

UNESCO

Notes for Oral Statement by John E. Fobes
before the Subcommittee on Human Rights
and International Organizations and the
Subcommittee on International Operations
of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of
the House of Representatives



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"United States Withdrawal from UNESCO"

My name is John E. Fobes. I am a former Chairman of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO and former Deputy Director-General of UNESCO in Paris. Currently I am adjunct professor of political science at Western Carolina University and Chairman of the U.S. Association for the Club of Rome.

My interest in international organizations began at Northwestern University and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. At the end of World War II, I was one of a group of persons loaned by Allied forces to draw up the first rules and structures for the organization and management of the United Nations. I became Secretary to a group of experts advising the first Secretary General of the United Nations on administration, finance and personnel. Later, during service with the Bureau of the Budget and the Department of State, I dealt with management problems of international organizations. I also served as a member of an advisory committee of the UN General Assembly where, in addition to reviewing budgets, I carried out studies of the administration of technical assistance by the agencies of the UN system.



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I welcome being invited to testify before the sub-committee inquiring into the withdrawal of the United States from UNESCO and appreciate that you have decided to incorporate my written testimony into the record.

In this oral statement, I would like to make three points.

First, my written testimony is an overview of problems at UNESCO together with suggestions as to solutions: three categories of problems with nine topics for action. I believe that much study and consultation is needed. The problems are complex, and many bodies need to be involved in formulating and negotiating the desirable changes. That is why my testimony offers an outline for studies and investigations by governments and, hopefully, by scholars and academic institutes.

It is reported that a group of representatives in Paris of 24 member states have compiled their own list of problems and are considering making formal proposals to the UNESCO Executive Board. There is merit in such joint action of course. The process of change needs acceleration. But my impression is that the list deals too much with symptoms. Moreover, it is not enough that only 24, mainly Western, delegations are involved.

Some may feel that the analysis in my written statement is academic and asks for too many studies. My reply: if we are serious about what has become a complex international organization system, with bureaucracy and policy-making apparatus similar to, although not yet as heavy as in national governments, then we

need to engage in much more analysis, brain-storming and delinea-
tion of options.

If we do not want to engage in such effort, then it
better to forget UNESCO and probably some other parts of the UN
system. The U.S. would then be allowing others to worry with the
changes which are bound to come.



That leads to my second point. Multiple changes in the world
in the 39 years since establishment of the United Nations system
have put pressures on that system and have already resulted in
adjustments. Those pressures continue to mount. They are likely
to produce even more drastic changes in the institutions of
international cooperation. For example, I believe that there will
be considerable decentralization and regionalization of opera-
tions. Solving the problems of food, housing, water, environment,
energy, education, health and the like demands more self-
reliance, on the one hand, while at the same time it requires
more mutual support, partnership and the exchange of information.
To deal with all these problems, the learning capacity of
societies must be enhanced and scientific advance must be
strengthened if humanity is to develop the resilience it
requires. Transnational institutions of all kinds--inter-govern-
mental and extra-governmental, voluntary and obligatory--will be
adapted from those already in existence and new ones created.

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The systems engineers tell us that such developments are
natural, a working out of Ashby's law: the law of requisite



variety. Only variety can control and manage variety and promote resilience.

Does America want to be a full partner in this development, the evidence of the urge for human survival on this planet? Or are we prepared to leave--even if only for a period--the developments to chance or to others? For example, if we move out of UNESCO for a few years while looking for and testing alternatives, we are likely later to be forced to deal with a greatly changed organization. I cannot believe that America will abrogate its responsibilities as the leading nation on this earth or think to protect its interests by standing aside.

Not that the solutions to issues facing international institutions will come solely from this country. No--I believe that the next constructive moves will come from an amalgam of West and the new South. Our participation in creating that amalgam is of consequence to us and to the rest of the world.

That brings me to my third point. If we want to participate effectively in the reform and restructuring of UNESCO and possibly of other UN agencies, we have a lot of "homework" to do. We have been guilty of benign neglect. We haven't been listening, learning, studying, assimilating. It has seemed that we did not want to exert the persistent efforts required for participating in UNESCO, although fortunately there have been a few exceptions where our initiative scored a success.

For about 15 years, our interest in and knowledge of international organizations, especially of UNESCO, has been declining.



The so-called "informed public" of the 1950's and 60's is less well informed today. In part this is because of increasing complexity on the world scene. The non-governmental organizations, through their representatives at the UN have been trying to help us keep up with developments. For example, they have been particularly active in connection with the series of global issue conferences, beginning with the Stockholm Conference on Environment in 1972.

But for UNESCO, the situation has been particularly bad:

- The staff of the National Commission for UNESCO has been steadily reduced since 1969. Today it receives only clerical support.
- The Commission once published a newsletter. There has been none for several years.
- It once had a library with a specialist who could furnish documents and answer questions from the public. Abolished.
- After each General Conference and other major UNESCO conferences, an informative delegation report was once published for the public. Such reporting no longer is available.
- National Commission sectoral committees once met regularly and provided useful channels of information and sources of ideas. They are almost defunct, having no staff help.

Does America care if we stay in or get out of UNESCO? What



signs there are--and the State Department knows this--is that there are many who do care. Everywhere I go in this country, I find a desire to know more about what is happening in UNESCO and the UN system and a complaint that it is not easy to learn. There are latent energies and interest out there. I believe that there is the potential of renewing a strong domestic constituency, something that is needed if America is to express and protect its interests in multilateral institutions. In this regard, I am glad that the National Research Council is undertaking a careful study on behalf of the National Academy of Sciences.

And only last week, for example, the U.S. Committee for the International Council on Monuments and Sites, with organizing effort by one staff member and an assistant, filled the auditorium at the National Academy to celebrate World Heritage Week. Remember that it was the USA which proposed the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and which has supported UNESCO work on cultural preservation.

Does it make any real difference if UNESCO does or does not continue in its present or some amended form? Or if the US is a member or not? I suggest that we get busy and elaborate the American answers to those questions.

There are moments when I think that perhaps America does not care enough or have guts enough to participate in the coming reconstruction of the international system. Then I remember our affluence--not mainly our obvious material strengths, but the strengths that come from information and ideas and spirit. Those



give us the power to cope with a changing world. Most of all, I take heart from the intellectual, spiritual and moral strengths which America has attracted, represents and embodies. That is what I find when travelling about this country and talking to non-governmental civic and professional groups.

I believe that UNESCO can be made more relevant and useful to this country. I believe also that if we are again willing to listen and learn in UNESCO, we will discover much more in that Organization than the rhetoric at which we take offense. We will discover that humanity wants to be whole, to increase its learning, its resilience and to survive. It wants new perspectives on politics and power. To do that, more than the World Health Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization and the other technical agencies of the UN system are needed. The elements of mind and spirit embodied in the UNESCO Constitution are also required. Drastic changes in the structure of that agency may be needed. Shouldn't we get into the act?

