

An hourglass-shaped graphic with a globe in the top bulb and another globe in the bottom bulb. The hourglass is light blue and has a dark blue cap at the top. The globe in the top bulb is dark blue, and the globe in the bottom bulb is light blue. The text is centered within the hourglass.

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UNESCO Membership: Issues for Congress

Lois B. McHugh, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Updated November 20, 2003

Abstract. This report discusses the actions taken since the U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO and provides background on the debate over withdrawal in the 1983-84 period and issues involved in the recent debate over rejoining.

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UNESCO Membership: Issues for Congress

Updated November 20, 2003

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UNESCO Membership: Issues for Congress

Summary

On October 1, 2003, the United States returned to full membership in UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. President Bush had announced the U.S. return a year earlier during his speech before the U.N. General Assembly. The Administration requested \$71.429 million for FY2004 for the U.S. return to UNESCO. This amount included funds for the last 3-months of calendar year 2003, full funding for calendar year 2004, and a one-time payment to the UNESCO Working Capital Fund of \$5.5 million. The U.S. share of the UNESCO budget is 22% (the largest of any member country). U.S. contributions to UNESCO are provided by Congress in the authorization and appropriation acts for the State Department in the Contributions to International Organizations (CIO) account.

The United States was one of the original members of UNESCO, which was created in 1946, and withdrew from the agency in 1984. The reasons given at the time of withdrawal were that the agency was highly politicized, exhibited hostility toward the basic institutions of a free society, especially a free market and a free press, and demonstrated unrestrained budgetary expansion and poor management under then Director General Amadou-Mahter M'Bow of Senegal.

UNESCO has had two Director Generals since the U.S. withdrawal, but very little national attention has been paid to the agency. In November 1995, President Clinton wrote to UNESCO Director General Federico Mayor of Spain that the United States recognized that UNESCO had made major progress in addressing the issues that led to U.S. withdrawal, but that budget realities precluded the United States from rejoining at the time. On January 16, 2001, President Clinton urged the incoming Bush Administration to rejoin the organization. While rejoining is an executive decision, the congressional role in authorizing and appropriating funds for U.S. dues gives Congress an important role.

This report discusses briefly the actions taken since the U.S. withdrawal and provides background on the debate over withdrawal in the 1983-84 period and issues involved in the recent debate over rejoining. It will be updated as developments warrant.

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UNESCO Membership: Issues for Congress

Recent Developments

On October 1, 2003 the United States returned to membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The U.S. return had been announced by President Bush on September 12, 2002, during a speech before the U.N. General Assembly seeking U.N. support on Iraq. The President's FY2004 budget request included \$71.429 million for U.S. assessed contributions to UNESCO. This amount included funds for the U.S. assessed share (22%) for the final three months of calendar year 2003 (October-December), a one-time payment to the UNESCO Working Capital Fund, and the full calendar year 2004 U.S. assessment.

The congressional response to the President's initiative has varied. Congress must authorize and appropriate UNESCO membership dues which are assessed at 22% of the total UNESCO regular budget. For FY2004 funding for UNESCO is included in contributions to the international organizations (CIO) account in the State Department budget request. Congress authorizes such funds as part of the "Foreign Relations Authorization Act" and appropriates the money in the "State, Justice, Commerce and Judiciary" appropriations legislation.

Recent Congressional Actions

Authorizations

The House-passed foreign relations authorization for FY2004 and FY2005 (H.R. 1950) authorized such sums as may be necessary for FY2004 and FY2005 for the annual U.S. assessment for the regular UNESCO budget. As passed, H.R. 1950 expressed the sense of Congress that in returning to UNESCO the President should do the following: appoint a U.S. Representative to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) who shall also serve as U.S. Representative to UNESCO; take steps to increase U.S. employment at UNESCO especially at senior levels; request creation of a Deputy Director for Management position to be filled by an American; insist that increases in the UNESCO budget level beyond zero nominal growth for the 2004-2005 biennium focus primarily on adoption of management and administrative reforms; and that the U.S. contribution for the last quarter of calendar year 2003 be spent on key education and science priorities of benefit to U.S. interests. The measure also updated the 1946 law governing the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in reporting its version of the foreign relations authorization for FY2004 (S.Rept. 108-39 on S. 925), recommended

authorization of the full amount for the CIO account requested by the President. The Committee expressed support for U.S. return to UNESCO and for an increase in the UNESCO budget.

