

**Margaret Gillett**

# **The Tbilisi Declaration**



Educational environment was the topic, discussed from a multitude of angles, at the Unesco Intergovernmental Conference held at Tbilisi, Georgia, USSR, in October 1977.

On several counts, this was an unusually significant gathering. To begin with, it was an historical event in that it was the first major conference sponsored by the United Nations or any of its agencies ever to be held in the USSR. It was a high level event or, in the jargon of international bureaucracy, a Category II meeting, that is, one at which the chief participants represent their governments and which generally leads to the adoption of a report and recommendations.

It was also a large event. The great chamber of the Georgia Supreme Soviet, where the meetings were held, was filled each day for two weeks with some 350 delegates from sixty-five states, a dozen international organizations, and about thirty non-governmental organizations. Canada's eight-man delegation, headed by our Permanent Delegate to Unesco, included P.E.I.'s Minister of the Environment, the Manager of Human Settlement Programs from the Canadian International Development Agency, two professors of Environmental Studies, an Assistant Deputy Minister from the Ontario Ministry of Education, an Executive Director of Development from the Saskatchewan Department of Education, and an embassy official.

As the composition of the Canadian delegation might suggest, this was also an interdisciplinary event. While there were some professors of education, such as this observer, there were also architects, engineers, economists, politicians, communications experts, geographers, demographers, lawyers, and officials from a variety of government departments and organizations. With such participants, it could be expected that the conference would call

for multidisciplinary and integrated approaches to the problems of environmental education (E.E.), whether the focus was on sensitivity raising or on plans for positive action. The final report will reflect this orientation and its essence is captured in the Declaration which was adopted by the plenary session on the last day of the conference.

Finally, it was, to some extent, an encouraging event. Delegation after delegation reported on the recent development of E.E. curricula in their countries and the establishment of environmental units in government and/or research organizations. Of course, there may well be some discrepancy between what is so glowingly reported at an international conference and what actually goes on at home, but there does seem to be a growing international awareness of the absolute need for E.E. There may also be a danger that E.E. will become a new kind of "motherhood" issue which will both attract the unrealistic zealot and repel the tired cynic. Nevertheless, the Tbilisi Declaration does represent a real and legitimate hope for humanity.

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### **The Tbilisi Declaration**

The Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education, organized by Unesco in co-operation with UNEP, convened in the City of Tbilisi reflecting the harmony and consensus achieved there, solemnly adopts the following Declaration.

In the last few decades, man has, through his power to transform his environment, wrought accelerated changes in the balance of nature. The result is frequent exposure of living species to dangers which may prove irreversible.

The Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Human Environment organized in Stockholm in 1972 proclaimed: "to defend and improve the environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal for mankind." This undertaking urgently calls for new strategies, incorporated into development, which particularly in the developing countries is a prerequisite for any such improvement. Solidarity and equity in the relations between nations should constitute the basis of a new international order, and bring together, as soon as possible, all available resources. Education utilizing the findings of science and technology should play a leading role in creating an awareness and a better understanding of environmental problems. It must foster positive patterns of conduct towards the environment and the nations' use of their resources.

Environmental education should be provided for all ages, at all levels and in both formal and non-formal education. The mass media have a great responsibility to make their immense resources

available for this educational mission. Environmental specialists, as well as those whose actions and decisions can have a marked effect on the environment, should be provided in the course of their training with the necessary knowledge and skills and be given a full sense of their responsibilities in this respect.

Environmental education, properly understood, should constitute a comprehensive lifelong education, one responsive to changes in a rapidly changing world. It should prepare the individual for life through an understanding of the major problems of the contemporary world, and the provision of skills and attributes needed to play a productive role towards improving life and protecting the environment with due regard given to ethical values. By adopting a holistic approach, rooted in a broad interdisciplinary base, it recreates an overall perspective which acknowledges the fact that natural environment and man-made environment are profoundly interdependent. It helps reveal the enduring continuity which links the acts of today to the consequences for tomorrow. It demonstrates the interdependencies among national communities and the need for solidarity among all mankind.

Environmental education must look outward to the community. It should involve the individual in an active problem-solving process within the context of specific realities, and it should encourage initiative, a sense of responsibility, and commitment to build a better tomorrow. By its very nature, environmental education can make a powerful contribution to the renovation of the educational process.

In order to achieve these goals, environment education requires a number of specific actions to fill the gaps that, despite outstanding endeavours, continue to exist in our present education systems.

Accordingly, the Tbilisi Conference:

*Appeals* to Member States to include in their educational policies measures designed to introduce environmental concerns, activities and contents into their education systems, on the basis of the above objectives and characteristics;

*Invites* educational authorities to promote and intensify thinking, research and innovation in regard to environmental education; and

*Urges* Member States to collaborate in this field, in particular by exchanging experiences, research findings, documentation and materials and by making their training facilities widely available to teachers and specialists from other countries;

*Appeals*, lastly, to the international community to give generously of its aid in order to strengthen this collaboration in a field which symbolizes the need for solidarity of all peoples and may be regarded as particularly conducive to the promotion of international understanding and to the cause of peace.

26th October 1977