1948 – 2008
Bulgaria
Czech Republic
Denmark
Finland
France
Greece
Ireland
Latvia
Norway
Portugal
Russia
Slovak Republic
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
United Kingdom

Argentina
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Cuba
Ecuador
El Salvador
Honduras
Mexico
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Uruguay
Venezuela

Democratic Republic of Congo
Ghana (Preparatory Committee)
Liberia
Nigeria

Australia
Bangladesh
China
Hong-Kong
Indonesia
Japan
Korea
New Zealand
Pakistan (Preparatory Committee)
Sri Lanka (Preparatory Committee)
FROM THE HISTORY OF WORLD ORGANISATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (OMEP)  
1948 – 2008

Documents from International OMEP archive, which is stored in Pedagogical Museum of J. A. Comenius in Prague.

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Translation: 
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OMEP (Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire) – World Organisation for Early Childhood Education was established at the first conference held at Charles University in Prague from 26th till 28th August 1948. It laid foundations of future international cooperation in the area of pre-school education.
Theme: Childhood and the World Community.

Delegates from the following 17 countries took part in the constitutive conference held in Prague: Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Gold Coast, Great Britain, Holland, India, Italy, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, USA and Yugoslavia.
The incentive of foundation of World Organisation for Early Childhood Education was created after World War II. A two-week international seminar focusing on help for children suffering from war aftermath was held in Zurich in September 1945. Specialists such as doctors, teachers and child psychologists who took part in this seminar later devoted their time and effort to the idea of cooperation in the area of pre-school education at an international level. The first conference, whose program included foundation of international organisation for pre-school education, was held on London in July 29th, 1946. A preparatory committee for OMEP foundation, which would later work as autonomous, voluntary and non-governmental organisation cooperating with UNESCO, was established during 8th – 18th November 1946 in Paris. The decision to set the first conference in Prague in 1948 was made at the following meeting of preparatory committee, which was held in Hillerød in Denmark.

Lady Allen of Hurtwood (1897-1976) – née Marjory Gill. She devoted almost her entire life, from her 30’s until her retirement at the age of 77, to care for small children. At the beginning of her career she worked as a garden architect. Later she became a chairwoman of Nursery Schools Association (NSA) in Great Britain. Her life was influenced by her marriage to Lord Allen of Hurtwood. In 1939 she organised evacuation of children and women from British towns threatened by Nazi bombardment. After World War II she served as a liaison officer with UNICEF in Europe and the Middle East. From 1945 to 1949 she was a member of Central Advisory Council for Education and the chairman of the Advisory Council on Children Entertainment Films.

Marie Bartušková (1900-1978) – a representative of Czech pre-school pedagogy and an organiser of pre-school education in Czechoslovakia. In the 30’s she taught in Kindergarten in Lány in Prague, later in 1937 she became an inspector for Prague kindergartens. At the end of the 30’s she started publishing in the area of pre-school education. On the occasion of the international pre-school education conference in Prague in August 1948 she published a book “Kindergarten in Czechoslovakia”. She was a chairwoman of the Czechoslovak committee of World Organisation For Early Childhood Education up to 1978.

Alva Myrdal (1902-1986) – a founder member of OMEP, Swedish diplomat, politician and social reformer. In 1945 - 1955 held an important function at UNO and UNESCO. She worked as an ambassador of Sweden in India and in 60’s she was a minister for disarmament and church affairs. In 1962 – 1973 she conducted Swedish delegation at disarmament conference in Geneva. In 1982 she was awarded Nobel Peace Prize.

Suzanne Herbinière – Lebert (1892-1985) – significant representative of pre-school education in France. She worked as a kindergarten director in Paris, later she became a general inspector of French kindergartens. 3400 delegates from 25 countries participated in the international congress („Congres international de l’Enfance”), which she organised in 1931. She also participated in the organisation of the 2nd World OMEP Congress in Paris in 1949 and the 11th OMEP congress in Paris in 1966.

Jens Sigsgaard (1910-1991) – a Danish pedagogue and psychologist, a director of the Froebel Teacher Training College in Copenhagen. He became a children’s writer and many of his books were translated to different languages, e.g. "Katinka og dukkevogen", "Palle allene i verden", "Sippe Sum og Nalle Bamsebjørn". He was also an OMEP General Secretary. He was the author together with Å. G. Skard and P. Bailey, of the book „Your Child is Growing“.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>1948</td>
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<td>Mexico City</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>Quebec City</td>
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World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (L’Organisation Mondiale pour l’Éducation Préscolaire) – OMEP is an international non-governmental organisation associating people indiscriminate of race, nationality and political beliefs. Its aim is the improvement of education and care for children from their birth up to the age of 8.