Last year's Foreign Relations Authorization Act, FY2003 (P.L. 107-228), as signed into law on September 30, 2002, expressed the sense of Congress that the President should submit a report to the appropriate congressional committees describing the merits of renewed U.S. membership in UNESCO and detailing the costs involved. The State Department has prepared a report which is expected to be submitted in the fall of 2003.

Appropriations

FY2004 appropriations legislation for the Department of Commerce, Justice, and State, including funding for U.S. participation in UNESCO, has not yet been enacted. House-passed appropriations legislation for FY2004, H.R. 2799, included the full amount requested by the President for the CIO account. In its report (H.Rept. 108-221) on this measure, the Committee on Appropriations recommended the full amount requested for U.S. return to UNESCO. The Committee noted that it expects the Department of State to work aggressively to ensure that UNESCO employs more Americans, particularly at senior levels. If the 2004-2005 UNESCO budget is increased, the Committee stated that the Department should submit a reprogramming of funds from lower priority items in the account and that such increased funds should be used for management and administrative reforms identified by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO). The Committee recommended that any U.S. contribution for the last quarter of calendar year 2003 be used for UNESCO activities and programs which directly benefit U.S. national interests and priorities. The Committee urged the Department of State to consider appointing one ambassador to represent the United States at both UNESCO and OECD. The Committee also included \$3.250 million to reestablish and operate a U.S. Mission to UNESCO in Paris, France, and to reestablish a UNESCO National Commission in Washington, D.C.

During floor debate on H.R. 2799, an amendment was offered by Representative Ron Paul to strike funding for UNESCO.¹ He argued that UNESCO had scarcely reformed and that its goals remained antithetical to those of the United States. His amendment was defeated by a vote of 145 to 279.

The Senate Committee on Appropriations, in its report (S.Rept. 108-144) on S. 1585, deleted the \$71.429 million requested for U.S. return to UNESCO, noting that the Committee did not consider UNESCO reformed. The Committee directed the Office of Inspector General of the Department of State to conduct an annual audit of UNESCO to determine the status of reform; the qualifications of UNESCO's staff; its procedures for hiring and promoting personnel; the ability of UNESCO's inspector general (or equivalent body) to conduct impartial, detailed, and accurate

¹ H.Con.Res. 4, introduced by Representative Paul on January 7, 2003, expressed the sense of Congress that the United States should not rejoin UNESCO. The bill has not been considered by Congress.

audits; a detailed breakdown of expenditures; and how U.S. membership would advance the goals of the organization and U.S. priorities.

Background

The United States was one of the original members of UNESCO, created in 1946, and withdrew in 1984 citing serious questions concerning the agency's internal management and politicization. After withdrawing, the United States continued to participate in some UNESCO programs on a voluntary basis. In addition, the United States sent observers to all the biennial UNESCO General Conferences and the twice a year meetings of the Executive Board, the groups that set the budget and program priorities for UNESCO. The Department of State maintained a permanent observer mission at UNESCO in Paris and Americans have attended most of the important meetings of UNESCO.

What is UNESCO?

UNESCO is one of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. It is an autonomous international organization with its own constitution, separate budget, and program. It is affiliated with the United Nations through an agreement signed in 1946. The UNESCO constitution was adopted as an international agreement at a conference held in London in 1945, and it entered into force on November 4, 1946. The UNESCO headquarters is in Paris and the organization currently has 190 members.

The purpose of UNESCO, as outlined in its constitution, is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among member states in the fields of education, science, and culture. Under its constitution the organization is intended to sponsor international exchanges and meetings in science, education, and other fields; promote the free flow of ideas; encourage the conservation of books, monuments, and works of art; and assist member states in developing educational, scientific, and cultural programs. UNESCO provides an international forum for collaboration among nations in education, science and culture. The UNESCO website provides information on its programs and fields of activity [<http://www.unesco.org/>].

UNESCO's Structure

The UNESCO organization consists of a General Conference, an Executive Board, and a Secretariat.

General Conference. The General Conference, composed of representatives of member countries, meets every other year to decide the policy, program, and budget of the organization. UNESCO decisions on important questions are made by consensus; all members must agree on a resolution before it is adopted. The result is that resolutions approved are not very specific, even on budgetary items. The most recent meeting of the General Conference took place from September 29 to October 17, 2003.

