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Recommendations on The Relationship Between

De-segregation Strategies, Cultural Autonomy

and Integration in the Quest for Social Cohesion

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Introduction

On reading the draft recommendations, and at the risk of belying my American heritage, two important statements from the United States Supreme Court come to mind as an initial concern.

The first quote is from *Pierce v. Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* wherein the Court essentially upheld the right of non-public schools to exist. In this context, and recognizing the rights of parents, the Court reasoned that the child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.”¹

The second statement comes from the most important education case that the United States Supreme Court ever decided, maybe its most important of all time, *Brown v. Board of Education*. In striking down segregated schools based on race in 1954, the Court acknowledged that “education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments.”¹ Still, a tension arises as public

officials seek to set appropriate curricular content in schools that are not necessarily consonant with familial religious beliefs, morals, and practices.

Recommendations

With these two comments as a backdrop, I offer the following recommendations in addressing the relationship between de-segregation strategies, cultural autonomy, and integration in the quest for social cohesion:

1. Treat education as an integrative, rather than a segregative, factor. If tolerance and acceptance of diversity of religious beliefs and world views are not encouraged in schools and not imbued throughout curricula, both by majority and minority population groups, then we cannot expect to find them present throughout the rest of societies in which social cohesion is the goal.

2. Create integrated, rather than merely desegregated, school systems that are open to all children, regardless of their religious beliefs, ethnic origins, mother tongues, and cultural world views.

Educators in these schools must emphasize democratic, pluralistic, multi-cultural principles rather than

membership in society based solely on ethnicity, religion, or language. In other words, if systems are to become socially cohesive, they must be inclusive, not exclusive.

3. Adopt pro-active roles helping to create shared values among all groups in developing educational curricular standards as a means of developing social cohesion. It is essential that officials in central governmental ministries maintain leadership role in education to ensure that policies and practices are adopted uniformly in all schools and areas. In order to ease the transition of students who are ethnic and linguistic minorities into schools, instruction should begin in their mother tongue with a gradual transition to the use of the national language with an awareness of cultural differences.

4. Create policies to enhance social cohesion by meeting the needs of all student populations including, but not limited to, those who are of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities.

5. Develop national curricula, and accompanying texts, that are drafted primarily by appropriate professionals who can call on outside experts for assistance. Leadership on this important project should be provided by individuals from the respective governmental and educational ministries.

6. Implement national curricula (or sets of standards) that all can accept regardless of their religious beliefs, morals, and cultural values. At the same time, educational leaders should provide some consideration for ways of permitting groups to preserve their independent religious heritages in the schools. For example, while schools might offer courses focusing on one specific religious tradition, the classes should be open to all students regardless of their beliefs or genders.

7. Select members of committees who are assigned the task of developing curricular materials from among a broad representation of stakeholders.

8. Plan to schedule meetings such as this one on an array of topics and in a variety of locations. The discussions should utilize the same format as the present forum in order to obtain input from all parties, including, but not limited to parents, students, teachers, civil leaders, interested in helping to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children.