

# UNESCO WITHOUT U.S. FUNDING? IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION WORLDWIDE

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## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is arguably best known for its World Heritage List, which protects and celebrates designated cultural, natural, and mixed sites around the world. These include such places as the Pyramids of Giza, the Grand Canyon, Australia's Great Barrier Reef, and Peru's Machu Picchu. Although these designations provide exposure to UNESCO to travelers the world over, the organization spends the majority of its resources on other endeavors, with education being the most prominent. In education, UNESCO's goal is to be a clearinghouse and laboratory of ideas, standard-setter, collector of educational statistics, catalyst for change, and capacity-builder. Led by its flagship Education for All (EFA) initiative, UNESCO has established itself as a leading international agency involved in setting a global agenda for education. With a focus on two global priorities, Africa and gender equality, its overall objectives in the field of education include attaining quality education for all and lifelong learning.

Recently, the United States — the country that provides the most financial support to UNESCO, contributing around \$60 million annually in dues — has stated that it is withholding all funding from the organization in light of UNESCO allowing member state status for Palestine. This is not the first time that the U.S. has withdrawn support from the organization. In the 1980s, the United Kingdom, the U.S., and Singapore each withdrew their memberships and significant funding only to rejoin UNESCO in 1997, 2003, and 2007, respectively.

Given the withdrawal of what amounts to roughly a quarter of UNESCO's annual budget, the intention of this brief is to provide a set of perspectives on what the withdrawal of U.S. funding could mean for education around the world. The brief will open with an overview of UNESCO and its role in education, fol-

lowed by a short discussion of Palestine's status in UNESCO and the withdrawal of U.S. membership dues. The brief will then turn to four important voices that will discuss what it could mean to international education now that the U.S. is withholding support. These perspectives are written by four leaders in international education:

1. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO
2. Nicholas Burnett, Managing Director of Results for Development Institute
3. Steven J. Klees, Professor of International Education Policy, University of Maryland
4. Emily Vargas-Baron, Director of The RISE Institute

Of course, these four views do not represent all opinions on UNESCO's work in the field of education. Therefore, additional perspectives are summarized later in the report. The brief will then conclude with a range of issues that policymakers in the U.S. may wish to consider in the debate over the future of U.S. involvement in UNESCO.

## ABOUT UNESCO

Established in 1945, UNESCO is the leading agency in the United Nations' system dedicated to education, culture, communications, information, and natural and social sciences. Headquartered in Paris, France, the membership of UNESCO consists of over 190 member states. These member states have agreed to work multilaterally towards UNESCO's mission, which is:

...to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values. It is through this dialogue that the world can achieve global visions of sustainable development encompassing observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty...

(UNESCO, n.d.)

*(continued on page 6)*

## UNESCO: A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

IRINA BOKOVA



*Irina Bokova is the Director-General of UNESCO, a position she has held since 2009. She is a Bulgarian diplomat and politician, having served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador of Bulgaria. She is the first woman to have been elected head of UNESCO.*

Universality is the one of the great strengths of the United Nations. In essence, it is about shared goals and commitments, and about a shared vision between all member states. UNESCO's universality is threatened by the withholding of U.S. funding that followed the 31 October decision of the 36<sup>th</sup> General Conference to admit Palestine as a Member State of the Organization. This unique strength is undermined, because it will lead to a 30 percent cutback in programs that are at the heart of building peace, security and democratic societies today.

Education is UNESCO's top priority. This is fundamentally because education is a human right that brings sustainability to all the internationally agreed development goals – from child and maternal health to poverty reduction.

UNESCO is the lead United Nations agency on education. We coordinate a wide array of partners – public, private and non-governmental – involved in the Education for All movement. We help countries to tackle the HIV/AIDS pandemic through comprehensive education reform. Through our Institute for Statistics we produce cross-nationally comparable data that provides the primary evidence base for reports and research on education at all levels. We produce an authoritative annual report on Education for All that monitors progress, highlights good practice and puts the spotlight on challenges like the impact of armed conflict on education, the cost of inequality and marginalization and the urgent need for comprehensive policies on literacy and early childhood care and education.

This evidence also informs the choices we make in developing our programs. It is why we place special priority on countries farthest away from the Education for All goals, on those that are in the process of transformation, of recovery from conflict.

- In Afghanistan, UNESCO is delivering literacy programs to more than 600,000 people, including Afghan police officers.

