



The Holy See

*Letter of His Holiness Paul VI to Mr. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of 9th International Literacy Day**

In this tenth year after the Teheran Conference which marked the starting point of world action to eliminate illiteracy, we wish specially to stress the major part which has already been played by UNESCO in this field for many years now, not only in making world opinion aware of the seriousness of this problem but also in drawing up and implementing appropriate programmes effectively catering to the needs of mankind and of development.

We reaffirm the support which the Holy See intends to continue to give to these efforts. Indeed the educational action of the Church is aimed, through literacy work, at the moulding of the individual as a whole and at his human and social advancement, seeking thus to integrate individual men and women, deliberately and in a responsible manner, into the society to which they belong. In this way they will be able to enjoy their right to participate in the culture of their people, and will also become aware of their own mission in society.

Those in position of responsibility in the Catholic world, in collaboration also with their brothers of other religions or those who share other convictions, have already made a valuable contribution to the success of this noble campaign, through a great number of undertakings as varied as they are original. In connection with this, the ninth International Literacy Day, they will not fail to redouble their efforts, with renewed dedication, to secure the recognition of literacy as a basic precondition for all genuine human development and all economic and social progress. May we also be allowed to insist on one aspect of these efforts, which is perhaps a special one but is of growing importance, namely literacy programmes for migrant workers.

Large numbers of workers are being forced, for economic reasons, to leave their countries for long periods of time. Urgent measures are required to enable them in the first place to participate fully in the culture of their own home country, and then to integrate with social and professional activities in the host country. A genuine literacy campaign will frequently be necessary to achieve

both of these aims, since otherwise migrant workers are likely to find themselves helpless and at the mercy of all kinds of exploitation. We know how many generous spirits have already set to work in this field, but much still remains to be done.

It is true that it is for nations themselves to define and promote literacy through appropriate policies. It is with great satisfaction that we note the development along these lines of manifold activities which can serve as an example and a model. The problem is however a vast one, and necessitates the collaboration of all, going beyond cultural and territorial boundaries. A sense of international community calls for the provision of useful aid of all kinds, particularly to the least favoured countries, whether by directly supporting the implementation of clearly defined programmes or by sharing with them the fruits of experience, thus enabling them to improve their methods or make an accurate assessment of the results achieved. We know and we appreciate the persevering action conducted on these lines by UNESCO, and it is for this reason that we shall follow with special interest the implementation of the projects and programmes drawn up for the next few years with a view to finding an over-all solution to the serious problem of literacy work throughout the world.

In connection with the celebration of this International Literacy Day we reiterate to you our good wishes for this noble task, which so appropriately finds its place in UNESCO's specific mission and which, transcending many grievous divisions, manifests mankind's common desire to achieve more genuine fulfillment for individual men and women.

The Vatican, 29 August 1975.

PAULUS PP. VI

*ORa n.39 p.2.

Paths to Peace p.132-133.