

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO SOUTH AFRICANS¹

General

1. The effects of apartheid (and of racist domination before apartheid became State policy in 1948) have been so serious - not only in terms of disparities - that it will take a long time to overcome them. Substantial international assistance may be needed for many years.

The transitional period - toward an interim national government and then non-racial elections under a democratic constitution - will, let us hope, be brief, given the necessary international action.

While assistance inside South Africa should be provided immediately - and academic boycott formally ended - any plans for assistance will need to be formulated for period of several years.

Many other countries in the world have less resources than South Africa and pressing needs. Governments and public opinion will need to be persuaded that the international community has an obligation to give special consideration for South Africa.

2. The term "disadvantaged" is not identical with "Black", though most Blacks have been the victims of discrimination. The United Nations cannot think in racial terms in providing assistance.

The UNETPSA (United Nations Educational and Training Programme for Southern Africans) was not established for "disadvantaged" Southern Africans only, though it had to provide assistance mainly to Black students and exiles who were deprived of educational opportunities under apartheid. (It began providing a substantial number of scholarships for applicants from inside South Africa from the early 1970s though the scholarships were tenable only at non-racial institutions outside South Africa).

Moreover, apartheid is not merely a matter of disparities in incomes and opportunities. Even white students have been deprived of proper education because of segregation, censorship, distortion of textbooks and inculcation of prejudice. In a sense, all South Africans are "disadvantaged". While bridging of the gap is the main task, this aspect will also need to be kept in mind in order to promote the transition to a truly non-racial society.

3. Under apartheid, South Africa has had segregated white, African, Coloured and Indian educational institutions; the African institutions were even segregated by ethnic group.

Major changes have taken place in recent years, primarily as a result of the struggle of the

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faculties, students and communities. The Universities of the Western Cape and Durban-Westville, for instance, are rapidly being transformed into non-racial institutions. Their student enrolment is already more representative of the population of the country than the enrolment at the "open" white universities.

It is perhaps more appropriate to refer to institutions rapidly moving toward non-racialism than of "Black" institutions.

Priorities

UNETPSA is to be commended for reviewing its priorities in the light of changes in South Africa. It should not remain a scholarship agency, but should increasingly be undertaking programmes to assist restructuring of education and training in South Africa. It might consider assistance, if requested, for:

- (a) An emergency programme for in-service training in other countries in planning, public administration, management etc., not only in the field of education.

Such in-service training cannot be only in the developed countries in Europe and North America.

- (b) Revision of textbooks and other educational materials.

For instance, the history books are still white-oriented. They are oriented toward Europe, though the great majority of the population is of African or Asian origin. (Perhaps more than four million South Africans can trace their ancestry to Asia and relations with Asia precede the Dutch settlement in 1652.)

There is a reference in the General Assembly resolution to "development of learning material" but the urgent need for revision of textbooks deserves to be specifically indicated.

Perhaps the time has come to terminate all scholarships abroad at secondary level and to phase out scholarships for the first degree (except in certain professional and technical fields) so that resources will be released for other programmes.

Because of its limited resources and the urgent need to help students in exile to become self-supporting, UNETPSA gave priority to education toward the first degree, and granted only a limited number of scholarships for post-graduate training. At present, priority will need to be given to advanced and in-service training, to international exchanges and to "institution-building". Perhaps the terms of reference of UNETPSA should be revised.

Promotion and Co-ordination of Assistance

It may be difficult to conceive of "effective" co-ordination when many governments are providing bilateral assistance (in consideration of their national interests) and numerous agencies are undertaking assistance. The UNETPSA and its Advisory Committee will need to consider whether they have the capacity to "co-ordinate" and whether the donors wish their assistance to

be "co-ordinated".

But there is a need for a clearinghouse for information on assistance, and a forum for consultations. The UNETPSA and its Advisory Committee - in co-operation with UNESCO and UNDP - are perhaps ideally suited to undertake this task.

To ensure effective action on the recommendations of this Conference, the United Nations will need to give serious attention to follow-up. The Advisory Committee on UNETPSA and the Special Committee against Apartheid should actively promote international assistance.

The Special Committee against Apartheid has played a crucial role over the years in promoting various forms of assistance to South Africans through diverse channels. It should be persuaded to continue its contribution, especially since the purposes are both political and educational.