

UNITED STATES DELEGATION  
TO THE  
SECOND MEETING OF INTER-AMERICAN CULTURAL COUNCIL

Lima, Peru, May 1956

POSITION PAPER

Subject: Situation in America as to Illiteracy.

PROBLEM: Study No. 17 is offered by the Committee for cultural action (CCA) as a "preliminary working document without prejudice to subsequent studies that should continue to be made by the Committee and by the Pan American Union."

The main questions to be decided actually are (a) whether or not studies called for by Resolution XXVIII of the First Meeting should be continued by the Committee, and (b) what alternative arrangements and resources are possible and available to provide information and stimulation helpful to the Member States vitally concerned with the problems involved.

U.S. POSITION: It is suggested that the U.S. Delegation should:

1. Take the stand that Document CAC-E-17 does not carry out the assignment of the First Meeting of the Inter-American Cultural Council (Resolutio. XXVIII) either as to method of preparation or as to scope and therefore should not be accepted.
2. Support a clear cut assignment to the Pan American Union, in close collaboration with the Inter-American Statistical Institute (IASI) and UNESCO, of full and continuing responsibility for research and periodic reporting on the developing situation in America as to illiteracy and practice in elementary and fundamental education.
3. If a majority of delegates favor adoption of the three Committee Recommendations, the U.S. delegation should:
  - a. Propose modification of CCA Recommendation No. 1 so that the illiteracy census will be included in the regular population census, as follows:

"For the purpose of obtaining an exact knowledge of the problem of illiteracy, its extent, and the areas in which it exists, it is suggested to the governments of the American countries that have not as yet carried out an official illiteracy census, that it is desirable for them to do so as soon as possible in their regular population census."

- b. Support CCA Recommendation No. 2 to emphasize studies of illiteracy and the results of campaigns, modified as follows:

"With the purpose of ensuring due inter-American coordination and concerted action in the common task of eradicating illiteracy, it is recommended that the governments keep the Division of Education of the Pan American Union informed of the results of significant studies of illiteracy and their experiences with literacy and adult

education campaigns so that the aforesaid Division can report thereon to the other governments."

c. Approve CCA Recommendation No. 3 as follows:

"That the States endeavor in their literacy campaigns to encourage and utilize the aid of private enterprises (businesses, unions, churches, societies, clubs), inasmuch as the eradication of illiteracy is a problem that affects, and is of concern to, society in general."

4. If any discussion develops on the content of statistical tables, the U.S. delegation should participate, guided by the comments under Discussion which give suggestions for improving the presentation of the statistics.

DISCUSSION:

1. The report, in its present form is of limited usefulness. To be an effective document and fulfill its purpose, a report on the "situation in America as to illiteracy" could well include, in addition to material on the statistical aspects of the problem, an analysis of the causes of illiteracy in America, and information regarding the programs to reduce illiteracy in the various countries, the techniques used, and the results obtained.
2. The Resolution (XXVIII, 7) of the Inter-American Cultural Council recommended that the "Pan American Union, in collaboration with the Committee for Cultural Action, present to the Member States, the Council of the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Cultural Council" the annual report under consideration. This would seem to assign to the Pan American Union primary responsibility for the production of such a report. However, the introduction to the study appears to be a partial modification of a secretariat document prepared in the Union, plus three recommendations by the Committee itself. The "country reports" annexed to the Spanish version of the study are actually the raw data as submitted by each government in response to a questionnaire sent out by the Pan American Union through the Inter-American Statistical Institute; comments on the usefulness of these tables appear in paragraph 4 below.

The Education Division of the Pan American Union has already demonstrated strong interest in this field, and has close working relations with IASI. It has prepared documentation and displays for use at the Lima meetings including illiteracy data (Doc. 3, Ministers of Education) understood to be presented in a more satisfactory manner than is the annex to CCA study No. 17. While it is obvious that much improvement is needed in the work of the Union on this subject, the Delegation should take the stand that informational reports of the character contemplated are more appropriate for assignment to the Union than to the Committee.

3. Comments on Recommendation No. 3 are as follows:
  - a. CAC Recommendation No. 1 seems pointless inasmuch as only two countries have not taken a recent census of population (Peru and ~~Uruguay~~ Uruguay), both of which are now preparing to do so. An examination of their proposed questionnaires indicates that the subject of illiteracy and/or educational level will be included.

Plans for the 1960 Census of America are already well under way, sponsored by the Inter-American Statistical Institute (IASI). The international committee in charge of developing and promoting this program has already had 2 sessions: Rio de Janeiro, June, 1955, and Washington, January, 1956.

It is very important that countries not be urged to take national illiteracy censuses as such because this could tend to detract from the general population census which in addition to educational data, can secure many other significant social and economic facts. If a nation-wide or other large scale illiteracy survey is made, the IASI will undoubtedly know about it.

It is of greater importance for international bodies to urge the detailed study of data available from census and other sources, and the presentation of the facts through maps, charts, and other forms of graphic presentation.

- b. In view of the above, CAC Recommendation 2 could be re-phrased to emphasize studies of illiteracy and the result of campaigns as proposed in Recommendation 3-b.
  - c. CAC Recommendation No. 3 simply underlines the importance of utilizing all available resources outside the government in the eradication of illiteracy.
4. On the adequacy of the statistical data and reports (in Spanish version only):
- a. Questionnaires for any future surveys gathering statistics on illiteracy should be more adequately conceived in order that the resulting figures may be more comparable and meaningful. Full recognition should be given to the work which is being done by other organizations toward standardizing terminology and definitions of illiteracy.
  - b. The original Spanish version of the Report on the Situation in America as to Illiteracy consists of three parts: (a) Introductory text (6 pp.); (b) 15 Country reports (76 pp.); and (c) 4 Statistical tables (6 pp.). The country reports, submitted in answer to a questionnaire, are largely statistical. The questionnaire and its instructions, usually reproduced as an appendix to such a report, are not included.
  - c. The text does not attempt to summarize or analyze the details of either the country reports or the statistical tables or to explain obvious cases of inconsistent data. No explanation is given (a) for the use of different years of reference for the same items appearing in both the country reports and the tables--e.g., Brazil report gives 1940 census data on p. 1, but tables on pp. 79-83 give 1950 census data; or (b) for the publication of different census totals for the same year--e.g., Dominican Republic data from 1950 census on p. 67 (country report) and p. 82 (table 3). (Probably some data are preliminary, some final results.) Such inconsistencies are confusing, if not misleading, when found in a single report.

- d. The 4 tables at the end of the report were originally compiled in the summer of 1954 and were published in August 1954. Since then, many of the countries have published additional census data which should be included in a report of this type. The latest release by the Inter-American Statistical Institute on this subject was issued January 17, 1956. It is probable that much additional census data could be secured from the countries through the Institute.
- e. 18 of the 20 Latin American countries took censuses of population between 1947 and 1953. All of these included inquiries on illiteracy; all 18 also included data on the educational level of the population; and 12 collected data on school attendance. It is probable that special studies are now in process in various countries analyzing these data. Such studies should be listed and brought to the attention of the Council.
- f. The present report presents data only by sex and by urban or rural residence. For most countries detailed data are also available by age in combination with these classifications. The absence of an age analysis greatly reduces the usefulness of this report. It is much more significant to have high illiteracy among young adults (e.g., ages 15 to 24 years) than among the aged (65 years and over). A summary table for selected countries giving illiteracy by sex and broad age groups would not be difficult to compile.