OMEP has a consultative status similarly to such organizations as UNESCO, UNICEF and Council of Europe. OMEP National Committee acts on General Assembly plans however, is free to perform any other activities independently. OMEP is the member of a group of non-governmental organisations dealing with convention of children’s rights. OMEP cooperates with national and international organisations working in the same area.
In 1988 a meeting of OMEP World Council was held in Prague. At this meeting the Czech committee offered to deposit the international OMEP archive in Prague in Pedagogical Museum of J. A. Comenius. In January 1993 the museum obtained archival documents from Norway. OMEP archive is now deposited in 80 archival boxes. It contains documents connected with OMEP history 1948-2006. Its base is formed by progress reports of OMEP secretariat and other individual national committees, international conferences and seminar proceedings, correspondence of world and national OMEP representatives, magazines and publications issued by OMEP, studies dealing with the issue of pre-school education, bibliography and photographs.

Due to the number of documents (up to 6 000) international OMEP archive may become the source of understanding to modern history of pre-school education in the world.
During 60 years of its existence OMEP implemented many projects such as researches and questionnaires concerning kindergarten teachers training, innovations in pre-school education, traditional games and toys, role of mass media in relation to child development. One of the last projects “Tsunami Relief India” focused on help to victims of natural disaster in Indian Ocean in December 2004.

The results of researches were published in individual studies or in special magazines.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Alva Myrdal</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Lady Allen of Hurtwood</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>Suzanne Herbiniere-Lebert</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>Harald Flensmark</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>Bess Goodykoontz</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Hazel Gabbard</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>Åse G. Skard</td>
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<td>1968</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>Margaret Devine</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Margaret Roberts</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>Madeleine Goutard</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td>1986</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Candide Pineault</td>
<td>Canada</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>Audrey Curtis</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Selma Simonstein</td>
<td>Chile</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Ingrid Pramling Samuelson</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
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The first periodical issued by OMEP was OMEP’s News Letter (*Les Nouvelles de l’OMEP*), which was issued twice a year in three languages (English, French and Spanish). Since 1968 a new magazine *International Journal of Early Childhood* was issued twice a year. UNESCO participates in issuing OMEP magazines. Individual OMEP national committees issue their magazines dealing with the issue of preschool education.
One of research projects of Publication Committee in the 80's was OMEP's history. The first volume called "The first ten years 1948-1958" was issued in 1988 – on the occasion of 40th anniversary of OMEP foundation. It was published in English, French and Spanish versions. Then, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the OMEP foundation in 1998, the brochure "The history of OMEP 1959 – 1971" was published. A publication of Madeleine Goutard "OMEP 1948-1998 - Serving children's needs" was published in 1998 as well.

An exhibition "50 years in documents" was organised on the occasion of 50th anniversary of OMEP foundation within OMEP European congress in Prague in Pedagogical Museum of J. A. Comenius in September 1997.
**OMEPE HISTORY IN AFRICA**

**Member Countries (since 1977):**
Cameroun, Nigeria, Zaïre, South Africa, Liberia, Morocco, Mauritius, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Cote D'Ivoire, Zambia, Ghana, Burundi

**Current OMEP National Committees (2007):**
Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, South Africa, Mauritius

Individual member: Ms Verdiame Bukumi, Burundi

**Incoming OMEP Preparatory Committees:**
Republic of Benin, Togo, Zambia

**OMEPE World Assembly:**
- 1990, 7 - 15 August; World Council Meeting & Seminar, Nigeria
- 2002, 7 - 11 October; World Council Meeting & Conference - ICC, South Africa

**OMEPE Activities:**
- **Participants:** from all the spheres (universities, scholars, experts in child health, media, early childhood education, researchers on child care and early child education).
- **National conferences and seminars:** on regular basis creating awareness of the importance of early childhood education.
- **Workshops:** for educators of nursery school children, parents, caregivers on how to relate to children from birth - 6 years of age.
- **Training programs:** for teachers for early childhood education. Some universities and colleges of education have incorporated early childhood education into their curriculum.
- **Research programs:** carried out by various university scholars and experts on early childhood education. E.g.,
  - Child-Rearing Practices Among Educated and Illiterate Mothers: Implication for Childhood Education
  - Pre-school Education and the Language of Instruction Policy
  - Effects of Emotions on Children's Academy Achievement
  - The Importance of Kindergarten Education to the Children's Academic Performance in Primary Schools
  - The Pre-school Child: His Characteristics and Learning
- **Publications:** quarterly magazines for parents and teachers of preschool children - esp. topics on how to care, educate, socialize and realize children's development from birth to 6 years.
- **Media:** co-operation in promotion of OMEP activities, of the role of parents and guardians in the health and safety of pre-school children, of the conditions for child development.
- **Regional conferences / seminars:**
  - 1998, 14 - 19 August; Nigeria
  - 2000, 30 October - 3 November; Nigeria
  - 2007, 2 - 5 April; Ghana

