

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

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CTITF Working Group Membership:

- Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes
- Presenting and Resolving Conflicts

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is an international organization that focuses on promoting peace, development, and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication, and information. As two of its global priority areas, UNESCO focuses on Africa and gender equality. Moreover, among its overarching goals are the attainment of quality education for all, addressing emerging social and ethical challenges, and fostering cultural diversity and a “culture of peace.”¹⁷⁵

UNESCO’s governing body, the General Conference, is made up of 195 member states; of these, fifty-eight are elected to the Executive Board by conference members. UNESCO has a strong field presence, with nearly a third of its staff in field offices, numbering approximately 2,100.

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, UNESCO’s General Conference adopted Resolution 39, in which it expressed “its firm conviction that, based upon its mandate and within its areas of competence—education, science, culture and communication—UNESCO has a duty to contribute to the eradication of terrorism, drawing on its character as an intellectual and ethical organization, and invites the Director-General to take appropriate action through UNESCO programmes and studies.”¹⁷⁶

Four years later, in 2005, the director-general delivered a *Status Report of UNESCO’s Contribution to International Action against Terrorism through Education, the Sciences, Culture and Communication and Information*. This report reflected on the activities and challenges faced by UNESCO in addressing the emerging threats of terrorism and violence born of intolerance, hatred, and extremism, and acknowledged that

in order to generate results, activities in the context of international cooperation must move beyond agreement about general principles...towards concrete and programmatic activities that can transform the dialogue from the conference hall into policies

and practices with consequences for how people live together, interact with each another and understand one another.¹⁷⁷

Significantly, the *Status Report* also observed that though UNESCO's contribution to international counterterrorism efforts might be modest in a long-term and global perspective, "the earlier the Organization's impact can be brought to bear, the more effective it may well be in any dissuasion strategy."¹⁷⁸ Consequently much of UNESCO's work has been of a preventive nature, seeking to sensitize policymakers and civil society representatives to the importance of effective dialogue and constructive pluralism. Through activities focusing on the delivery of quality education and intercultural engagement, UNESCO contributes to mitigating some of the "conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism" outlined in Pillar I of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.¹⁷⁹

To that end, UNESCO has organized special events, such as one in 2005 dedicated to dialogue among civilizations, cultures, and peoples, in which the presidents of Iran and Algeria participated. In the same year, UNESCO worked with the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), the Danish Centre for Culture and Development, and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures to convene the broad-based, expert-level Conference on Fostering Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations through Concrete and Sustained Initiatives. One outcome of this conference was the Rabat Commitment, which sets out detailed action proposals to improve the quality of educational materials and teacher training to address negative stereotypes and promote better intercultural relations.¹⁸⁰

These plans reflect UNESCO's broader efforts to promote the development of textbooks and other educational materials that reflect the diversity of communities, learning styles, and needs of students in different countries. As UNESCO has noted, textbook revisions need to focus on the portrayal of gender stereotypes, the portrayal of other cultures and nations, and the role of the teacher in order to promote tolerance, dialogue, and a respect for diversity. UNESCO also facilitates a network of thirty-one university chairs on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, which convene regular interreligious

meetings.¹⁸¹

Moreover, UNESCO was designated the lead agency for the 2001-2010 International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, which aims to assist civil society organizations in denouncing terrorist acts as inexcusable.¹⁸²

UNESCO is a member of the CTITF Working Groups on Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes and Preventing and Resolving Conflicts, where it works to share information and coordinate activities with other group members. However, UNESCO, like several other CTITF entities whose work is more focused on development-related issues, has been reluctant to be “linked too closely with the Security Council’s sometimes unpopular security-focused counterterrorism program.”¹⁸³ Nonetheless, UNESCO has recognized its potential role in contributing to multilateral efforts to prevent and combat terrorism and violent extremism and has developed initiatives, such as those listed above, to meet these aims.