

Report

Subject: **35th Session of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris.**

As the head of Pakistan's Delegation, Education Minister represented Pakistan in the 35th Session of UNESCO General Conference in Paris, from 6-12 October, 2009.

A. Salient engagements:

Besides addressing the inaugural session of the 35th Session of UNESCO General Conference, Education Minister attended various Plenary Sessions, Round Table meetings and held sideline meetings with the UNESCO authorities as well as my counterparts from various countries.

The General Conference, which is UNESCO's highest decision-making body, brings together after every two years, representatives from all its Member States. It heralds the closure of one biennium and initiation of the next. The current session mainly focused on election of the new Director General of the UNESCO, office-bearers of its various bodies, lobbying and public relations activity among the Member States and their delegates, besides holding the various meetings.

Education Minister, along with members of delegation, joined the Inaugural Session of the UNESCO General Conference, which was addressed by its Temporary President (President of the 35th session), the Chairman of the Executive Board and the Director-General. The Conference established the Credentials and Nominations of Committees, examined and adopted its agenda, and considered the recommendations by the Executive

Board on the admission of observers from international non-governmental organizations.

In the afternoon session, Education Minister participated in the lobbying and election process, conducted for the office of the President and Six Vice Presidents of the UNESCO General Conference out of the 193 Member States, and the establishment of Commissions and Committees. Afterwards, the Chairman of the Board addressed the session, and the Director General UNESCO introduced and conducted the General Policy Debate. Education Minister also made the Pakistan Policy Statement during the said Policy debate.

Education Minister joined the one-day Plenary Ministerial Forum, on Thursday, 8th October, which was comprised of two meetings, in the morning and afternoon, respectively, to discuss the following themes:

- *First Meeting: Investing out of the crisis and attaining international development goals – through action in education, the sciences, culture and communication and information.*
- *Second Meeting: Shaping UNESCO for the next decade as an effective multilateral actor, including in pursuit of international goals and United Nations reform.*

On 9-10 October 2009, Education Minister attended the Ministerial-Level Round Table Meetings conducted by the Director-General, UNESCO, for Ministers of Education on the **theme “What Education for the Future?: Lessons from the major international education conferences”**. The said meetings were based on **Education Ministers’ statements in the previous General Conference Session held in 2007 and on the outcomes**

of the series of landmark global education conferences organized by UNESCO in 2008 - 09, namely:-

- *The 48th International Conference on Education on the theme “Inclusive Education: the way of the future (25-28 November 2008 in Geneva, Switzerland);*
- *World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development on the theme “Moving into the Second Half of the United Nations Decade” (31 March-2 April 2009 in Bonn, Germany);*
- *World Conference on Higher Education on the theme “The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Social Change and Development” (5-8 July 2009 in Paris, France); and*
- *The High-Level Group meeting on Education for All (EFA) (16-18 December 2008 in Oslo, Norway).*

The said Round Table meetings were structured around following three sub-themes:

- i. Knowledge, values, competencies and skills for today’s and tomorrow’s societies.*
- ii. Building education systems that are inclusive, equitable, of high quality and supportive of sustainable development;*
- iii. Promoting changes in policies and practices: the way forward.*

B. Pakistan honoured:

Though the Delegation of Pakistan was small as compared to many other countries, however, it played very proactive role in the proceedings of the UNESCO General Conference and its other bodies. Well before the start of the UNESCO General Conference, the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan had set its targets, which were successfully achieved.

The outstanding achievement was the election of Pakistan as one of the six Vice Presidents of the 35th session of the General Conference, out of 193 member countries of UNESCO and Education Minister assumed that honour.

Pakistan has also been elected as a Member of the Council of International Bureau of Education (**IBE**), the Inter-government Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (**IPDC**) and the Inter-governmental Council of the International Hydrology Programme (**IHP**).

C. Other engagements:

The current session of the UNESCO General Conference marked the election of the new Director General of UNESCO, in place of Mr. Koichiro Matsuura (from Japan), whose decade-long tenure (1999-2009) has now expired spreading over two terms. Education Minister held exclusive meetings, both with the out-going Director General, UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura as well as the Director General-designate. Education Minister conveyed appreciation and gratitude to the out-going Director General, on behalf of the Government of Pakistan for generous support of the UNESCO, during his tenure.

In the meeting with H.E Irina Bokova, Ambassador of Bulgaria and the Director General-designate of UNESCO, she especially mentioned about her visit to Pakistan, as a part of her election campaign during which she held fruitful meetings in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of

Education. We agreed to working in close collaboration between the UNESCO and Pakistan in the UNESCO priority areas of Education, Science, Culture, Environment, Information and Communication & Information Technology.

On the sidelines of the General Conference, I held meetings with some of my counterparts, who came to attend the UNESCO General Conference. These included the Education Ministers from Iran, Malaysia, India, Egypt, Thailand, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

In these meetings, we exchanged views on education policies of our respective countries. I briefed them about the current educational scenario in Pakistan, recently announced National Education Policy and priority areas in our education sector. While highlighting government's efforts in promotion of education and literacy in the country, I reiterated our commitment for E.F.A goals and the determination of the Government of Pakistan to raise the literacy rate upto 86% by 2015.

Availing the opportunity of these meetings, I also briefed them about the current law and order situation in Pakistan, our Government's commitment to eradicate terrorism and our successful military operation against the militants especially in Swat/Malakand. I also informed them that almost all IDPs have returned back to their homes. Now the Government of Pakistan has launched a massive program for renovation and restoration of damaged schools.

During these meeting, I also underscored the need for collaboration in education sector to the benefit of the peoples of our region. In response, the Ministers of Education from the said countries fully endorsed my proposals.

These meetings ended with a positive note for periodical mutual contacts and exchange of invitation for visit of each other's country.