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## **1. Introduction: ICDE at UNESCO is at the crossroads between militant engagement and professional expertise**

It is my great pleasure to be here in Shanghai with you, and to bring with me a new, an outside, and probably an unusual point of view on ICDE. It is quite a long time now since I was in your position, at the head of a large distance education institution; but I have kept in touch from the outside, as ICDE general delegate at UNESCO. I had been asked to talk today about “Regulation and Distance Learning”, which I shall try to do, but first of all I would like to share with you my experience of working at UNESCO, and also give you an account of my action as ICDE representative.

ICDE is an international NGO which has been in official relations with UNESCO since 1967. Thousands of Non-Governmental Organizations have contacts with UNESCO, but only 310 large international NGOs are in official relation with UNESCO. They are chosen for: a) their geographical representativeness; b) their quality of cooperation; c) their democratic legitimacy. Representing the “Civil Society”, NGOs help to implement UNESCO’s objectives. Let me tell you a few words about what this means, and why it is important for ICDE to belong to this community.

My involvement at UNESCO as representative of ICDE within the framework of civil society and the NGO community has been continuous over the last 15 years. But it changed dramatically last December when I was elected President of the International Conference of NGOs. This conference is a gathering of all NGOs in official relations; it takes place every two years to elect its president and a Liaison Committee of 9 members, adopt its programme of action, in which all NGOs will become partners, according to their specific expertise, to help implement UNESCO’s programmes in its 4 main fields of competence, i.e. Education, Science, Culture and Communication.

Usually when you speak to people about NGOs they immediately think of humanitarian organisations, usually devoted to the relief of extreme poverty or to the defence of human rights. Indeed some of them are more “caritative” like OXFAM or Action Aid. Others are more professional like ICDE, which is the acknowledged representative for open and distance education. As one of the most important global non-governmental organizations in the world of education

and training, ICDE has been for more than 40 years now an official and active partner of UNESCO in the fields of distance education and of educational technology. For instance an important part of the literature published on the subject by UNESCO is of ICDE origin. This long-standing relationship between ICDE and UNESCO is in constant development, as education becomes an ever greater challenge at global level, and as solutions, can be found in the extensive use of information and communication technology for education, as is brilliantly demonstrated by our Chinese friends.

But to come back to the community of 310 NGOs, one can see that it is extremely diverse and that the expertise of its members covers all kinds of domains: education, law, culture, science, religion, philosophy, economy, communication etc, a diversity which sometimes makes it difficult to organise their collective work to support the implementation of UNESCO programmes. This organisation of their work in common is the main function of the Liaison Committee of 10 members, which I now chair. The major activities of the Committee consist in:

- organizing the International Conference of NGOs every 2 years;
  - taking part in the joint programme committees and working groups set up by UNESCO;
  - taking part in collective consultations on the main issues treated by UNESCO and in regional consultations;
- setting up commissions and organizing special events.

It is a position of growing responsibility and political influence, especially since the role of NGOs, and of civil society at large, is being considered with an increased interest by member states and by the international community. The question of a more open dialogue, a more direct partnership, and even of a new balance of power between governments and civil society is now being debated, especially since the Cardoso report on this subject delivered to the United Nations in June 2004. It belongs to us NGOs to increase our influence and legitimacy as strong partners of intergovernmental organizations.

Our work with UNESCO is carried out within working groups which we call “joint programmatic commission” meeting regularly and proposing ideas and actions in conformity with the programmes of the 4 main sectors: Education, Science (both hard sciences like Maths, physics, chemistry, and Human and social sciences), Culture, Information and Communication. ICDE is at the crossroads of 2 sectors, Education and Communication, and working with both of them.

As a professional organization, ICDE can bring considerable expertise to UNESCO, and develop its own global influence, which it does and has done for

long. On the other hand, UNESCO is always for us a sort of permanent workshop on education issues, as was recently the case for the ICDE OER Task Force which had held its first meeting at UNESCO in Paris some 2 years ago.