- In Iraq, UNESCO's International Bureau of Education is working with the government to rewrite the school curricula and textbooks, and to train teachers to promote civic values and fight sectarianism.
- In the newly created state of South Sudan, we are assisting the government to build its first-ever Ministry of Education and develop a strategy to educate up to 1 million school-aged children.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, we have supported the government in making education free for children in the first three grades of school.
- In Egypt, we are supporting a national literacy campaign launched as part of our activities to accompany the transformation to democracy.

In 35 countries with some of the world's lowest literacy rates, UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment has had a positive impact through strong alliances with governments and societies that have succeeded in generating political will and mobilizing resources.

Fundamentally, education is about values. Through our program on Holocaust Education – unique within the UN family – we contribute to the production of learning materials on Holocaust remembrance and we support the community of researchers and teachers worldwide in developing strategies to combat anti-Semitism and all other forms of exclusion. Through our Associated Schools network and other channels, we facilitate the exchange of good practices to combat violence and racism, and to promote a culture of human rights, tolerance and mutual understanding. Through the recently launched U.S.-supported Teaching Respect for All program, we will develop a curriculum framework on anti-racism and tolerance and online interactive platforms for education professionals and young people.

Our remit is large because education is lifelong – from early childhood programs to adult literacy, from technical and vocational education and training for youth to second-chance opportunities and professional development.

A 30 percent reduction in funding affects all these efforts. While forcing us to refocus and streamline, a cut of this magnitude will lead to a weakening of our presence in developing countries. Fewer will benefit from our interventions to build national capacity – the key to improving education systems across the board. It will reduce our ability to work with governments to improve legal frameworks on the right to education. Our Associated Schools Network of 9,000 schools in 180 countries, which promotes intercultural dialogue and work on climate change, human rights and other global concerns, will receive less support at a time when encouraging students and schools to manage diversity is more important than ever for “building peace in the minds of people” – our core mandate.

In short, the withholding of U.S. dues will immediately affect our ability to support countries in the often tremendous efforts they are making to provide universally accessible, relevant and transformative education. The U.S.-UNESCO relationship is a strong one. Our action is supported by a broad constituency of advocates and experts in the United States. UNESCO is determined to keep this relationship vibrant for the advancement of education and peace worldwide. †

## A MISSED OPPORTUNITY TO REFORM UNESCO...OR COULD RENEWED U.S. FUNDING TRIGGER IT?

NICHOLAS BURNETT



*Nicholas Burnett is a Managing Director at the Results for Development Institute in Washington, DC. He was UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education from 2007-09 and Director of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report from 2004-07.*

Given the way that UNESCO has handled the cut in United States funding, the potential implications for UNESCO's future – and thus for education worldwide – are discouraging indeed. So discouraging in fact that the United States should think carefully about the terms on which it might re-engage financially. UNESCO's response has only demonstrated the continuing failure of its Board and management to tackle its enormous administrative problems, all of which impede it from properly executing its education mandate. This is very unfortunate because there is an urgent need for an effective international agency devoted to education and because the U.S. decision to cut its funding was wrong.

Think for a minute about the issues at the top of the global agenda: security/terrorism, international health, climate change, sustainable economic growth, the reduction or elimination of poverty, take your pick. But note also the paradox that, on the one hand, education is nowhere near the top of this list but, on the other, tackling every single one of these issues requires education. Education and skills are key to jobs, the best health intervention of all is women's education, adapting to climate change requires an educated citizenry, and so on. Beyond this, education currently faces enormous challenges around the world: evidence is accumulating that there is a "learning crisis" in the developing countries with most children unable to perform competently at the grade level in which they are enrolled, not to mention the 10 percent of primary school age children who still do not even go to school. As the UN agency responsible for education, there is enormous work for UNESCO to do, in terms of supporting member states' efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals, preparing new global education priorities for the period after these goals expire in 2015, and establishing an international clearinghouse of data and information on what works in education.

The U.S. decision was wrong, as others have argued, based on outdated legislation, and it is encouraging that the Obama administration is currently trying to persuade Congress to change the law and restore the funding. Even if the law is changed, however, it is not clear that UNESCO's management and Board has earned the right to have the funding restored unconditionally. Their reaction to the cuts has been twofold: to try to offset them through special appeals and to reduce certain budgetary expenditures. So far, so good, that is what any management should do. Indeed, the Emergency Fund established in November 2011 and the recently announced Compensatory Additional Program of February 2012 both make sense as fundraising techniques.

