

One Billion Illiterates By The End Of The Century

IN the last ten years the number of illiterates in the world rose by 456,000,000, an increase of 30 per cent, said the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, at a ceremony at UNESCO's headquarters to mark the 15th International Literacy Day on 8 September 1981. During these 10 years the world illiteracy rate had been reduced from 34.4 per cent to 28.9 per cent and would be near to 26 per cent in 1990, he said speaking before members of UNESCO's Executive Board, members of the jury and winners of the 1981 international prizes for literacy and delegates from the UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, taking place at UNESCO headquarters.

While the percentage of illiterates fell, their absolute number rose: from 742,000,000 in 1970 to 800,000,000 today. If current tendencies were maintained there would be more than one billion illiterates by the end of the century, warned Mr. M'Bow. Illiteracy rates ran at 60.6 per cent in Africa, 34.3 per cent in Asia and 20.3 per cent in Latin America, said the Director-General, pointing out that the categories most affected were rural populations and those living around cities, migrant workers, refugees, handicapped persons and women.

A double challenge was posed to human consciences, constituting an intolerable denial of the most elementary of human rights which led to a worsening of inequalities among nations and within them. The Director-General said that literacy appeared more and more as the essential precondition for all development and as a decisive factor for the liberation of men.

Huge efforts were being made on the national, regional and international levels, he said laying stress on UNESCO major projects in Latin America and the Caribbean and on the increased resources that UNESCO was consecrating to literacy. He appealed for vigorous action to reduce the most flagrant educational injustices and to make literate the greatest possible number of adults while ensuring that all children of primary school age should receive education.

LITERACY PRIZES: Before messages sent by Pope John Paul II, the President of Upper Volta and the Secretary-General of the United Nations were read at the ceremony, Mr. Malcolm Adiseshiah, chairman of the international jury for the literacy prizes for 1981, announced the winners. The Nadezhda Krupskaya Prize this year goes to the Federation of Cuban Women, a mass movement of 2,434,600 members (81 per cent of the female population in the country) for active participation in the campaign which made 56 per cent of the women literate and eliminated illiteracy in Cuba. The Federation gives courses for new literates and 226,800 housewives have followed the sixth stage.

The prize donated by the International Reading Association has been awarded to the Department of Adult Education of Bihar State, India, a region where the illiteracy rate was 83 per cent in 1971. The Department's programme led by 1979 to the setting up of 8,000 centres for 240,000 participants 32 per cent of them women. By 1980 the number of centres had doubled. The literacy programme was carried out as a development effort by being integrated into courses on local government, agriculture, industry and health.

Use of computers enabled progress to be checked and difficulties identified. By this year the illiteracy rate was down by 74 per cent.

The Noma Prize, awarded for the second time goes to the National Literacy Commission of the People's Republic of Angola. Since it was set up in 1976, this has established literacy centres in urban municipalities, provincial communities, industrial undertakings, associations, co-operatives and trade unions. Thanks to publicity on the media, nearly 2,800,000 people were enrolled from 1977 to 1980. Of this number, more than 500,000 have been made literate simultaneously in Portuguese and in one of the six national languages. The youth section of the Party, organized in literacy bridges, and the trade union movement made a decisive contribution to the campaign.

An honourable mention for the Krupskaya Prize is made of the Research Centre for Adult Education of the People's Republic of the Congo, set up at Pointe Noire in 1980 to support literacy efforts. It trains instructors popularizes teaching methods and perfects programmes and techniques and also carries out a special programme for timber workers making use of a 8,000-copy monthly newspaper and a weekly radio broadcast from Kouilou regional station. Honourable mention also goes to Mr. Mail Mahmood Al-Saidi of Iraq who has devoted thirty years of his life to literacy and adult education.

The Literacy Service of the National Bureau for Rural Promotion of the Ivory Coast and the BBC's project 'On the Move' receive honourable mentions for the International Reading Association prize. The Ivory Coast Service has already trained 60 instructors to

help peasants understand production systems and marketing. The British project uses radio and TV to reach 2 million people with a reading level below that of a child of nine. Between 1975 and 1978 some 80,000 voluntary instructors took part in the programme which benefited 70,000 people in the single year of 1977/78.

Noma Prize honourable mentions go to Professor Manuel de Jesus Manzaneres, Director-General of Adult Education in Honduras and to the Indonesian non-governmental organization, Dharma Wanita. Professor Manzaneres has used new methods and elementary education redesigned for adults to give impetus to the training of personnel. Following his initiative, and national literacy campaign has been launched which led to 250,928 new literates in 1980. The 2,800,000 wives of civil servants, who form Dharma Wanita have taken an active part in the Indonesian National Literacy Campaign and through branches in 27 provinces, ensured a rate of execution of 14.9 per cent in 1980, representing 766,426 new literates.

The jury paid special tributes to Shannirvar Bangladesh, whose programme involves 6 million people; to the Tanzanian rural press which provides reading matter for new literates; to the project for the promotion of literacy by the US Laubach Association which recruits 20,000 volunteers every year; to the World Boy Scout Movement which has played an important role in national campaigns in Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Kenya, Benin and Senegal. The UNESCO Director-General expressed his encouragement to the programme recently launched by the Ecuador government.