But as a member of this great community, ICDE also has to share its values and responsibilities for the implementation of a global policy. The main lines of this policy are adopted every two years at the International Conference, usually held in December. A resolution is then adopted democratically, defining our main programme, as well as a general policy line which can be currently summed up as **the reinforcement of civil society for the promotion of democracy at global level**. A vast programme indeed, but which has elements of application for all NGOs concerned, whether humanitarian or professional. We all share a militant engagement and seize the best opportunities to realize it. For instance this year being the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a large part of our activity has been devoted to the question of Human Rights, among which access to Education is prominent (article 26). I shall come back on it later. It gave us all the opportunity to realize and reassess, that Human Rights are the backbone of our common action and that, more than ever, **the Universal Declaration is the horizon of our common action**.

For all those reasons, the International NGOs are entitled to claim a four-fold legitimacy in their global action and the sometimes uneasy partnership with governments and member states:

- a legitimacy of action and intervention at local and national levels;
- a legitimacy on ethics, as bearers and defenders of global values, for instance in the Defence of Human Rights ;
- a democratic legitimacy, as representatives of citizens and peoples of the world with a capacity to be their mouthpiece and the bearers of their messages ;
- a professional legitimacy through the great variety of our knowledge and know-how.

I wanted to describe this general background in my introduction, first because it is only since I have been chairing the NGO community that I have fully realized the unavoidable entanglement between the two approaches, professional and militant, and second because I think it sheds a new light and gives a new outreach on our work in progress in various fields.

## **2. A short account of my activities at UNESCO on behalf of ICDE.**

There are currently several issues or events, in or around UNESCO, which deserve ICDE's attention and participation. 3 main points can be examined

today, which bear upon the definition of an ICDE strategy for the coming months and years:

- the issue of ICT in education;
- the follow-up of WSIS;
- current events concerning EFA and higher education.

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### **- 2.1. ICT in Education at UNESCO: a new approach and impetus.**

The issue of ICT in Education and e-learning has recently been given a new and greater attention, in the Education sector of UNESCO. It may be a consequence of one or two important reports on the subject, including my own survey report of 2006 on *ICT and Education at UNESCO 2000-2005* (see the executive summary). An important Strategic planning seminar (involving both the Education and Communication sectors) was held for three days (29-31 July 2008) in Paris to define a policy and create a *UNESCO network on the use of ICT in education*. My above-mentioned report was one of the founding documents, and I think ICDE should play a decisive part in such a network.

#### 2.1.1. Survey report on ICT and Education (April 2006).

The overall aim of this work was to make a complete survey of all initiatives taken by UNESCO – at all levels and in all its branches, bureaux, institutes, field offices – on the issue of ICT in and for Education. Everyone at UNESCO knew that many things had been done in that field but without an overall strategy and with too little coordination. 2005-2006 was the final lap of the WSIS phase 2 in Tunis, and I was asked to make a survey of everything that had been done, with some recommendations for better coordination for the future. It was a difficult job and it took me a good year's work, to cover only about 30 to 40 % of all the material to consider. And I took into account only the most recent initiatives, based on digital technology and the Internet. It included publications, conferences, various projects and activities at local, national or regional levels and of course many references on the web.

The survey was divided into 4 main sections:

1. Policy = a section dealing with policy matters to illustrate the efforts of UNESCO to support education authorities, decision makers and educators in their approach to the question of ICT and Education and to help them answer the question: “why and how to build a strategy of ICT integration”. The definition and analysis of indicators was essential for that matter.

2. Training of Teachers. It has been for years a top priority of UNESCO as it is now admitted that an adequate application of ICTs to teachers' training could greatly reduce the enormous deficit of qualified teachers, especially in LDCs. The survey enabled me to discover, for instance through all the projects reviewed, that without being aware of it, UNESCO had developed a kind of

“circular strategy” for teacher training in ICTs, each circle covering a wider area, and each proposing a different framework for action. I have called them respectively: /the awareness-raising framework/ the pioneer-teacher framework/ the cascade model framework/ the ICT Portal for Teachers.

3. Teaching and Learning = a section devoted to the integration of ICT into the curriculum, and to ICT into Open and Distance Learning, with special reference to projects in the E-9 countries.