Executive Board. The Executive Board, consisting of 58 representatives of member states, meets at least twice a year and is responsible for supervising the program adopted by the General Conference. The United States was elected to the Executive Board on October 10, 2003, for a four-year term.

Secretariat. The Secretariat is headed by the Director-General. He is appointed to a 6-year term by the General Conference on the recommendation of the Executive Board. The current Director General, Koichiro Matsuura of Japan, took office in November 1999 for a six-year term. It is his job to prepare the program and budget, make proposals to the General Conference, create the organizational structures of the Secretariat and appoint the staff. Most of the resolutions considered at the General Conference in recent years have been written by the Secretariat, and the Director-General also plays an important role in the negotiations between members over programs, budgets, and resolutions.

UNESCO's Budget and Programs

UNESCO's activities are financed through contributions assessed against member states on a sliding scale, through voluntary contributions of member states to special programs, and through funds provided by other agencies such as the United Nations Development Program, UNICEF, and the World Bank.

The 2002/2003 budget of \$544,367,250 covers two years. UNESCO's program budget is divided approximately as follows: education—31%, sciences—24%, culture—12%, communication—9%. The rest of the program budget provides dissemination and information services and interdisciplinary programs. The U.S. share of the UNESCO assessed budget is 22% (the largest of any member country).

U.S. Participation in UNESCO

U.S. membership in UNESCO was established by P.L. 79-565. The joint resolution that authorized the President to join the organization directed him to establish the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, and authorized the annual appropriation of funds for UNESCO. U.S. participation in what was to become UNESCO had previously been urged by Congress in identical House and Senate Resolutions adopted unanimously in May 1945.

U.S. Withdrawal from UNESCO 1983-84

On December 28, 1983, the Secretary of State notified the Director-General of UNESCO that the United States was terminating membership in the organization. U.S. withdrawal took place on December 31, 1984. The decision was the result of a six month assessment of the agency, according to the Administration, which concluded that UNESCO programs and personnel were heavily politicized and that extraneous political discussions had become the major focus of the organization. The report also noted that "statist" theories prevailed over western democratic ideas in the programs and that budget priorities had not been established so that programs proliferated with no rationale. Many American observers also objected to

self-aggrandizement and hostility to the United States on the part of UNESCO Director-General M'Bow.

Article 2, Section 6 of the UNESCO constitution outlines the procedures for withdrawal from the organization. Under this section, a member is required to give written notice of withdrawal to the Director-General of UNESCO. The withdrawal goes into effect on December 31 of the year following the notice of withdrawal. The member must honor its financial obligations to UNESCO during the 1 year of the waiting period.

Issues Cited in Withdrawal

“Politicization”. Historically UNESCO has been most often criticized for its actions concerning Israel in 1974, and for attempts to redefine human rights in a way many critics felt favored collective over individual rights as well as economic rights over civil and political rights.

The 18th session (1974) of the UNESCO General Conference adopted three resolutions condemning Israel. In response to these resolutions, Congress amended the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-559) to direct that no funds could be obligated or spent to support UNESCO until the President certified that UNESCO: (1) had adopted policies fully consistent with its educational, scientific, and cultural objectives; and (2) had taken concrete steps to correct its recent actions of a primarily political character. In keeping with this limitation, Congress did not authorize or appropriate funds for the rest of calendar 1974, and for all of calendar 1975 and 1976. In 1976, Congress authorized (P.L. 94-350) and appropriated (P.L. 94-362) \$3,545,453 – the minimum contribution required to retain the U.S. right to vote in the UNESCO General Conference.

At the 19th General Conference in 1976, Israel was allowed to join the European Regional group, thereby ending its isolation in the organization. However, two other resolutions which condemned Israel remained in force. President Ford certified that UNESCO had satisfied the provisions of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 and asked for full restoration of UNESCO contributions. Congress appropriated only part of the funds required to make up the U.S. arrearage, paying for 2.5 years of the 4-year shortfall. In 1978 Congress appropriated U.S. contributions to UNESCO for the rest of the funds owed to UNESCO. These included calendar year 1977 and all of calendar year 1978 and 1979. The Israel issue continues to be a problem throughout the U.N. system.