The budgetary cuts are another matter, however. No staff have been let go, despite a massively bloated administration that accounts for over half the employees and despite an education sector workforce that urgently needs renewal. No reforms have been made to the outdated benefits and pension schemes that wrongly encourage employees to stay on staff for life. No bold steps have been taken to eliminate at least some of the excessively large number of nonperforming country offices.<sup>1</sup> The different sectors (education, science, culture, communications) have not been prioritized further. Within education, there has been no extra prioritization of key programs over less important ones. In essence what has happened is that jobs have been protected while the funds necessary for the still-employed staff to perform their functions have been cut. One director recently called me to discuss a technical issue and had to ask me to call back as staff is now required to limit international phone calls to eight minutes!

Every adverse situation poses also an opportunity. The U.S. funding cuts, even if unanticipated, were such an opportunity for UNESCO to clean house, establish a sound and sustainable financial footing, reduce its administrative staff and revamp its education staff, and generally seize the initiative to become once again the premier global education agency.

The U.S. funding cuts were a mistake. Nonetheless, given UNESCO's response, the U.S. would be ill-advised to simply restore its funding, assuming the legislation is changed as it should be, without demanding massive reforms to the organization. The U.S. would not be alone in this – the UK recently gave a warning in its multilateral aid review that it will not be able to continue to support several international agencies including UNESCO unless their performance improves.

I hope the U.S. does re-engage, as the world certainly needs a strong global education agency, advocating for the right to education and providing the knowledge so that right can be realized. Re-engagement should be conditioned on reforms, however, reforms that could have been introduced in response to the initial funding cut. ✦

<sup>1</sup> I lay out what some of these reforms might be in two recent articles. See Burnett, N. (2011). UNESCO education: Political or technical - Reflections on recent personal experience, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(3); and Burnett, N. (2010). How to develop the UNESCO the World Needs: The Challenges of Reform, *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 13(2), CICE Hiroshima University.

## UNESCO VS. WORLD BANK: THE STRUGGLE OVER LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

STEVEN J. KLEES



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*Prof. Klees' work examines the political economy of education and development with specific research interests in globalization, neoliberalism, and education; the role of aid agencies; education, human rights, and social justice; the education of disadvantaged populations; the role of class, gender, and race in reproducing and challenging educational and social inequality; and alternative approaches to education and development.*

UNESCO's overwhelming vote to admit Palestine as a member is contested politics. The United States and a number of other nations voted against admission, and the U.S. is withholding funding and might actually resign. Whether such reactions are seen as extreme or justified depends on your politics. Some broad concerns revolve around whether UNESCO membership for Palestine can contribute to the Middle East peace process or whether membership will ratchet up tensions further. I have no answer to this question, nor do I believe there is a clear answer. It remains to be seen. But what is clear is that once again the U.S. acts as a petulant bully who, when not getting its way, packs up its marbles and goes home.

I say "again" because the U.S. reacted similarly in an earlier era. In the mid-1970s, UNESCO developed positions in favor of a New World Information Order and a New International Economic Order that critiqued standard development policy (Mundy, 1999). In 1984, citing excessive politicization and poor management, the U.S. officially withdrew from UNESCO and did not rejoin until 2003. I again see this as the petulant bully who does not mind politicization as long as it is the kind of politics it favors.

	World Bank	UNESCO
<b>Founded</b>	1944	1945
<b>Members</b>	187	196
<b>Voting</b>	By Contribution	By Country
<b>Philosophy</b>	Neoliberal	Humanitarian
<b>Goals</b>	Economic Growth & Poverty Reduction	Peace & Security
<b>Guiding Principle</b>	Human Capital	Human Rights
<b>2010 Education Budget</b>	\$2,865 million	\$181 million

I believe it is a very short-sighted decision today to withhold funding for UNESCO. In particular, I want to focus on how this

may have the consequence of further strengthening the position of the World Bank in education vis-à-vis that of UNESCO. Let me begin by comparing the two institutions as in the table below:

UNESCO and the World Bank were both founded in the post-World War II effort to initiate forms of global governance. Current membership is similar, but there the similarities end. Voting in the World Bank is proportional to contribution, allowing wealthy countries to govern Bank policy. In UNESCO, we have one country, one vote, giving rise to outcomes that the U.S. and others have not liked. The overall philosophy that permeates the Bank is neoliberal, still following the Washington Consensus to delegitimize and cut government while privatizing, deregulating, and liberalizing the economy. To the contrary, UNESCO's philosophy is more humanitarian. The World Bank's goals focus on economic growth and poverty reduction in developing countries. UNESCO focuses on peace and security through education, science, and culture. In terms of its work in education, the Bank takes a human capital approach, with education seen as instrumental to attaining income and productivity. On the other hand, the guiding principle for UNESCO is human rights, where education is an end in itself, and emphasis is given to attaining Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Thus, we have two very different institutions that do not compete in most ways. But they do so very directly in education. While education is part of the mandate of UNESCO, it has become a central part of Bank operations as it has expanded its efforts in social investments, like education and health, that may affect growth and poverty. In the early 1960s, the Bank had hardly any investments in education, but by 1965 it was spending about the same amount as UNESCO on education; by 1970, it was spending twice as much, by 1980, three times, by 1990, ten times, and by 2010, sixteen times (Mundy, 1999; UNESCO, 2010-2011; World Bank, 2010). It was during the 1980s that many observers would say that the World Bank replaced UNESCO as the lead agency for education. It was not just a question of money, although this era saw the start of the U.S. and UK withdrawal from UNESCO, hurting both its education budget and its legitimacy. It was also during this time that the Bank began producing a series of education strategy papers that have increasingly set global education policy. According to many critics, the World Bank's usurpation of UNESCO's role has been a disaster, following narrow, economic, neoliberal policies that increase educational inequality and neglect true learning (Klees, Samoff, & Stromquist, 2012). It is interesting to note what Federico Mayor, former Director of UNESCO, said on this subject:

I do not accept that the World Bank and the I.M.F. should continue to take decisions and make recommendations on issues in education in which they are not adequately informed.... They should concentrate on economics, banking and finance and leave education to UNESCO and other agencies mandated to work in this domain (Njoku, 1998).

Education is contested terrain. For those of us who want a broader, humanitarian, human rights, democratic, participatory, education-oriented approach to education policy, the current decision of the U.S. and other countries to withhold contributions or withdraw will further weaken UNESCO. It is not that UNESCO is such a paragon of educational virtue. It is not and, like much of the world, has been affected by the neoliberal juggernaut. However, it is much better than the alternative. Global education policy should not be determined by a bank! †

## UNESCO WITHOUT U.S. BUDGETARY SUPPORT? SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORLDWIDE

EMILY VARGAS-BARÓN



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The real value of UNESCO's education sector is largely measured by the quality of its international civil servants and the amount of funding devoted to promoting educational development. UNESCO's education specialists were severely curtailed between 2003 and 2009, following which, staff competence began to be rebuilt. As recently declared by the Director General of UNESCO, the major reduction of 22% of the core budget due to U.S. legislative requirements will reduce support for personnel and offices over time. It is hoped that new and competent staff members of the education sector will be protected. However, bureaucracies tend to delete posts most recently filled and personnel most recently hired. Should this occur, the loss of newly hired educational specialists would immediately affect the quality of programs and quite likely also result in a reduction of education budgets at headquarters, regional and country levels. To maintain UNESCO's current level of effort in education, other funds would be needed to support education personnel, posts and offices.

A lack of program support would negatively impact the expansion and improvement of educational and early childhood development systems, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, extra-budgetary support from the U.S. for educational reform and development in countries in crisis is expected to end, especially with respect to Haiti, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Southern Sudan and others. Such work may be curtailed, although other donors may continue these initiatives to some degree.

With respect to teacher training, considerable funding is required to expand pre- and in-service teacher training, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, a priority region for UNESCO and the U.S. The EU also supports these initiatives in UNESCO but it is unlikely to be able to absorb fully the loss of core support from the U.S. This could result in a lamentable decline in key education and early childhood development (ECD) training initiatives for Sub-Saharan Africa.

In terms of normative leadership for education, U.S. specialists will continue to contribute to important initiatives to reinforce educational rights, equity and quality; promote inclusive education with a focus on children with disabilities and culturally and

linguistically appropriate education for ethnic minorities; and protect children and school personnel during armed conflicts. However, U.S. governmental support for such initiatives will disappear. This could lead to a vacuum in normative work, as UNESCO managers may use other core funds for activities considered to be more critically important for maintaining education personnel and support costs.

