the peaceful development of societies by contributing to the construction and consolidation of democracy, and the development of democratic institutions, especially in times of transition. Since its foundation, the Organization seeks to promote the aspirations of all people, especially young women and men, to strive for the realization of shared universal values, such as tolerance, pluralism, the respect of human rights, freedom and dialogue. While underlining the decisive role of education and human rights, UN focuses on issues such as governance, democratic institutions, citizenship, freedom of expression, representation of young women and men, and their active participation in decision-making processes, in socio-economic and cultural development. The Organization is inherently a place for democratic debate, a platform for exchanges where democratic values are promoted, including tolerance, pluralism, and respect for human rights, freedom and dialogue. Education for peace and human rights is a fundamental building block in this process as a catalyst for fostering global citizenship.

On the ground, UN is committed to actively participate in the consolidation of a democratic culture, especially by assisting countries in the Arab region, with special emphasis on capacity

building of young women and men in civic education, civic engagement and human rights with the aim of practical participation in the development of a community governed by democratic institutions.

UN's focus on education for global citizenship goes hand in hand with a broader commitment to build democratic institutions, encourage the active participation of all people, including young women and men in decision-making and development processes and in the protection and promotion of human rights. UN's work in the field of peace and human rights education builds knowledge and understanding of internationally shared values and supports the development of good policies and practice that help create safe learning environments, free from discrimination and violence. UN works with civil society partners in the promotion of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (link is external). It supports the integration of education for peace and conflict prevention into national education policy and curriculum; tackling many challenging issues within education, such as access to quality textbooks free from stereotypes, anti-bullying and non-violence.

UNESCO is a global leader in the field of education for holocaust remembrance and genocide prevention, helping communities deal with difficult pasts and (re)build shared democratic structures. The Organization advocates for non-discrimination in education and teaching respect for all. Inclusive quality education is a central to UNESCO's approach to building citizenship and democracy, including the promotion of multilingual education. Through its Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet), UNESCO encourages the exchange of innovative educational practices that directly engage children, teachers, schools and their local communities on the most relevant and pressing issues of the day.

VI. Useful Links

https://en.unesco.org

https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/A_Human_Rights_Based_Approach_to_Education_for_All.pdf

https://www.humanium.org/en/right-to-education/

http://www.un.org/en/events/democracyday/events.shtml