“Hostility Towards the Basic Institutions of a Free Society”. The Administration was also concerned about UNESCO activities in international communications, particularly the concept of the New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO). During the early 1970s, developing countries called for a new order in international communications. These countries contended that a small number of developed countries provide most of the world’s news coverage, entertainment, and advertising, resulting in poor coverage of news in developing countries, even within these countries themselves. This poor coverage, the argument continued, led to a poor understanding of these countries, their cultures, and their development needs. Many Western countries, including the United States,

conceded that an imbalance existed in global news coverage, but questioned UNESCO's response. The UNESCO initiatives included a Declaration on the Media, presented to the General Conference in 1976, and modifications added to this declaration at subsequent General Conferences. One article of the original Declaration asserted that "states are responsible for the activities in the international sphere of all mass media under their jurisdiction." This assertion was strongly opposed by Western delegates, who saw it as a threat to freedom of the press. No final action was ever taken on the New World Information Order nor have any of the other initiatives calling for licensing journalists, setting codes of ethical conduct for journalists, or establishing advertising codes, been adopted by UNESCO.

Congress reacted to NWICO proposals in the State Department Authorization bill for FY1982 and FY1983 (P.L. 97-241). This law provided that none of the appropriated funds could be used to pay the U.S. contribution to the assessed budget of UNESCO "if that organization implements any policy or procedure the effect of which is to license journalists or their publications, within or among countries, or to impose mandatory codes of journalistic practice or ethics."

"Unrestrained Budgetary Expansion". The third area of concern was UNESCO's lack of adherence to the "zero net program growth" proposed for all international agencies by the United States. The Reagan Administration came into office with goals for all U.N. organizations which included restraining budget growth (zero net program growth meant no new discretionary costs and an absorption of non-discretionary costs). This meant that there would be no real growth in the agencies' budgets, although allowances were made for fluctuating exchange rates. In fact, it would have resulted in a funding reduction, since automatically rising personnel costs would require reductions in other areas. Administration spokesmen also criticized alleged management problems and what they described as high overhead costs. A very large percentage of UNESCO expenditures were made in its Paris headquarters and a low percentage were made in the field. During a hearing of the House Science and Technology Committee on March 8, 1984, U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO Jean Gerard described problems of duplicative programs and confusing and incomplete budgetary information on programs.

At the 1982 Extraordinary Session of the General Conference, which met to establish UNESCO's 1984-1989 medium term plan, the Director-General proposed a 9% increase in the budget. Government delegates voted for a real growth rate in 1984 and 1985 of 4% to 6% over the 1982-1983 expenditures. This was adopted despite opposition from the United States and other major donor countries. The countries that abstained or voted against the growth rate at the meeting contributed 85% of UNESCO's assessed budget, according to the Department of State.

At the 1983 General Conference, a proposal by the United States and five allies to set the two-year budget at \$360.6 million was rejected. A compromise proposal offered by the Nordic countries setting the budget at \$374.4 million was accepted by 126 to 1 (United States voting against) with 10 abstentions. This amount represented a real growth rate between 3.8% and 5.5% for the two-year period, according to the Administration. Mr. M'Bow in his reply to Secretary of State Shultz on Jan. 18, 1984, pointed out that in constant dollars the UNESCO budget had declined from the 1981-1983 level by 13%. The wide difference between these two statements resulted

from using different financial data, such as constant dollars vs. current dollars, French francs versus dollars, etc.

Issues Surrounding Director-General M'Bow. Although it was not reflected in the Shultz letter of withdrawal, many perceived that a large part of the U.S. unhappiness with UNESCO centered on the Director-General. Assistant Secretary Newell on February 22, 1984, criticized Mr. M'Bow for not using his office to keep UNESCO from straying into extraneous political areas. On March 5, 1984, in a meeting of U.S. Government and non-governmental agencies involved in UNESCO science programs, Assistant Secretary of State Newell also noted critics' concern that Mr. M'Bow had demoralized the employees of the Secretariat. He cited an employee survey which showed only 3% of UNESCO employees felt promotions were based on merit. Assistant Secretary of State Newell expressed concern that many funded staff positions remained unfilled for long periods of time and no accounting of the money saved was made.