Specific to Education for All (EFA), the U.S. played critical leadership roles for the preparation and convening of EFA World Forums in 1990 in Jomtien and 2000 in Dakar. At those times, the U.S. was not a member state of UNESCO, as it is at this time. The Department of State has expressed the firm decision to remain a member state in UNESCO. It is expected that the U.S. will continue to play a leadership role in EFA decisions for the foreseeable future. It is also expected that U.S. specialists in international educational policy planning and research will continue to collaborate with the preparation of the annual EFA Global Monitoring Report. There are, however, implications for a number of educational development institutes and programs, further described below.

Several key UNESCO institutes are engaged in educational development work worldwide, including the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the International Bureau of Education (IBE). The UIS provides technical support for national educational management information systems (EMIS). UNESCO will undoubtedly maintain the work of the UIS, which receives only part of its budget from UNESCO. The data collection and analytic systems of the UIS are essential for nations and many bilateral and multilateral agencies around the world, including UNESCO itself, UNICEF, and the World Bank. However, important regional and national training programs for EMIS personnel might be curtailed due to budgetary restrictions leading to inadequate data collection and analysis in some countries. The extent to which U.S. withdrawal might affect UNESCO's IIEP is unclear, especially because, as with the UIS, UNESCO only funds a minor part of its budget. Given U.S. leadership in IIEP, the institute might be supported by non-governmental grants from U.S. foundations. However, without them, new and planned initiatives for training and research might be curtailed during the coming two years or more. The IBE, which is devoted to improving educational contents, methods and structures, receives most of its funding from UNESCO. It is expected that this specialized agency may have to reduce its personnel and programs during the coming years unless it can find alternative funding support.

With respect to specific programs, since the U.S. government has provided additional extra-budgetary support for family, youth and adult literacy programs, these investments will disappear and literacy work in UNESCO will continue to be seriously underfunded. More recently, UNESCO has placed a strong emphasis on education for global sustainability. It is expected that this program will continue but perhaps at a lower level and without U.S. sponsorship. Science and engineering education had been a strong focus of the U.S. through the years, but have waned. Progress achieved recently in placing science and engineering education at the fore is likely to be lost unless the U.S. science community finds alternative non-governmental funding for this UNESCO program.

*(commentary by Emily Vargas-Barón continued on next page)*

(continuation of commentary by Emily Vargas-Barón)

In September 2009, UNESCO took leadership in the field of early childhood development (ECD) by holding a World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education in Moscow, Russia. Part of the follow-up of that conference is a major project to develop an Holistic Early Childhood Development Index (HECDI). U.S. education specialists will continue to participate actively in HECDI activities. For example, the author and her colleague, Julia Schipper, prepared a study entitled, Early Childhood Policy Planning Indicators: Elements for the HECDI, and she plans to continue collaborating fully with the preparation of the HECDI.

There are a number of other education initiatives and programs that will likely be sustained regardless of the U.S. withdrawal of funds. For example, UNESCO's Associated Schools Program, a global network of more than 9,000 educational institutions in 180 countries, is low in cost, and it has proven to be

indestructible. It is unlikely that the U.S. withdrawal of funding will impact this program. UNESCO's University Twinning and Networking Programme (UNITWIN) for higher education partnerships is notably low in cost, and if partnerships are well-structured, they can be highly effective. Given its popularity, utility and cost-effectiveness, this program will undoubtedly survive expected UNESCO budgetary cuts.

The withdrawal of the U.S. government's core and extra-budgetary funding for UNESCO may offer opportunities for serious thought about how this specialized UN agency might focus on conducting strategic planning, identifying and supporting only high-priority programs, streamlining the system of regional, sub-regional and country-level UNESCO offices, and maximizing the use of a sharply curtailed annual core budget. However in the short run, several UNESCO initiatives that are of value to education programs in the U.S., support U.S. foreign policy activities, and collaborate with our agenda for international development and cooperation will be heavily impacted. ✦

(continued from page 1)

UNESCO is a specialized agency within the UN system, which means that it is autonomous, yet works with the UN to carry out various functions on its behalf. Its main decision-making body is the General Conference, which is made up of all member states. The General Conference sets the organization's policies, lines of work, and budget. The organization also has an Executive Board that currently consists of 58 member states. The Executive Board oversees the organization between General Conferences, prepares for the General Conferences, and monitors implementation of the programs they adopt. With the goal of creating a space for dialogue amongst members, UNESCO is best understood as a forum of global intellectual cooperation. It is neither a development aid organization nor an agency that places an emphasis on funding projects.