4. ICT beyond borders of formal education = this section dealing (or trying to) with the jungle of initiatives launched to cover the special missions of UNESCO: EFA, Lifelong Learning, Literacy, Adult Education, Education for Special Needs, Non-formal education etc.

And the conclusion came out with 3 main keywords: Collaboration, Openness, Synergy.

#### 2.1.2. A new contribution of the Education sector to ICT for Education’s work.

Owing to various reasons (a new ADG at the head of the education sector with the creation of new ICT unit, a stronger will to implement inter-sectoral projects and initiatives, the realization that outside funding was easier to collect on that kind of project, the influence maybe of such already mentioned reports ) the Education sector of UNESCO has decided this year to give a new impetus to the question of ICT in Education.

To set the ball rolling, an important strategic planning seminar was held at UNESCO headquarters for 3 days at the end of July this year (29 to 31 July). 42 staff members attended, coming from 30 different units over the worlds. I was invited as expert, my survey report being one of the main reference documents. The important result of this meeting was the creation of an ICT4ED working group which will continue its collaboration on the web as a UNESCO network, with expertise from outside partners like us.

Mission, priority areas and initial areas for joint project and fund raising were discussed. The final conclusions are yet to be endorsed by the two ADGs (Nicholas Burnett for ED and Abdul Khan for CI), but some outlines can already be revealed:

a) concerning the mission of UNESCO: UNESCO promotes:

- a permanent global debate on education and learning for all and ICTs;
- ICT as levers for educational system change;
- using ICTs effectively in the learning environment: for learners, teachers, and conents.

b) concerning priority areas: they will be:

1. Plans, strategies, management, indicators, monitoring and evaluation
2. Teacher education

3. Facilitating teaching and learning
  4. Open access including open educational content and curriculum
  5. Distance education including higher education and lifelong learning
  6. Information literacy
  7. ICT beyond formal education
  8. Infostructure and infrastructure.
- C) concerning initial areas for joint projects and fund raising: they will be:
- Website
  - Open resources
  - Methodological guide and policy briefs
  - ICT and education indicators
  - Digital opportunities in LDCs
  - Teacher capacity development.

I think that such a strong intention and energetic drive on the part of UNESCO at top strategic level on ICT and Education is of high importance for ICDE, that it has to be attentively supported by us, both at global level and at the level of our institutional members where we could become more than observers but actors, and that once again ICDE can play an important, even decisive role as UNESCO partner.

**- 2.2. The WSIS and after: the implementation of the Tunis Plan of action.**

Without going too far in the past you may remember that ICDE had been actively engaged in the preparation (the PrepComs) and in both sessions of this World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva with some 15 000 participants (December 2003) and in Tunis with 24 000 participants (November 2005). We had been especially active, with UNESCO, to promote Education as a major issue (whereas at first it was not considered as such by ITU the initiator of the WSIS) and make it visible in that large global event: During the Geneva session, a position paper had been presented by ICDE on the theme “Teachers’ Training, Central Challenge for Knowledge Societies”. Thus you can understand that I remain permanently on the watch, as ICDE representative at UNESCO, to see whether education remains in that top position in the follow-up process of the WSIS.

Since Tunis, the implementation of the Plan of action adopted then has been rather slow to begin, many governments being reluctant to tackle the difficult questions of the Internet governance and of the funding of the Internet Society. Yet an important aspect of the follow-up of the WSIS is that UNESCO (through its CI sector) has been put in charge of an important part of the plan of action:

holding 6 action lines among the 11 adopted in Tunis, the most important for us being:

- action line C3 = Access to Information and Knowledge;
- action line C7 = E-learning and E-science.

Consultation meetings have been held in Geneva in May 2006, May 2007 and May 2008 in which all stakeholders were invited, including Member states, IGOs, private sector and civil society including NGOs in official relationship with UNESCO. I was unfortunately unable to attend the Geneva meetings for lack of adequate funding. Those meetings were mainly organisational, an important outcome being the opening of an online platform by UNESCO, entitled “UNESCO’s online platform in support of the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines”. Another important event in May 2008 was the “Global Event on Measuring the Information Society”.