Compiled by
Mrs. Victoria O. Bilewu E-mail: vietyemi@yahoo.com
V. P. Africa Region (2006 - 2008)
Participation of Latin America in OMEP activities began very early, even when their national committees were not founded yet. This was the case of the 2nd World Congress in France (Paris) in 1949, in which Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico took part.

**Member countries:**
- Mexico (1949/1964)
- Brazil (1953)
- Chile (1956/1958)
- Uruguay (1957)
- Salvador (1958)
- Venezuela (1964)
- Argentina (1965/1967)
- Costa Rica (1971)
- Columbia (1971)
- Honduras (no date available)
- Guatemala (1971)
- Panama (1993)
- Peru (1997)
- Paraguay (1997)
- Ecuador (1999)
- Cuba (2002)

**Exceptional OMEP personality** is Mrs. Rosaura Zapata from Mexico who, in 1951, became a member of the World Council as a vice-president. Thanks to her work in OMEP and the offer of the Mexican government, the 4th world OMEP congress took place in Mexico in 1952.

**Activities** realized by countries of Latin America during almost 60 years of their participation in OMEP work were numerous and of different kind:

**World OMEP congresses** held in Latin America:
- Mexico (1952)
- Venezuela (1987)
- Chile (2001)
- Mexico (2007)

**International seminars** organized in:
- Chile (1985)
- Colombia (1993)
- Cuba (2005)

**Conferences, seminars, trainings** and international meetings, all focusing on improving child care, are organized for teachers, professionals as well as for students.

**Lobbying for the legislation and promotion of the activities concerning the care of children** was among the most important activities. Laws were adopted, norms set up, exhibitions took place, leaflets were disseminated - all the activities focused on improving children's rights and their life conditions.

**Activities commemorating important events** (seminars, publications) concerning children education in Latin America, e.g. 100th anniversary of the opening of the first kindergartens in Latin America.

**Celebrations of the Children's Day**

**Research works** within one or more countries, e.g. the role of professionals educating and taking care of children, or games for children between 0 – 3 years of age

**Facilities for direct use of children** were established - crèches, kindergartens, ludotecas ("library of toys"). The most needful areas are monitored.

**Participation in congress realized by OMEP in Argentina** is the last activity of Latin American countries. At the meeting organized by regional vice-presidency were agreed some steps in common work. E.g. call attention to emergency and urgent cases concerning children, which often are not the subject of interest of the responsible institutions.
Member Countries include and have included over the past sixty years: Australia, Bangladesh, PR China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, Fiji, Myanmar and Nepal

Activities include: research, exchange visits between countries, ECE development projects, conferences and support for disadvantaged situations within and between countries.

Conferences: An International OMEP conference is hosted every year by one of the member countries. The Asia Pacific Annual Assembly meets alongside the International Conference. In the past few years such conferences have been held in Australia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Singapore and Thailand. In 2004 OMEP Australia hosted the World Assembly in Melbourne. In addition member countries hold their own OMEP conferences. OMEP members actively participate in the conferences presenting a diversity of research.

Publications: A history of OMEP Australia was published in 2007. "Fact Sheets" from member countries were published in 2000 and a further set are planned for publication in 2008.

Research: OMEP members are very involved in research across a wide range of topics. The 2008 OMEP International Journal for Early Childhood Education will focus entirely on research from the Asia Pacific Region.

ECE Development Projects: OMEP initiated joint OMEP/UNICEF ECE development projects in Sri Lanka and Indonesia following the tsunami of 2002. Project to support ECE development in Sichuan China following the earthquake and in Bangladesh following the 2007 cyclone are being explored.

Professional Development: Several countries within the region are supporting development in less advantaged countries or in situations within their own country. Bilateral cooperation and support is an important OMEP Goal.

Doreen Launder
Vice President OMEP Asia Pacific