

Hundred and seventy-first session

171 EX/56
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Item 62 of the provisional agenda

**INFORMATION ON THE FIRST WORLD CONGRESS ON LITERACY
(Havana, 31 January-4 February 2005)**

SUMMARY

This item has been placed on the provisional agenda of the 171st session of the Executive Board at the request of Cuba.

An explanatory note and a proposed decision are set out below.

Decision proposed: paragraph 14.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Report on the scientific programme

1. The First World Literacy Congress was attended by 660 persons representing 25 countries. A total of 231 communications were presented, including 59 by Cuban delegates. Venezuela presented the largest number of communications, 66, followed by Brazil, with 39, and Mexico, with 26.
2. The Declaration of the Ministers of Education, Deputy Ministers and Representatives of Ministries attending the First World Congress on Literacy is annexed to this document.
3. The **scientific programme** was held in rooms 1, 4, 7 and 22 of the Convention Centre in Havana.
4. Attendance was high in all the conference rooms, with every available seat taken.
5. The **scientific programme** consisted of the following activities: one special session, three round tables, three thematic conferences and 22 workshops. A room was also set aside for poster presentations and a stand set up for exchanges through informal activities and to respond to specific questions about the literacy process and the “Yo sí puedo” (Yes, I can) method. The coordinators of each activity did an outstanding job, ensuring that every delegate had an opportunity to present their communication.
6. Before the official opening of the Congress, four special classes were held on the themes of education of young people and adults and literacy.
7. At the **special session**, attended by Dr Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers, the participants presented interesting work with positive results in Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador and New Zealand. The session was marked by statements by the Minister of Education of Venezuela and the coordinators of the programmes in Mexico, Ecuador and New Zealand and by the significant participation of literacy facilitators and literacy graduates, all of which gave the occasion a special intensity.
8. The **round tables** were as follows:
 - Round table on the literacy campaign, led by Cuban specialists.
 - Round table on literacy for all, run by a group of experts from specialized institutions in the region. This round table elicited great interest.
 - The round table on literacy without exclusion, broadcast by satellite, was conducted by a group of Cuban educators with broad international experience and by representatives of various organizations in Venezuela, Argentina and Mexico. The round table focused on and was in line with the new literacy training process.
9. The **three conferences** were as follows:
 - **Thematic conference on “Illiteracy: the situation worldwide”**, led by the Director of the Regional Bureau for Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO. This conference, which proved to be of great interest, was attended by 400 individuals.

- **Thematic conference on “The impact of the Yo sí puedo method”** on Venezuelan society. Great interest was shown in this conference, which attracted an audience of over 500.
- **Thematic conference on “The education of young people and adults in Cuba”**. This conference provided a picture of the current status of adult education in Cuba and gave rise to a debate which brought to light many aspects of life in Cuba. Approximately 300 people attended the conference.

10. The **22 workshops** were fully attended. While some were linked to the round tables and the thematic conferences, most were independent. The themes that evoked the most interest were:

- themes relating to practical experience with the Yo sí puedo method, especially in Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico and New Zealand;
- interculturality and bilingualism;
- evaluation of the literacy training programme;
- education and training of facilitators and specialists;
- literacy training through the radio;
- development of materials.

11. The 40 different investigations presented in the poster room included a wide range of studies from literacy training to the universalization of higher education.

12. The publication of the book *Desde la alfabetización presencial al Yo sí puedo* (From assisted literacy training to Yes, I can) was announced and the three thousand copies printed were sold out at the Congress.

13. At the concluding session of the Congress, a summary of the activities was presented. Participants from other countries took the floor to give their views, which included the following:

- the Congress had broken the traditional mould of such events by including technicians, facilitators and literacy graduates;
- the Congress had not been confined to a scientific/technical framework; it had also dealt resolutely with the political will, in all its aspects, necessary to carry out the process of literacy;
- the Congress had reaffirmed the need to focus on primary education for children and the continuation of studies for the newly literate;
- it was seen as very positive that the Congress had not been limited to the field of literacy but had also dealt with the education of young people and adults;
- the Congress announced a new kind of international cooperation, with the example of Cuba and Venezuela and of other countries such as Ecuador and Mexico;
- the Congress supported the *Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas* (Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean);

- the Congress proudly highlighted Cuba's work at the international level, not only with reference to Yo sí puedo, but for over 40 years;
- the Congress had an opportunity to meet many of those collaborating on the Yo sí puedo and Yo sí puedo seguir programmes and the programme teachers, who were encouraged and applauded by the public.

Proposed draft decision

14. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 171 EX/56,
2. Taking note of the report of the First World Congress on Literacy held in Havana from 31 January to 4 February 2005,
3. Requests the Director-General to report to the General Conference at its 33rd session on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Declaration of the Ministers of Education, Deputy Ministers and Representatives of Ministries attending the First World Congress on Literacy (Annex to document 171 EX/56).

ANNEX

Declaration of Ministers of Education, Deputy Ministers and Representatives of Ministries attending the First World Congress on Literacy

Havana, Cuba, 3 February 2005

Considering that UNESCO and the United Nations, representing the views of all their Member States, undertook at Dakar to eradicate illiteracy by 2015, and that there is consensus among the countries most affected that, given the urgent need to eradicate illiteracy and as international cooperation commitments continue to be insufficient, it is necessary to formulate specific proposals to secure this objective,

Recognizing that UNESCO is the United Nations agency that has been given the mandate to lead and coordinate action to eradicate illiteracy and that Cuba has offered UNESCO a new literacy teaching method to achieve satisfactory literacy rapidly at very low cost for the large population masses of the countries in need, especially those that suffer most from the scourge of illiteracy, based on the innovative, relevant and flexible use of information and communication technologies, primarily radio and television, and educational videos,

We, the Ministers of Education, Deputy Ministers and Representatives of Ministries attending the First World Congress on Literacy, have decided:

1. To support Cuba's offer to UNESCO and to request, through our representatives to that Organization, that the proposal be submitted to the Executive Board at its 172nd session so that the Board may endorse it for subsequent approval by a resolution of the General Conference at its 33rd session in October 2005;
2. Given that the educational method and techniques that Cuba has contributed through bilateral cooperation to several countries have proven their effectiveness within a very short period of time, it is requested that UNESCO provide its patronage and associate itself with requesting countries to ensure that Cuba's bilateral cooperation in the struggle to eradicate illiteracy will be backed up by the authority and legitimacy of the General Conference of UNESCO and that the Organization will mobilize cooperation as a complement to the contributions that Cuba will make as a Member State;
3. Cuba has proposed to contribute, in a spirit of cooperation, all the professional, methodological and technical human resources for the literacy programmes of the requesting countries; consequently we propose that UNESCO take up and promote that programme and mobilize the will of and contributions from other international sources of cooperation to secure the additional funding that would be required to meet costs for the production of materials, television equipment, radio facilities, videos, transport, accommodation, maintenance and basic remuneration (as distinct from fees, which would be part of Cuba's contribution);
4. The proposal made should constitute a UNESCO programme, which would be broken down into projects with specific components, immediate objectives, outcomes, timetable, necessary resources and so on, designed specifically for each of the countries requesting such cooperation.

We, the Ministers of Education, Deputy Ministers and Representatives of Ministries attending the first World Literacy Congress, confirm our commitment to humankind and to the future and our will to support initiatives and programmes that lead to the attainment of the "Literacy Decade" goals set out in the Framework for Action of the Dakar World Forum.