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PROCLAMATION OF 2016 AS INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING (YGU)

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 192nd session of the Executive Board at the request of Djibouti on behalf of the Member States of the Africa Group.

The corresponding explanatory note together with a draft decision is attached hereto.

Action expected of the Executive Board: decision proposed in paragraph 18.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

I. Introduction

1. Thinking globally and acting locally presupposes global understanding. To reach global sustainability and to advance good governance and transparency we need to bridge the gap in awareness between local actions and global effects. Herein lies the ultimate significance of a program for the promotion of global understanding.
2. Humankind is now confronted with unprecedented situations: the world's climate, ecosystems, and biodiversity, economic order, and socio-cultural well-being are at stake. Those already most vulnerable will bear the brunt of the impacts making it increasingly difficult to meet the Millennium Development Goals.
3. Global environmental change research has produced unambiguous scientific insights into earth system processes that are rarely translated into effective policies. We need to deepen our knowledge of socio-cultural contexts and to improve social and cultural acceptance of scientific knowledge and to reach culturally differentiated paths to global sustainability.
4. Genuine transdisciplinary research is now a first-order necessity. In order to achieve this, we need to overcome the established divide between the natural and social sciences. Natural and social scientific knowledge have to be integrated with non-scientific and non-Western forms of knowledge to develop a global competence framework.
5. It is imperative that the gap between global problems and national, regional, and local behavior and decision-making be bridged. Effective solutions based on bottom-up decisions and actions need to complement the top-down measures.

II. Rationale and objectives of an International Year of Global Understanding (IYGU)

6. The International Year of Global Understanding will:
 - establish a comprehensive global understanding and awareness of the natural and cultural embeddedness of all human action.
 - contribute to changing ecologically harmful habits by designing culturally differentiated, exemplary alternative models of core everyday (best) practices.
 - enhance awareness of the individual capacity and responsibility for everyday decision-making.
 - mobilize social and natural scientists, as well as scholars in the humanities, to engage in transdisciplinary sustainability research.
 - produce school teaching modules and study guidelines to be implemented at all educational levels – from primary to tertiary and post-experience education.
 - serve as a catalyst for transdisciplinary cooperation and improve the culturally differentiated transfer of scientific insights to social practice.
7. Recognizing that societies and cultures determine the ways we live with and shape our natural environment, the International Year of Global Understanding addresses the ways we live in an increasingly globalized world and the transformation of nature from the perspective of global sustainability – the objective it wishes to achieve for the sake of future generations.

8. The International Year of Global Understanding focuses on habitual day-to-day practices that will show the two-fold global embeddedness of local biophysical and the socio-cultural living conditions. Bridging these two main realms of everyday practices is of primary urgency.

9. The International Year of Global Understanding aims to yield deep, but practical, insights into the ways all peoples can live together more sustainably. The focus will be on developing strategies for targeted local projects with a global reach.

10. The IYGU objectives involve three core elements: namely, research, education and information. Research will bring together social and natural scientists to gain an understanding of the global impacts of everyday local activities of everyday local activities' global impacts. Teaching will use these research results at all levels in classrooms throughout the world. Information will be provided in cooperation with strong partners from the private sector to increase public awareness using, for example, print media, computer games, social networks, internet platforms (www.global-understanding.info) and television programmes.

III. Coordination of the International Year of Global Understanding

11. This initiative is led by the International Geographical Union (IGU). The IGU has a truly global reach with 57 full national members and 40 associate national members with observer status. At its General Assembly in August 2012 in Cologne the presidents of the national committees and the IGU Executive Committee approved unanimously the IYGU initiative for 2016 to be the United Nations International Year of Global Understanding. This initiative has the full support by the International Council for Science (ICSU), the International Social Science Council (ISSC), the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (CIPSH), the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP), and is expected to become part of the Future Earth initiative, co-sponsored by ICSU, ISSC, UNESCO, UNEP, UNU and the Belmont Forum.

12. The objectives of the International Year of Global Understanding (IYGU) will complement the Future Earth initiative through the mobilization of the social and natural sciences, as well as the humanities, to engage in sustainability research. It will enhance the opportunities for both citizens and decision-makers to benefit from and relate to new findings and orientations. In addition, the IYGU will (a) advance science and technology for sustainable development; (b) promote UNESCO's priority for Africa; and (c) contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

13. The IGU and supporters of the IYGU will cooperate with the UNESCO to highlight the role of cultural, social and natural sciences to reach global sustainability in culturally differentiated ways to address the needs of society and to support new geographical imaginations for new geographical realities in the digital age. The IGU will serve in a coordination and communication role for the IYGU activities. These activities will be planned by national geographical societies, ministries of education, science and technology; educational institutions; and non-governmental as well as governmental organizations. All these activities will be coordinated by regional action centres and the global secretariat in Jena (Germany).

14. The IYGU can draw from and will be fully in line with UNESCO's climate change education programmes as well as UNESCO's efforts in regard to education for sustainable development; i.e., enabling people to foresee, face up to, and solve the problems that threaten our future. The IYGU will demonstrate to a wide range of world citizens – as global citizens with global responsibilities – that most everyday activities are rooted in a dual global natural and socio-cultural embeddedness that links the local and the global scale.

15. UNESCO has played a crucial role in the designation and the celebration of the International Year of Planet Earth, the International Year of Astronomy, and the International Year of Chemistry. Through its Executive Board and General Conference, UNESCO will be an important champion to

obtain approval from the United Nations for the proclamation of the International Year of Global Understanding.

IV. Conclusion

16. International Years may only be proclaimed by the United Nations during their annual General Assembly meetings, and only at the request of one (or more) of the United Nations Member States. Rwanda is taking the lead role in bringing this request forward, on the understanding that a significant number of other United Nations Member States will support this initiative.

17. An International Year of Global Understanding will support and raise the profile of UNESCO in giving global leadership towards building capacity in science and technology for sustainable development.

Proposed decision

18. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recognizing that global sustainability is grounded in a global understanding of our everyday activities,
2. Stressing that geographical education for global understanding is critical for addressing challenges such as global climate and social change, for providing sustainable sources of clean water, food and energy, and for maintaining an intact environment for the well-being of all people,
3. Considering that global understanding contributes to reducing the potential for regional conflicts helping to advance peace at the local, national and global scales,
4. Being aware that the year 2016 provides the opportunity to highlight the need for international and transdisciplinary scientific collaboration to reach global sustainability,
5. Having examined document 192 EX/39,
6. Welcomes the unanimous approval of the International Geographical Union (IGU), at its 2012 International Congress and General Assembly, together with the support of the Executive Boards of ICSU, ISSC and CIPSH to declare 2016 the International Year of Global Understanding and to play a lead role in coordinating and promoting geography-related activities at the national and regional levels around the world;
7. Invites the Director-General to support all efforts leading the United Nations General Assembly to declare 2016 the International Year of Global Understanding;
8. Recommends that the General Conference at its 37th session adopt a resolution on this subject.