The main problem with the follow-up of WSIS is that organization is very difficult, due to the global scope adopted and to the enormous number of stakeholders and potential number of participants. So it seems that a new policy begins to be adopted for the next meeting in May 2009 in Geneva: launch a call for concrete projects on only 3 or 4 cross-cutting themes. Projects also that would not be global, but implemented at national or regional level. Obviously Education will be one of those cross-cutting themes. And ICDE could certainly think of proposing a project on OER with the experience it has gathered through its Task Force.

I refer you for more information, to the WSIS websites

At ITU: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/index>

At UNESCO: <http://portal.unesco.org/ci>

### **- 2.3. Two important UNESCO events in Education:**

#### 2.3.1. The EFA meeting in Oslo;

The World Conference held at Jomtien (Cambodia) in 1990 had launched the ambitious programme of “Education for All”, to fight illiteracy and provide education all over the world, even for the poorest, boys and girls. EFA has since become the major priority programme of UNESCO. The World Education Forum was convened in Dakar (Senegal) ten years after, in April 2000, to assess what progress had been made towards that ambitious goal.

ICDE was present and active there with other large educational NGOS. Although the evaluation of the situation was disappointing, ICDE showed that ICTs could be usefully applied to developing countries, and not only to rich countries, with 4 principles of use:

- priority to a collective use of technology;
- use less advanced technology (radio) when necessary;
- give wider access to locations equipped in ICT (schools, libraries, training centres);
- give top priority to the training of teachers and tutors.

To pursue the implementation of the EFA Global Initiative, A Collective Consultation of NGOs was created at UNESCO in March 2001 to formulate proposals on various aspects of the financing of EFA, resources and mechanisms. The consultation was then chaired by ICDE. Since then ICDE has remained active in the follow-up action

The Education for All Programme remains the top priority of the Education sector at UNESCO. I was recently invited to attend again (this time in my capacity as president of the NGO/UNESCO Liaison Committee) the meeting of the CCNGO (Consultative Consultation of NGO's) working group to prepare the next high level meeting on the subject. The High Level Group of EFA (composed of member states, with a few, very few, NGOs as observers) will meet in Oslo in December. It would be relevant for ICDE to get more involved in the EFA programme, especially in the field of teacher training.

### 2.3.2. The 2009 World Conference on higher education.

Since the World Conference on Higher Education of October 1998, which was partly devoted to the implementation of online courses and “virtual” universities, ICDE has been a close partner of UNESCO in that field. I was actively involved in its preparation with a text on “the potential of technology to shape the future”, in the Conference itself with a paper delivered in plenary session on “the university considered as a public service”<sup>1</sup>, and in follow-up action with papers<sup>2</sup> (in 2000) to show:

- the role played by national Open Universities for equal access to higher education;
- the new capacities in learning opened by ICT systems;
- the creation of virtual universities and the role of ICDE as a laboratory of ideas and expertise.

The follow-up action was pursued in 2002, 2003 and 2004 with ICDE's participation in several consultations of experts and international seminars, and an active participation in the new World Conference on Higher Education (June 2003) where ICDE chaired the workshop on “Higher Education as a Public Good”.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard LOING *Quelques Considérations sur l'université comme service public.*

<sup>2</sup> Bernard LOING *TICE Révolution ou solution.* Workshop of 28 november.

The new World Conference on Higher Education will be held at UNESCO headquarters from 6 to 8 July 2009. This conference comes as follow-up of the previous Conferences in 1998 and 2003. We shall try to have a similarly involvement in 2009 in order to re-affirm the importance of the distance education sector.

Preparatory regional conferences are being currently held on the five continents; the first one took place in Cartagena in July 2008.

### **3. A discussion on the issue of state regulation for education, with special reference to Distance Education and the “merchandizing of education.”**

Let us take the Universal Declaration on Human Rights as the starting point of our discussion on the issue of state regulation for education versus the merchandizing of education.

