

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

UNESCO AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST VARIOUS FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

The article of which we now give several extracts¹ is on action in which the Red Cross is also engaged, since one of its fundamental principles, that of impartiality, calls upon it to act "without any distinction of nationality, race, religion, social condition or political adherence".

The United Nations General Assembly has designated the year 1968 as International Year for Human Rights, and has invited Unesco "to mobilize the finest resources of culture and art " in order to lend it " a truly universal character ". It is fitting that during 1968 the Organization, one of whose fundamental aims is to assure respect for these rights, should intensify its efforts and activities in the area of human rights. Among the events which will be organized by Unesco as part of celebrations of the International Years are a Symposium on Human Rights and the Identification of Universal Human Values, and a meeting of experts on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the right to culture. In addition, the Organization is at present making a comparative study of texts relating to human rights in the different religions, ideologies, traditions and cultures with a view to establishing whether there is a universal concept of human rights and of the basic idea of such rights. An anthology of these texts will appear in December 1968. Lastly, the Organization is concerned in a more general way with many problems related to human rights and their application within its various programmes and activities.

¹ UNESCO Chronicle, Paris, 1968, No. 3.

Unesco's purpose, according to its Constitution, is to "contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion by the Charter of the United Nations."

Thus, in addition to working for the realization of those rights which are its specific concern, Unesco has the task of promoting human rights generally. Furthermore, even those Unesco activities which are not aimed specifically at one or another aspect of human rights still serve to create the material, intellectual, moral and cultural conditions necessary to make human rights a living reality for all human beings. What follows is directly related to action against various forms of discrimination:

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration emphasizes that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms of the Declaration "without distinction of any kind". This specifically condemns any kind of discrimination, in any country, against ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural or any other minority groups.

Unesco has campaigned against discrimination first of all in the field of education, and its Convention against Discrimination in Education has now been ratified by 39 States. It has also encouraged research on the status of women in various countries, and in 1966 it began a long-term programme to secure full equality for women in education, science and culture.

In addition, last September Unesco organized an expert committee consisting of 18 members—geneticists, anthropologists, ethnologists, sociologists, historians and jurists—from 16 countries. This committee prepared the text of a "Statement on race and racial prejudice", the latest in a series of statements on this theme, beginning with the first, issued in 1950, followed by a declaration on the nature of race and differences of race, drawn up in 1951, which was revised in 1964 to take into consideration the most recent developments in human biology and genetics.

At the same time, the race question has been the subject of a number of studies published by the Organization in several langu-

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ages. These include the series on "The Race Question in Modern Science", and two further collections entitled "Race and Society" and "The Race Question and Modern Thought".

The unanimous adoption by the United Nations General Assembly, on 16 December 1966, of the Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights presents a new challenge and a new opportunity for Unesco as well as for the rest of the United Nations Specialized Agencies. The principal task now is to secure ratification of these covenants by all States and their implementation through national legislation. To this goal Unesco is firmly committed. Will it ever be achieved? Realism compels us to admit that it will probably take a long time. But as Unesco's Director-General, René Maheu, has observed: "Those who seek justice do not confuse realism with pessimism. And even if they begin with pessimism, they end up with courage".
