

Disarmament Times

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UNESCO Focuses on Disarm Education

Educators Gathering In Paris

By BETTY REARDON

The World Congress on Disarmament Education convening at UNESCO headquarters in Paris 9-13 June comprises some three hundred participants, including a number of educators and researchers who have been working for years on the central task of the Congress and a head of state who shares their concern about directing educational processes toward the achievement of disarmament and world peace. President Rodrigo Carazo of Costa Rica inaugurates this major UNESCO experts meeting.

NOT SINCE the UNESCO General Conference of 1974 issued its Recommendation on Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace, and Education Regarding Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, has the centrality of education to the resolution of problems of war and peace been given such international recognition.

THE OFFICIAL ORIGINS of the Congress can be traced to a small meeting of experts organized by UNESCO's Division of Human Rights and Peace in preparation for the General Assembly's 1978 Special Session on Disarmament. The recommendations of the experts were based on their conclusions on the theme of that preparatory meeting, "Obstacles to Disarmament and Means for Overcoming Them."



Seated at head table at recent meeting of Disarmament Commission, left to right: Rikhi Jaipal, Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Jan Martenson, Assistant Secretary-General, Centre for Disarmament; M. A. Vellodi (India), Chairman; Fehmi Alem, Secretary; Jose Maria Otegui (Argentina), Rapporteur.

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A major psychological barrier identified by the group was the widespread belief that disarmament is impossible. The group attributed this belief in large part to extreme ignorance about disarmament issues. Some pointed out the special significance of the lack of information on alternative security systems and non-violent techniques for conflict resolution. The need for and the potential of education regarding disarmament was seen of such significance that a world congress on the subject should be convened.

THE IMPORTANCE of this recommendation was recognized by UNESCO's Director-General, who included it in his address to the Special Session. The cogency of the idea was grasped by the General Assembly and the Final Document of the Special Session on Disarmament calls upon UNESCO to organize such a Congress.

AS THE HEAD of state of a nation which has no army and has taken the most significant historical initiative in education for peace, President Carazo

is expected to deliver a message of major importance to the cause of disarmament education. He is known to have a deep personal concern for the human consequences of the arms race, especially the costs in lives and the quality of life suffered by the peoples of the developing countries as a result of conventional arms trade.

UNESCO has announced two basic objectives for the Congress:

to take stock of the situation with regard to disarmament education throughout the world, thus enabling specialists in disarmament education and research and those responsible for the educational policies of UNESCO Member States that are particularly concerned with education and research in this field freely to exchange their views and experience; and to promote the development of disarmament education at all levels in the context of both school and out-of-school education.

Betty Reardon, a veteran U.S.A. peace educator, participated in preparatory meetings for the World Congress on Disarmament Education and is attending the June Paris Conference.