UNESCO is financed through contributions assessed against members, based on a sliding scale. The 2010-11 sliding scale shows that four countries currently contribute more than 50% of the budget: U.S. (22%), Japan (15%), Germany (8%), and France (6%) (UNESCO, 2010-11)

## PALESTINE AND UNESCO

In 2011, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian National Authority submitted a formal request for Palestine to be admitted to UNESCO as a full member state, which would allow them to join other UN agencies and participate in international treaties. On October 5, 2011, the Executive Board

of UNESCO voted to approve Palestine's request to become a full member state. This vote was forwarded to the General Conference for a full vote by all UNESCO member states. On October 31, 2011, with a two-thirds majority, Palestine became the 195<sup>th</sup> member state of UNESCO. Of the 173 votes, 107 UNESCO member states approved the bid, 14 opposed, and 52 abstained. Opposing votes included the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Within the European Union (EU), member state votes varied. Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands were opposed, while France and Belgium were supportive. Other supporters included China, Russia, Brazil, India, and a majority of the African and Arab member states. Notable abstentions included Japan, Britain, Denmark, Italy, and South Korea (*The Guardian*, 2011)

Palestine has signed and ratified the UNESCO constitution, required to bring its membership into effect. To date, they have not paid any dues to the organization. As a result of the approved Palestinian membership bid, the U.S. has stated that it is withholding funds to UNESCO. Based on federal legislation from the 1990s, U.S. law prohibits the U.S. government from providing funds to any UN agency or affiliated organization that "accords the Palestine Liberation Organization the same standing as member states" (P.L. 101-246, Title IV [1990] and P.L. 103-236, Title IV [1994]). To date, the U.S. administration has indicated that it will remain a member state in UNESCO, not completely withdrawing from the organization, as it did from 1984-2003. The U.S. government has repeatedly indicated that regardless of the funding issue, there are no plans for a withdrawal from the or-

ganization. The U.S. can remain a full member for two years without paying its dues.

In February 2012, the Obama administration announced that it would seek a waiver from Congress to avoid withdrawal of its funding from UNESCO. In the U.S. Government Office of Budget and Management's 2013 fiscal budget submitted to Congress, it was stated:

The Department of State intends to work with Congress to seek legislation that would provide authority to waive restrictions on paying the U.S. assessed contributions to UNESCO. Should the Congress pass this legislation, this funding is sufficient to cover the FY 2013 UNESCO assessment and the balance of the FY 2012 assessment. (p. 52)

It is not certain at this time whether Congress will approve the waiver. This policy brief aims to add an informed perspective on possible benefits and drawbacks to education now that funding is being withheld. The brief is intended for a general audience that wishes to have more information on the UNESCO debate. We hope that the perspectives provided will inform both policymakers and the general public in creating informed decisions.

## OTHER CRITICAL VIEWS ON UNESCO

There remain a number of views in both popular, policy, and academic literature that are not represented in the brief, including from groups that tend to be more critical about the benefits of U.S. membership in UNESCO. These critics provide an alternative perspective that we believe

should be included and considered by anyone attempting to understand the pros and cons of UNESCO's role in education.

Some of the critical perspectives on UNESCO claim that in its current structure, UNESCO cannot meet the educational goals it intends to accomplish (Benavot, 2010; Burnett, 2010a, 2010b; Heyneman & Wagner, 2010). Similar to Steven Klees' response above, some critics argue that the spread of the neo-liberal doctrine in education has resulted in multilateral organizations, including UNESCO, prioritizing educational targets and outcomes above learning (Goldstein, 2004; Mundy, 2006). Many of these critics contend that what is considered "good" international education development has been increasingly narrowed and that narrowing has moved UNESCO away from its broader goals.

Critics have also voiced their concern in regard to the Palestinian debate. For example, in response to the admission of Palestine into UNESCO and the withdrawal of U.S. funding, there is an intensifying politicization surrounding UNESCO within the U.S. Recent media debates and discussions between the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Secretary Clinton suggest that there is a growing powerful voice within the U.S. government that recommends the U.S. should immediately withdraw not only funding, but also its membership from the organization.

