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## The Time Has Come For The United States To Get Back Into UNESCO

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Since October 17, when UNESCO opened a six-week general conference in Paris, 158 member nations have been debating the United Nations organization's strategic plan for 1990-95. The member nations should weigh their decisions carefully, for UNESCO's future hangs in the balance.

What is at stake is whether UNESCO can recover the vitality and leadership it lost in 1984, when the United States withdrew from it, and 1985, when the United Kingdom followed suit. Since then the organization has suffered a 30% cut in annual operating funds. More damaging, it has lost the support and resources of the world's two leading research superpowers. Unless UNESCO wins them back soon, its present state of temporary weakness may degenerate into permanent impotence.

The strategic plan now being debated ought to address three main problems that triggered the U.S. withdrawal: poor management, runaway spending, and highly politicized programs. These problems characterized the administration of director general Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, whose controversial 13-year tenure ended

in 1987 when Federico Mayor Zaragoza of Spain was elected to the post.

Many influential U.S. scientific leaders believe UNESCO has shown enough progress under Mayor's leadership to warrant renewed U.S. membership. Frank Press, president of the National Academy of Sciences, said: "Mayor is moving as fast as he can, and he needs our support.... UNESCO has been very successful in its scientific programs. If it didn't exist, we would need to invent it" (*The Scientist*, Oct. 16, 1989, page 3).

This opinion is shared by a diverse group of professional organizations that have urged the U.S. to rejoin UNESCO. They include the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Bar Association, American Chemical Society, and National Education Association.

Another important endorsement came from a panel organized to take a fresh look at UNESCO by the United Nations Association in New York, an independent foreign policy research group co-chaired by Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance. Led by former senator Robert Stafford (R-Vt.), the panel concluded that

UNESCO "has made clear and undeniable progress in correcting all three problems," and recommended that the U.S. rejoin if the general conference approves Mayor's strategic plan.

However, UNESCO's 51-member executive board has revised Mayor's plan, reinstating a contentious issue that provoked the U.S. and U.K. withdrawals and will assure their continued absence—the New World Information and Communication Order. The U.S. government has explicitly warned that a decision to rejoin would be "extremely unlikely" if this revised plan is adopted.

It's interesting to note that the Soviet Union is distancing itself from this issue. It supported the Third World dogma of "better balanced information" to combat the

"information imperialism" of the West, and provoked many confrontations. But in a recent UNESCO speech, Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze came close to apologizing: "As we delve into the roots of the trouble, we don't try to shift the blame. We submitted to the influence of confrontation.... Our decisions ought [now] to bring to a common denominator the demands and interests of East and West, of North and South."

The general conference should emulate this constructive example by adopting Mayor's reform plan and rejecting the executive board's regressive revisions. The U.S. government can encourage this conciliatory move by declaring an unconditional decision to rejoin UNESCO. ■