U.S. Domestic Budget Issues. In order to reduce the size of the budget in a time of growing deficits and to accommodate other congressional and Administration priorities, Congress appropriated the amount requested (\$50.77 million) for UNESCO for FY1984 but also passed a provision which froze aggregate U.S. contributions to the five largest international organizations, including UNESCO, for calendar 1984 (appropriated in the FY1984 and FY1985 budgets) at the same level as the calendar 1983 contribution despite increased assessments for these agencies. This meant that UNESCO could receive no more than the calendar year 1983 contribution unless the contribution to one of the other agencies was reduced. The amount provided by the United States as its final contribution to UNESCO was a matter of contention between the United States, UNESCO, and the other major donors. The final appropriation of \$25.4 million was finally accepted as full payment. However, withdrawal from UNESCO and the reduced final contribution allowed the United States to contribute to the other four agencies at the assessed level. Later, Congress cut the CIO appropriation further, leading to arrearages in U.S. contributions to many of the organizations in the CIO account.

Administration's Actions

In March 1984, the Department of State named a 13-member UNESCO monitoring panel which was to report to the Secretary of State on the degree and types of changes made by UNESCO during 1984 to assist the Secretary in deciding whether to recommend that the U.S. withdrawal decision be reviewed. Their final report, given to Secretary of State Shultz on November 27 and released on December 13, 1984, outlined several concrete steps taken by the UNESCO membership during 1984 to initiate reform but concluded that there was no substantial change in the organization.

The State Department also began a search for alternatives to carry out the missions of UNESCO. The National Academy of Sciences, asked to study alternative arrangements for UNESCO scientific programs, noted that there was no single alternative to UNESCO in the scientific field and expressed concern about the possible fragmentation of scientific programs without a single agency alternative. The Academy was also concerned about disruptions to international scientific

cooperative programs and U.S. participation caused by U.S. withdrawal. It identified needed U.S. expenditures of \$14 million to arrange interim funding for programs of greatest interest to the United States.

Response at UNESCO

In May 1984, the Director-General suggested several changes he wished to make in the Secretariat, including: (1) the delegation to one of his subordinates, an American, of the power to appoint staff to vacant positions up to a certain professional level; (2) creation of five working groups to identify program duplication and to establish priorities within the program sectors for consideration during the next budget cycle; to review UNESCO budgeting techniques and make recommendations for improvements, and to review management and make recommendations.

The UNESCO Executive Board established a temporary committee of 12 members to examine proposals and suggestions for reform of UNESCO. U.S. Observers noted that some movement toward reform occurred at the meeting, but disagreed over the significance and permanence of the reform effort. The Board endorsed the recommendations of its Temporary Committee and extended its life to oversee implementation of the recommendations. The Board also recommended a zero growth budget for the 1986-87 biennium and gave the Director-General guidelines for preparing his program budget which address U.S. concerns.

In testimony before Congress, Assistant Secretary of State Newell stated that the reform effort was inadequate. He indicated there was no implementing machinery for the Temporary Committee recommendations, the management changes did not go far enough, and programs which the United States criticized had not been eliminated or reduced. He also stated that the zero growth budget resolution was amended to leave open the possibility of a 2% growth rate for 1986-1987. Finally, he noted that U.S. proposals to protect the rights and interests of Western governments, who are in the minority in UNESCO, were not accepted and no alternatives were suggested.

Assistant Secretary Newell ruled out the possibility that U.S. withdrawal would be postponed for one year. He reiterated that the State Department intended to devote the same \$47 million to international programs in the UNESCO areas, including several UNESCO programs, by funneling funds through 18 U.S. and international agencies.

Congressional Reaction to Withdrawal

On November 30, 1984, the General Accounting Office (GAO) released a review of the fiscal and management activities of UNESCO. The report confirmed the problems noted by the United States in its letter of withdrawal in the area of management. It also made observations on the ineffectiveness of the Executive Board and General Conference in controlling and directing the UNESCO Secretariat.

On March 2, 1984, the House adopted H.R. 5119, the Foreign Assistance Authorization Act of 1985. One provision of the Act outlined the Administration's concerns in UNESCO and expressed the sense of Congress that:

1. The President should create a bipartisan panel of experts to review U.S. participation in UNESCO, including the impact withdrawal would have on Israel's participation in UNESCO and on freedom of the press, and report to the Congress by October 1, 1984;
2. The President should upgrade the U.S. mission to UNESCO and the appropriate office of the Department of State, in order to ensure a fair and thorough examination of UNESCO's willingness to implement needed reforms; and
3. The President shall not make or announce a final withdrawal decision until the relevant committees of the Congress have been fully consulted.

