

1990, International Literacy Year



The moment the United Nations declared 1990 as International Literacy Year, the international literacy movement began to consider how the year could strengthen the movement in every corner of the world. The U.N. plan of action is to "help member states in all regions to eradicate illiteracy by the year 2000". A UNESCO statement says that "International Literacy Year (ILY) should not be a 'celebration' but a summons to action". UNESCO will be encouraging action among member states and increasing public awareness and popular participation.

In this framework, the International Council For Adult Education (ICAE) initiated an International Task Force On Literacy (ITFL) to facilitate the involvement of primarily Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and the grassroots of the literacy movement in preparation for the year.

The Task Force envisions a year which will mark the beginning of a ten-year intensive effort to: dramatically reduce illiteracy in the world; mobilize resources from the grassroots and factory floors through governments and educational institutions; recognize that illiteracy is a problem of both industrialized and non-industrialized nations; not confuse a campaign against illiteracy with a campaign against illiterate people; link literacy to the achievements of social, economic and political democracy; strengthen the organizations of women, the poor, the jobless and the landless; result in

increased empowerment of people not increased dependency; and results most importantly in strengthened permanent structures for promoting literacy and adult education at governmental and non-governmental levels.

The Arab Regional Literacy Organization (ARLO)

The Arab world is not exempted from the efforts to combat illiteracy. For the years 1989 and 1990, the Arab Regional Literacy Organization (ARLO) has provided concerned bodies in Arab States with a practical guide on planning informational and promotional work in the field of Literacy and Adult Education. ARLO has produced a series of the Pan-Arab T.V. Literacy Program: "An el-Awan" ("It is high time") for all Arab States and a pilot series of a T.V. program for neo-literate women. These series are directed at literacy learners, the educated, policy-makers and the public in general.

Furthermore, beginning the year 1989 through 1991, ARLO plans to stimulate debate on **Cultural Literacy**. This Arab concept of literacy is based on the belief that "the real illiteracy is the illiteracy of society as a whole. Illiteracy is the result and cause of social development"¹. Thus, the plans of ARLO to promote cultural literacy will take place through:

- a symposium on the role of popular arts in the comprehensive confrontation of illiteracy;
- a panel of experts on the state of NGOs active in adult education;
- a seminar on the concepts of literacy and adult education;
- a workshop for educationally concerned media people on the mobilization of public opinion as a means of solving illiteracy problems;
- a field study to evaluate the practice of the comprehensive literacy campaigns;

ARLO guarantees an opportunity for participation in these events to any interested Arab literacy and adult education departments and NGOs.

Sources: Voices Rising: A Bulletin About Women and Popular Education, Vol. 4, No. 1, Jan/Feb. 1990.

¹**1990, International Literacy Year**, A Newsletter of the International Task Force On Literacy. This newsletter is available in English, French and Spanish free of charge by writing to ITFL Coordinating Office, 720 Bathurst St., Suite 500, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5S 2R4.