UNESCO has also received considerable conservative media attention as part of an ongoing U.S. political discussion regarding what role, if any, the U.S. should play within UNESCO. Some of the discussion emphasizes that to support Israel, the U.S. should pull its funding from UNESCO. Although not all critics feel that UNESCO works in contrast to the U.S.'s overall international agenda, some critics claim that the organization is too political and has anti-American leanings (Zemek, 2012).

Financially, some critics argue that the U.S. gives considerable funding to UNESCO but that the extra financial support above what other member states contribute does not come with any additional influence regarding the way the money is used in education. In addition, critics have called into question the spending habits and overall budget of the organization. For example, Harris (2012) notes that the U.S. is not a signatory of some of the conventions that UNESCO financially supports and that the Paris-based staff has an annual average cost of over \$200,000 per employee. Many of the same critics further postulate that UNESCO's high overhead distracts from its overall mission. This group further claims that U.S. contribution to

UNESCO could be better spent on bi-lateral projects that are more closely in line with the U.S. mission.

Critical voices concerning UNESCO are also present outside of the U.S. One of the most notable among these voices is a recent report by the UK's Department for International Development (2011). In this official review, the governmental organization stated that the work of UNESCO did very little to contribute to the UK's development objectives. In the arena of education, the review states that "UNESCO's significant under-performance in leadership means it is rarely critical in education and development" and the report is also critical of the work the organization has done in promoting girls' education. The final report also stated that administration costs of UNESCO remained high and that insufficient attention is being paid to transaction costs. This report tends to mirror much of the same criticism found in U.S.-focused conversations.

## CONCLUSION AND POINTS TO CONSIDER

Dialogue is needed on UNESCO's mission, the extent to which it is able to carry out its mission, and the U.S. gains and losses from withdrawing its financial support from the organization. To that end, the aim of this brief is to provide a range of views from leading experts on the work of UNESCO in education and the implications of the U.S. withdrawal of funding from the organization. The following are key points for policymakers to consider:

***We should move beyond the Palestine debate and focus on UNESCO's work in education.***

In the debate over the U.S. funding withdrawal, the overarching focus on Palestine ultimately overshadows and detracts from important conversations about UNESCO's role in education and education policy worldwide. Therefore, there is a need to move beyond the Palestine debate and focus on UNESCO's work in education. The current situation provides an opportunity both within the U.S. and the broader global community to dialogue and debate the purpose of UNESCO, its work in global education policy, and the role of the U.S. within the organization. Ultimately, policymakers should instead focus on UNESCO's goals in education and determine whether and to what extent these goals are accomplished and are aligned with the goals of the individual countries, and who should best play a role in meeting these goals.

***We should focus on learning about UNESCO's education work in strategic contexts of interest to the U.S.***

In considering UNESCO's work in education, policymakers should consider the educational work led by UNESCO in particularly significant and strategic contexts, including Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, and Pakistan. These are undoubtedly important contexts to policymakers in the U.S., including in education.

***UNESCO's role in global and cultural diplomacy must not be overlooked.***

With a voting procedure of one member state, one vote, the intent is that no one single country is able to wield more power over others, despite the sliding financial scale of assessed dues to the organization. Although at times painfully slow to make decisions in education, UNESCO aims to provide an international environment for dialogue and debate over critical multilateral issues in education. Policymakers in the U.S. must consider carefully this broader role and what withdrawing funding from the organization may mean in terms of U.S. diplomatic relationships with other member states.

***Attention must be paid to UNESCO's budgetary and governance practices.***

Although the mission of UNESCO in education is significant, membership comes with real financial costs. The current situation provides an opportunity for important conversations to take place about the organization's budgetary and governance practices, and how best to meet the increasing demand for more and higher quality education around the world. U.S. policymakers should engage in discussions about how UNESCO might prioritize its work in education, and how it can serve to better meet its aims in education.

***Consideration is needed about the future of the Education for All mandate after 2015.***

The U.S. withdrawal of funding from UNESCO comes at a critical time for the organization and for education worldwide. As the leading UN agency accountable for education, UNESCO has extensive work to do. Its flagship initiative, Education for All, is due to expire in 2015. Policymakers must consider the future of this mandate and its progress to date, which has been uneven. Evaluation of UNESCO's mission and how it plans to carry out its mission is therefore necessary. As UNESCO will soon look forward to the next period in its work in education globally, this is a crucial time for discussions regarding educational needs around the world and who should play a leading role in championing change.

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