



The Holy See

*Message of His Holiness Paul VI to Mr. Rene Maheu, Director General
of UNESCO for the World Congress of Ministers of Education**

26 August 1965

We greatly appreciate your courteous letter inviting the Holy See to participate in the World Congress of Ministers of Education for the eradication of illiteracy, which, according to the resolution of the General Conference of UNESCO, is to be held at Teheran in the near future. In choosing to represent us at this Congress a delegation headed by Monsignor Giovanni Benelli, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to UNESCO, we wish to manifest the importance in which we hold this Congress, and express our ardent hope that it may mark a decisive step forward in the fight against one of the great plagues of our times. We assure you that the Catholic Church, while accomplishing her religious mission, will not cease to work to raise the cultural and social standards of all men to whom she presents her message without distinction of race, class or origin.

Even if, in the past, peoples have been able to attain a true culture without the aid of writing, and if to-day the means of audio-visual communication offer in this domain vast possibilities, who can deny the irreplaceable contribution offered by literacy? Literacy is an incomparable source of progress both for the individual and for society. For man, it is a means of the utmost importance to social integration, personal enrichment, professional achievement, and lasting education. Literacy is, at the same time, a privileged instrument of economic progress and development for society. It is also worthy of note that, without literacy, man cannot tap the vast treasures of Oriental and Western literatures, and every one knows the special place the Bible holds among these. Man will not be able to come to that ability of judgement and that mastery of thought reflection, which renders him truly free, capable of assuming his destiny and playing his role in social life in a completely lucid and deliberate manner.

For the full attainment of its goals, literacy must not be an isolated process, a purely technical objective, but ought to be integrated within an overall movement for the development of the

individual. This ideal has inspired the action of the Church down through the centuries, and has succeeded – not without effort or sacrifice – in furthering reading and writing at the same time as announcing the Gospel of Christ. It is also with joy that to-day the Church co-operates with national and international organizations, and in a special way with UNESCO, in bringing to the illiterate masses of the world the possibilities of a human and social blossoming now beyond them. It is a question of the full development of man and humanity which opens to all the way of truth; the truth of science - a major factor of cultural, technical and economic progress - as well as moral and spiritual truth, which alone is capable of fulfilling man's highest aspirations.

The Congress of Teheran will provoke, without a doubt – and this is our ardent wish – by its work and its repercussions on international public opinion, a stimulus to the awareness of this grave problem, and will give rise to a common desire to solve it with appropriate measures. It is to the honour of UNESCO to have convened this Congress, and all peoples will ever be grateful to His Imperial Majesty the Shahinshah Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, Emperor of Iran, for having been its promoter, and for having enabled it to be realized.

It is from our heart that we send our best wishes to you, Mr. Director-General of UNESCO, to the President of the Congress, to the noble nation that hosts it, to the highly qualified delegations that compose it, and we wish an abundance of celestial blessings on these efforts made for the eradication of illiteracy.

**Paths to Peace* p.130-131.