Representative Leach introduced two proposals on UNESCO, one which amended the original UNESCO implementing legislation to require the President to have specific legislative authorization before withdrawing from UNESCO, and one which would postpone U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO by 1 year, to December 31, 1985. None of this became law.

During 1984, House and Senate committees held several hearings on UNESCO. Most of the private witnesses at all these hearings disapproved of U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO, despite the universally acknowledged problems existing in that agency.

Withdrawal by the United Kingdom

On December 5, 1984, the government of the United Kingdom formally notified UNESCO of withdrawal from UNESCO on December 31, 1985. The notification acknowledged that there had been progress toward reform during 1984 and outlined nine specific areas where further reforms would be necessary to change the decision of the British government. Britain was accused by other members, including some Western governments, of basing its decision on the misleading information provided by U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO Jean Gerard during a secret lobbying trip in November. The United Kingdom rejoined UNESCO in 1997, with Foreign Secretary Robin Cook stating that UNESCO is a very important international organization covering the educational, cultural and scientific world. He indicated that it was important that Britain, because of its own very wide international links, should be part of that organization.²

² Extract from a press conference by the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, and the Defense Secretary, Mr. George Robertson, at the WEU Ministerial Meeting, Paris, Tuesday, 13, May 1997.

Developments Since U.S. Withdrawal

Little public attention in the United States was paid to UNESCO after the U.S. withdrawal. In April 1990, the Secretary of State transmitted a report on reform efforts in UNESCO required by P.L. 101-246, the State Department authorization act. This report concluded that: “It is obvious that the time is not yet ripe to reopen the question of renewing U.S. membership in UNESCO.”³

At UNESCO, Secretary General M’Bow was replaced in 1987 by Frederico Mayor, a Spanish biochemist, who served two terms or 12 years. He came into office determined to reform the management of the agency and refocus its programs. During his term, the GAO prepared two reports which were based on onsite reviews of UNESCO. In its second report to Congress, in 1993, GAO concluded that: “Overall, UNESCO’s member states, Director General, managers, and employee associations have demonstrated a commitment to management reform through their actions. This commitment will need to continue over the long term if UNESCO is to fully implement our recommendations and solidify its recent management improvements.”⁴ After an interagency review, the Department of State recommended to the National Security Council in June 1993 that the United States rejoin UNESCO at the next General Conference (October 1995). In a letter to the Secretary General in November 1995, President Clinton noted that he was pleased that UNESCO had taken great strides to address the concerns and issues that led to U.S. withdrawal. He also stated his regret that budget constraints precluded the United States from rejoining the UNESCO at the time. He concluded that membership remained on his list of priorities for the future.⁵

The current Director General, Koichiro Matsuura, a Japanese lawyer, economist, and career diplomat, took office in November 1999. In his statements, he has stressed that the organization must become universal again, should focus on the programs in its true mandate and needs sound management. According to the Department of State, his reform activities began immediately. He fired all Special Advisors, abolished half of the agency divisions and half of the high level posts. He replaced the entire top management team through open, competitive recruitment. He pledged to close one third of UNESCO field offices. Since taking office, he has cut total staff by 25% and adopted nominal zero growth budgets. In the program budget, the Director General has focused on one major program in each area. The number of lower priority programs has been sharply curtailed. He established a new oversight mechanism which carries out audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.⁶ The Department of State, in a letter to the Director General on September 8, 2000, stated: “Your reform initiatives are impressive in their scope and

³ U.S. Department of State. The Activities of UNESCO since U.S. Withdrawal: A Report by the Secretary of State submitted pursuant to P.L. 101-246. April 17, 1990.

⁴ U.S. General Accounting Office. UNESCO. Improvements in Management Practices. GAO/NSIAD-93-159. March 1993. p. 1

⁵ Unclassified cable from Department of State to American Embassy Paris. November 13, 1995.

⁶ Telephone information from Department of State. 5/11/01

decisiveness. These initiatives, and your energetic pursuit of them, greatly enhance the ability of UNESCO to contribute to the attainment of strategic goals we share, such as basic education and freedom of the press.”⁷ During 2000, Secretary of Education Riley called for the United States to return to UNESCO and on January 16, 2001, President Clinton urged the incoming Bush administration to rejoin the organization citing the significant reforms undertaken by UNESCO in recent years.

