

PRESS RELEASE

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Address by Mr. Lim Kim San, Minister for Education, Republic of Singapore and Leader of the Singapore Delegation, on 15th October, 1970, at the 16th General Conference of UNESCO held in Paris.

Mr. President,

May I offer you congratulations and best wishes from the delegation from Singapore on your election to the high office of President of the 16th General Conference. My delegation has every confidence that, under your leadership, this general conference will achieve much in both uplifting the spirit of man and improving on his material advancement.

My delegation shares with UNESCO the principles, objects, and high ideals as embodied in documents 16 C/4 and 16 C/5 and so magnificently prepared by the Director-General whose services I am glad we continue to have, although we do feel that there are places in documents 16 C/4 and 16 C/5 where adjustments may have to be made to the details of the implementation of these principles, objects and ideals of UNESCO.

Last year, at the United Nations, one of my colleagues spoke on the futility of passing resolutions at assemblies unless they could be implemented. He noted that too often advocates of worthy causes pressed home pious resolutions which often gathered dust in the archives of time.

It is gratifying, therefore, to note the tangible achievements of UNESCO, over the years, which have left their impact in participant countries. The modest way in which UNESCO has gone about in achieving its objectives, the manner in which UNESCO has grown and extended its activities with the minimum of friction, to the benefit of all concerned, means goodwill. And goodwill, another way of describing trust and co-operation, is not without value to us all.

The future programmes of UNESCO in the context of the available budget may well pose problems in the face of competing demands, but I am sure when the various committees and sub-committees get down to grips with the actualities of the situation amicable and reasonable solutions will emerge as they have done in the past. National or supra-national, the issues generally have a common denominator and given the goodwill generated in UNESCO during the years since its inception and a better understanding built over the years of mutual problems, the pragmatic approach should prevail.

Singapore in its own way has its share of the issues that are posed to every national or international organisation. Multi-racial and multi-cultural and with four official languages, we have had to approach our national planning and programming in probably the same way as we have done in UNESCO and will be doing in the next few days. Every item appears to be equally important and in deciding the priorities we are faced with, probably, the very same considerations, albeit, in a smaller scale, that you in part debate and discuss and resolve year by year.

Of all the activities within the purview of UNESCO, it is perhaps those in the field of education that the Government of Singapore gives special attention. Let me therefore touch briefly on education in my country.

In Singapore to-day, every child is assured of free primary education for a period of six years. As a multi-racial society, with four official languages, namely: Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English parents may choose to send their children to a school using any one of these languages as the main medium of instruction. A second language is also compulsory in later years in the interest of the multi-lingual characteristic of our society. Secondary education is not completely free, only a very nominal fee of roughly one and one-third U.S. dollar per month is charged.

Assistance is given to those who are not well off financially. Every child who has successfully completed 6 years of primary school education finds no difficulty in continuing with a secondary school education.

Technical subjects in secondary schools are now given prominence. Trade and artisan courses requiring varying periods of training are offered to cope with the pressing demand for skilled workers in industry. Higher academic and technical institutes provide courses leading to professional diplomas and degrees. It can therefore be safely said that in Singapore any young person who has shown academic or technical aptitude and promise has opportunities for higher learning. Education to the highest level in my country, Mr. President, Sir, is available to all citizens regardless of race, colour or creed. Facilities also exist for adults to continue their education, to improve themselves and to live a fuller life. In this regard courses cover language studies, general education, vocational and technical training, professional training, recreational and hobby courses. About 50,000 adults representing $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of our total population participate in the adult education programmes.

My government also offers scholarships and bursaries to young persons from neighbouring countries to study at our academic and technical institutions. We strongly believe in a greater inter-mingling among youths of the world so that a more peaceful and secure society can be built upon the solid foundation of understanding brought about by living together and appreciating one another's way of life, culture and problems.

Whilst Singapore has her own problems and endeavours to find solutions to these problems, we are fully alive to the developments in the regions around us; and we share the hopes and aspirations of our neighbours and, no less, our friends in the family of nations.

The most recent regional undertaking in this direction is the establishment of the Regional Institute for Higher Education and Development in Asia; and the first meeting of the Board of Governors was convened in my country only last month. Last week, too, we sent a delegate to participate in the Conference of the Asian Regional Institute for School Building Research in Colombo. These are but two of the most recent examples of our active participation in regional, as well as international efforts aimed at improving the quality of education for youth. And as you are already aware, Singapore in 1971 will be hosting the Third Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers responsible for economic planning in Asia. We welcome this opportunity for co-operation and hospitality and look forward to meeting delegates from Asian member states.

Singapore in union with member states of UNESCO, aspires to give of her best in promoting and implementing the principles and objects and high ideals of UNESCO. In this particular regard, my delegation shares the hope expressed yesterday by the distinguished leader of the delegation from Malaysia that the member states of the region of South East Asia may be afforded a greater opportunity of sharing more in the executive work of UNESCO by having representation on the Executive Board. The concept of closer regional co-operation is gaining wider acceptance in our region to-day and this concept naturally serves as a base for closer international co-operation.

In the next few days, among other things, we shall look forward to learning from the experiences of the learned delegates of our fellow member states and sharing with them our own experiences. We hope to have a closer dialogue in this universal and sacred undertaking to ensure a better world for future,

by
h upholding the objectives and constitution of UNESCO.

Thank you.

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