As I told you before, our work this year at UNESCO was focussed on Human Rights with the celebration of The Universal Declaration 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This extraordinary document had been indeed adopted on 10 December 1948 in Paris, by the 56 States present at the conference. Extraordinary document because one of the most translated in the world but very little read, and known by very few people, a declaration to which lip service is paid every day by most statesmen all over the world, but practically nowhere put into practice; an extraordinary document aimed at the far future, but now standing in front of us to be implemented as the unavoidable corner stone of democracy.

And in a way it is probably the best starting point for our discussion on the issue of state regulation for education. As you know, one of the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration is devoted to education. It is article 26 which holds 3 propositions:

- 1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.*
- 2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*
- 3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.*

To sum up, the right to education is universal, and access to education is set up as a fundamental human right. Education must be made available at all levels by the states concerned, and is to be provided free of charge at elementary level. As a matter of principle, access to education is a right common to all human beings, and as such cannot be considered as a marketable service.

Of course we all know that the Universal Declaration, although universal and solemn, is just a declaration, and that no legal mechanisms have been adopted to make it compulsory. In no way is it a treaty or a covenant. This the reason why, in the field of education, the world had to wait for 42 years before beginning to launch an attempt at implementation at world level, with the programme Education for All, adopted at the Jomtien (Cambodia) Conference in 1990. Since then the implementation of this programme – although a top priority for the UN and UNESCO – has been rather slow. As I said before, the programme was given a new impetus at the Dakar Conference in April 2000 and EFA became one of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals). Since then, too little progress has been made to reach all the expected goals by 2015.

Within the general framework of EFA – which concerns mostly elementary education – distance education and e-learning have had a minor share; although in my opinion they should be given a central position. There is especially a case to be made for the thousands of teachers which will have to be trained if the aims of EFA are to be reached by 2015.

But let us now focus on the question of a regulatory framework for education, which I think stems directly from article 26 stating that education is a public good and that access to education is a universal human right. We all know that the debate about education considered as a public good versus education considered as a marketable product has now been going on for years, somehow following trends remarkably similar and parallel to those that can be observed today in the world of economy and finance. Should education be considered as private business (whatever the nature and level: primary, secondary, higher education, adult education and professional training), or should it be managed and dealt out by public authorities, and at least strongly regulated by them? We all know also that distance education and e-learning – central in what is generally referred to as “cross border” or “trans-national education” – should, for obvious reasons, be at the core of this debate in the general context of globalisation.

The debate became acute with the inclusion, by the World Trade Organization, in its General Agreement on Trade and Services, of Education as one of the 12 service sectors that should be open to free trade by removing all existing barriers. This measure has had supporters who highlighted the potential benefits

that more trade can bring in terms of innovations (through new providers), of delivery modes, easier access, increased economic gain. But it also raised strong criticism emphasizing the threats to the role of government, to the “public good”, and to the quality of education. Recently, the voice of critics seems to have grown stronger than that of supporters, but the debate is far from being over.

The reason why I thought it might be useful to discuss again this issue is the fact that about a year ago, the Belgian government –on its French-speaking side (the Government of the French Community of Belgium) - launched an initiative to re-examine this issue. An important seminar attended by some 160 personalities including diplomatic representatives from some 50 states as well as academics, members of NGOs, private sector and civil society, was held in Brussels on 23 May 2008 and came out with a platform of recommendations for the next Conference of the International Bureau of Education in November in Geneva. This platform has been taken seriously enough to be officially put on the agenda of the Conference.

The recommendations aim at encouraging the governments to fully keep control of their educational system with a high level of equitable access, quality of service, and cultural diversity; and to impose the same requirements to the private schools and other services of education that are officially recognized. It also aims at creating a network of states, especially among less developed countries, to share information about the economy of education both public and private (for instance to measure the effect of private funding on national public systems of education), to exchange good practice, to reinforce multi-stakeholder partnership between national public authorities, intergovernmental organizations, competent NGOs and civil society representatives. In this text UNESCO is invited to carry on the reflection and discussion on the regulatory role of the State on its education services.