President Bush, in his speech before the U.N. General Assembly on September 12, 2002 (at which he sought U.N. support for a possible intervention in Iraq), stated that the “United States will return to UNESCO. This organization has been reformed and America will participate fully in its mission to advance human rights, tolerance, and learning.” A fact sheet⁸ released by the White House described UNESCO’s reforms as having made significant progress since 1999. “UNESCO’s management structure has been dramatically reformed; senior positions have been slashed by about 50 percent; and capable managers have been brought in to administer key functions including personnel selection and auditing. And it is now dedicated to promoting values such a press freedom and education for all.”

A GAO report released at the end of March 2003 on the status of reforms and budgets concluded that UNESCO has launched several efforts to reform its management practices, but that its reforms are in their early phases and will succeed only with continued sustained effort. GAO also found that while UNESCO’s assessed budget has remained level for the past 6 years through the year 2003, its extra-budgetary funds have increased substantially, and that the assessed budget for the 2004-2005 biennium may rise.

President Bush nominated Louise V. Oliver as Permanent U.S. Representative to UNESCO on September 17, 2003, and the United States rejoined the organization on October 1, 2003.

Issues of Rejoining

Many observers are convinced that the political concerns raised during the 1970s and 1980s which led to the U.S. withdrawal have either been addressed or have disappeared from the international agenda for other reasons, such as the end of the Cold War. Issues surrounding Israel, while not currently a problem in UNESCO, are perennial U.N. system problems which are likely to continue until the situation in the Middle East is resolved. Although some of the critics of U.S. return cite problems such as the New World Information Order, many other observers state that these issues have been largely resolved. P.L. 101-246, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990/1991, included a congressional finding noting that Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze stated on October 11, 1988, that the Soviet

⁷ Letter to UNESCO Director General from Under Secretary of State for Management Bonnie R. Cohen, September 8, 2000.

⁸ [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-4.html>]

Union was responsible for “the exaggerated ideological approach that undermined tolerance intrinsic to UNESCO.”⁹

At the same time, critics of U.S. return including some members of Congress are not convinced that a return to full U.S. participation is the best option. Concerns about management are ongoing problems throughout the U.N. system. Critics, including the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee and 12 members of the committee writing in a 2001 committee report,¹⁰ asserted that UNESCO’s management problems were not yet under control. Critics have little trouble finding employees or former government representatives to UNESCO who argue that reform was occurring too slowly or was inadequate. Supporters of renewed U.S. membership questioned the timeliness of these criticisms, arguing that the new Director General had made great strides during his tenure and that some anti UNESCO sources in other member governments had recently revised their opinions. U.S. scientific and educational organizations continued to support U.S. membership despite the management problems and criticized the low level of funding for the UNESCO substitute programs. One of the earliest and harshest critics, the Heritage Foundation, a few years ago noted that “UNESCO is much closer to U.S. positions after 16 years of American non-membership than it was in 1984. Although its goals have some merit, the organization simply does not offer enough benefit to the United States to justify the expense of membership.”¹¹

The concern, that UNESCO’s focus is too broad and diffuse, is unlikely to be resolved to the satisfaction of all. Education, science, culture and communications are broad issues with diverse interpretations around the world. Proponents of U.S. membership argue that UNESCO provides a global infrastructure for international cooperation in education, science, culture, and communications. These are areas of interest to Congress and the Administration and form a large part of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. They point out that several U.S. agencies, dozens of U.S. nongovernmental organizations, universities, and private sector entities participate regularly in a range of UNESCO programs and that no one has yet established a comparable international substitute organization. Therefore the question remains as to whether the United States can more effectively address these issues globally as a UNESCO member; and it remains a matter of dispute.

World Heritage Convention and Man and the Biosphere. In a related area, congressional legislation passed during 1999 and 2000 called for curbing and finally eliminating U.S. financial participation in UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere program and World Heritage program. Although the legislation was aimed at these specific UNESCO programs, the actual concerns of program critics focused on the role of State and local governments in U.S. national participation in these programs. CRS has prepared reports on both these programs (CRS Report 96-395, *World*

⁹ P.L. 101-246, H.R. 3792, Foreign Relations Authorization Act, FY1990 and 1991. Sec. 408.

¹⁰ H.Rept. 107-57.

¹¹ Brett D. Schaefer. Look before leaping to rejoin UNESCO. Heritage Foundation. Executive memorandum. May 7, 2001.

Heritage Convention; and CRS Report RS20220, U.S. National Parks and Biosphere Reserves and the U.S. MAB Program).