

# **A Brief Review of the New Zealand National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in the Global UNESCO Context**

**by Dr Edna Tait, 2012**

The history of the NZ National Commission is a story of people, contributions and benefits. In 1946 New Zealand was the second country to join UNESCO and the National Commission, as required by Article VII of the Constitution, was established to be an advisory and liaison body, linking the work of UNESCO with the interests of New Zealand.

From the beginning New Zealanders have been influential in the direction and achievements of UNESCO. Dr Clarence Beeby represented New Zealand in different ways between 1946 and 1962, some of this time as an Executive Board member. His contributions included establishing UNESCO as a clearing house of knowledge and good practices and setting the goal of education for all. Mr Fred Turnovsky followed as the key New Zealand representative between 1966 and 1986. He also served a term on the Executive Board and was influential in reforming personnel and evaluation policies and establishing the present focus on transparent administration. Hon. Russell Marshall was the third Executive Board member and during his term greatly strengthened the focus on the Pacific and the movements for reform of the central bureaucracy.

Other people have represented New Zealand as Chairs of prestigious UNESCO bodies such as the World Heritage Committee, the International Press Telecommunications Council and the National Commissions Standing Committee. New Zealanders have also been selected, over the sixty five years of its existence, to provide training in all fields of UNESCO's support for Member States. Some New Zealanders have been employed as staff members. All of these appointments reflect the high international regard for New Zealand's contributions to UNESCO's ethical and intellectual visions and its mandate for development in the fields of education, the sciences, culture and communication.

The New Zealand National Commission is credited with the growth of Pacific membership, the establishment of a Pacific field office and increasing UNESCO support for Pacific development programmes. Over the many years of its membership New Zealand's contributions have helped to shaped policies, support programmes and assist with development in many countries. Currently New Zealand's contributions include international leadership with home language provision, participation in the Asia-Pacific Education, Innovation and Development Programme (APEID), youth projects and training of staff in other National Commissions. The New Zealand National Commission is recognised in the global UNESCO context as one of quality and strength, with positive and relevant contributions to make at all levels of UNESCO's work.

The work of the New Zealand National Commission has resulted in a number of benefits to New Zealand. The Participation Programme has brought in many thousands of US dollars for New Zealand-led national and international projects. The National

Commission has also brought many people to New Zealand for conferences and working projects and thus attracted further financial contributions to this country. Some recent examples of New Zealand-based global meetings include the international congress in 2000 for the Associated Schools Network, the World Heritage Committee meeting in 2005 and the Looking Beyond Disaster gathering in Christchurch in 2011. New Zealand's World Heritage listings, the UNESCO Chair in Inter-Religious Understanding at Victoria University and New Zealand UNESCO-l'Oréal prize winners are additional although different kinds of benefits. Further, the many New Zealand participants in external international meetings have gained invaluable experience and knowledge in the various fields of UNESCO's mandate.

In general, the work of the New Zealand National Commission has met its liaison and advisory responsibilities in the UNESCO context. It has been a conduit of New Zealand's policies and best practices to the global UNESCO context and a conduit from UNESCO of important funding, awards and programmes. The National Commission has an exemplary membership history, has rightly earned its status as an efficient, effective and reliable National Commission and, as a result, has brought much credit to New Zealand.