Of course, such a platform of recommendation could be criticized as excessively authoritative and centralized in favour of governments and ministries of education. It could be seen as inspired by systematic enemies of free markets as sometimes the Europeans and especially the French appear to be, at least on the other side of the Atlantic. To show how this debate is relevant in those days of financial crisis, let me quote an article by Alex Berenson in the NY Times a few days ago. It was entitled “How free should a free market be”? I quote: *Is the era of free market over? The overall belief was that less regulation would produce broad prosperity even at the cost of greater inequality. But now America and the rest of the capitalistic world is shifting away from faith in markets and distrust of governments. The new American president will have to strengthen financial regulation. But Americans are fundamentally suspicious of government in a way*

*that Europeans are not, a cultural and political difference that stretches back centuries.* And the author concludes, quoting David Ruder, former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission in the USA: *This country is built on an appetite for risk; we don't want to be France.* A statement which is probably true, America being based on a culture of pioneers, a culture of emancipation from a colonial situation; whereas the success of European countries was based on the gradual growth of a collective, mutual organization from smaller, poorer and less developed entities.

But let us come back to the issue of a state regulation as proposed in the Brussels platform. With its provision for a collective effort and organization, it probably comes in time as a safety measure to protect some less developed countries where failing public educational systems tend to be replaced by private offers, either too expensive or of poor quality.

The problem is that, in this Belgian initiative, the issue of distance education, although so central to any kind of cross-border education, seems to have been rather neglected, or overlooked, by the authors of the “platform”. I have been in touch with them over the last few months, but was unable to attend the preparatory meetings leading to this declaration, and thus unable to introduce the necessary reference to distance education. This is why I now turn to this assembly, and to ICDE executives, to suggest if not the creation of a Task Force similar to the one on OER, but the participation of some of us to the future developments of this initiative, which fully belongs to our field of competence. Martha Mena had expressed her interest and I thank her very much for it, but we would certainly need a few volunteers – which I could link both with UNESCO and with the Belgian authorities – to have some influence, as ICDE, on the future developments.

## **Conclusion.**

In my conclusion I would like to insist again on UNESCO's and ICDE's common approaches to educational issues.

The Organization has long been interested in open and distance education as a means of providing solutions for some of the major problems in the field of education, such as “education for all” or “reaching the un-reached”. The educational priorities of UNESCO are shared by ICDE such as:

- extending the field of lifelong learning;
- opening access to education at global level;
- providing the best training at the lowest cost.

UNESCO wants to promote endogenous capacities in open and distance learning. It does not intend to create its own institutions for ODL; but it will identify and help the actions launched by the member states, or at grass-root level. So it needs an expertise which ICDE can provide, both locally and through its global experience and extension.

UNESCO wants recognition of the diplomas delivered by means of ODL systems. ICDE's expertise in the field of quality assessment and certification in trans-national education is relevant on that issue.

UNESCO wants to extend cooperation with global networks in ODL: this priority policy is obviously at the core of ICDE partnership with the Organization, ICDE acting also as a network of networks in distance education.

UNESCO, like ICDE, wants to develop the use of ICTs in their application to education and training, both at higher education level especially for teachers' training, and in the implementation of its "Education for All" programme.

Thus, in the various fields mentioned above, ICDE is comforting its position as a major partner of UNESCO, and one can say that its position as a global NGO is privileged and central. Our approach is built on a combination of militant engagement and expertise in the combined fields of Education and ICT. Through its engagement in the UNESCO community, ICDE can play an important part in fostering the transition, now in the making, from a global Information Society, to the building of open and equitable knowledge societies.

I had told you in my introduction that I was coming as an outsider, or rather as the bearer of news from the outside world, but a world seen from an international position which, I admit, can be felt as less real than the one you have to deal with in your high functions at the head of major academic institutions. But let me tell you that from my position, I have the feeling that it is both a world of great progress and of major crisis, a world in which mankind is groping – more or less blindly – for more justice and better democracy, that we won't reach it without better education which it our responsibility, and that somehow, we are at the crossroads.

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