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After UNESCO, Washington Set To Abandon IFAD

by Ian Steele

NEW YORK—Less than one month after announcing its intention to withdraw from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United States is considering the abandonment of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

IFAD, which aids small farmers in the world's poorest countries, is one of the more tangible results of the World Food Conference in Rome a decade ago. It has committed about US\$1.8 billion to more than 130 projects for the rural poor in 77 countries since the late 70s.

But it is facing a shortage of funds for new projects this year and news of a possible US retrenchment comes on the eve of a pledging conference scheduled for Feb. 29 in Rome.

Leading officials in the US Treasury Department and the Office of Management and Budget opposed a renewed US commitment to IFAD. They claim that the agency duplicates the work of other organisations like the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme.

But there is at least one influential American voice in IFAD's favour. Agriculture Secretary John Block maintains that IFAD complements the work of the other agencies. He has mustered sufficient support for the organisation to force the involvement of President Reagan as an arbitrator of the dispute between his departments.

Leading US officials oppose a renewed commitment to IFAD, claiming that it duplicates the work of other agencies. The agency is facing an acute fund shortage and possible withdrawal of US support is admittedly a big blow to its existence.

The US had committed to provide IFAD with US\$180 million for the period 1981-83 but still owed US\$90 million on Dec. 31, joining a series of debtors to the organisation.

Total pledges by the body's 12 OPEC and 20 Industrial nations came to US \$1.05 billion with more than US \$100 million in arrears. OPEC stands for the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Saudi Arabia owes US \$51 million, Libya, US \$31 million; Nigeria, US \$26 million; and Iran, US \$19 million. The State Department denies that the US is pulling the plug on United Nations funding but it does admit to a policy of questioning future commitments to a number of other bodies as well.

US State Assistant Secretary for International Organisation Affairs Geoffrey Newell recently said that the administration had problems with a number of UN agencies in addition to UNESCO. He cited reasons having to do with their political, financial and management policies and named a few which might be vulnerable to the

same American response.

They are the International Labour Organisation, United Nations Environment Programme, Food and Agriculture Organisation, International Atomic Energy Agency and the International Telecommunications Union.

The US dispute with UNESCO at the possible expense of 25 per cent of its operating budget is indicative of a highly sensitive Reagan administration to any activity which might be at variance with Western power objectives and which cannot easily be ignored.

Owen Harries, former Australian Ambassador to UNESCO and now a fellow of the rabidly anti-UN Heritage Foundation, probably summed up that thinking in the New York Times of Dec. 21 when he said:

"UNESCO is a thoroughly politicised institution dedicated to attacking fundamental Western values, interests and institutions. It attacks and seeks to circumscribe the free Western press. It characterises Western culture as an 'imperialist' threat to the identity of

other peoples.

"It attacks the free-market economy and multinational corporations. It seeks to downgrade individual human rights in favour of nebulous and proliferating 'rights of peoples' thus helping tyrannical states to impose their orthodoxies on their subjects.

"It pronouncements on the complex and delicate issues of peace and disarmament—subjects on which it is incompetent—are biased and hostile to the Western case. It is hostile to Israel and provides political and financial support to the Palestine Liberation Organisation."

Mr Harries maintains that it is not only the Third World majority which is hostile to the West in UNESCO but the organisation's Director-General Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, as well. He describes Dr. M'Bow as "thoroughly politicised and anti-American". He also claims that when France expelled 49 Soviet spies in 1983, one-quarter of them were associated with UNESCO, and that the organisation is "appallingly managed and administered".

Reasonable or not, the tone of this and other attacks on UNESCO and other agencies of the UN system have bitten hard in Washington. And the financial writing is on the wall for those who care to take notice or not. The US has given UNESCO until the close of the year to "change its ways" or face the budgetary axe.