



United Nations
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Report (including the Draft Action Plan) of the Open-ended Tripartite Working Group on the Follow-up to the Review of the Cooperation of UNESCO's Secretariat with National Commissions for UNESCO

I. Background

1. As part of the follow-up to the independent external evaluation of UNESCO (IEE), an overall review of the cooperation of UNESCO Secretariat with National Commissions for UNESCO was carried out by the Internal Oversight Service (IOS) between April and September 2011. It consisted of a desk study of relevant documents and analysis of databases, interviews with over 200 stakeholders, field visits to a number of Member States and UNESCO field offices and online surveys to National Commissions, Permanent Delegations and UNESCO regional/cluster offices.

2. A preliminary summary of the review report was produced in late September 2011 as an information document of the General Conference (36 C/INF.16). The full draft report of the review was circulated in October 2011 to Member States for further comments. The final report of the review was published and circulated in January 2012 (first in English <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002151/215104E.pdf>, then in Spanish <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002151/215104S.pdf> and French <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002151/215104F.pdf>), taking into account various comments coming from National Commissions and Permanent Delegations. The review was conducted as a broad participatory process, with strong involvement and consultation of National Commissions and Permanent Delegations.

3. To follow up on the IOS review, the Executive Board established an open-ended tripartite working group of representatives from the Permanent Delegations, National Commissions and UNESCO Secretariat (189 EX/Decision 16 and 190 EX/Decision 37). This working group was requested to:

- Examine the key conclusions and recommendations of the report;
- Recommend key priorities to improve UNESCO's cooperation with National Commissions;
- Develop (for the 191st session of the Executive Board) an action plan including detailed timelines and responsibilities for the implementation of the recommendations;
- Ensure that the planned actions were in line with and complemented UNESCO's overall reform effort (Independent External Evaluation (IEE), follow-up and roadmap, including field presence reform, partnership strategy, and identify possible synergies; and
- Propose recommendations that could be carried out by a resolution of the 37th session of the General Conference.

II. First meeting of the open-ended tripartite working group

4. Following the approval by the Executive Board of its remit and terms of reference, the open-ended tripartite working group met for the first time on 19 October 2012 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. It was attended by 146 participants from 98 countries, including 35 National Commissions and 85 Permanent Delegations. The Secretariat participated as the third component of this mechanism.

5. The meeting, co-chaired by H.E. Mohamed Sameh Amr, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Arab Republic of Egypt to UNESCO and Neil Walter, Chairman of the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, was organized around the six findings of the IOS review, namely:

- Clarifying the role of National Commissions;
- Strengthening the coordination of the network;
- Strengthening National Commissions' partnerships with civil society and the private sector;
- Enhancing resource mobilization and better use of limited resources;
- Better management of the knowledge generated by the network; and
- Strengthening overall approach to capacity development of National Commissions.

6. Free exchanges and constructive debate were key features of the day. While comments and observations were made on the above findings, it was generally recognized that the IOS review represented a good and fair assessment, and set a solid basis for the way forward to strengthen the longstanding cooperation between UNESCO Secretariat and National Commissions. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed to:

- Extend the mandate of the two co-Chairs until the end of this exercise;
- Circulate the minutes of the meeting to all Permanent Delegations and National Commissions;
- Launch an electronic forum of discussion (e-Forum) open to all Permanent Delegations and National Commissions to collect concrete proposals and thoughts towards strengthening UNESCO's cooperation with National Commissions; and
- Organize a second meeting of the tripartite working group in early 2013 to prepare the group's report including recommendations and action plan to follow up on the IOS review for consideration of the Executive Board.

III. e-Forum discussion

7. Following the first meeting of the open-ended tripartite working group, a virtual online forum (e-Forum) of discussion was opened to the Permanent Delegations and National Commissions, with a view to gather proposals for the action plan that will be submitted to the Executive Board at its 191st session in April 2013. Over a hundred members from Member States and the Secretariat registered and participated in this e-Forum. Discussions were focused on clarifying the role of National Commissions and strengthening coordination within the network. These discussions elaborated on topics such as working with civil society and private sector, sharing information, knowledge and best practices and capacity development.

8. This new tool for discussion and communication contributed to sharing valuable information and knowledge and promoting reflections among the group. It proved effective, notwithstanding that some members were initially hesitant about participating in such a virtual and instant environment. Lessons can be drawn to improve this online working space in the future.

9. It was generally agreed during the discussion that the tripartite working group should use the IOS report, which took into account the feedback of National Commissions and Permanent Delegations, as a point of reference and discussion. It would not however be obliged to take the report as an unconditional starting point.

To follow-up on the IOS review, the tripartite working group at its second meeting formulated a draft action plan with timelines and responsibilities for the implementation of the group's recommendations, for the consideration of the Executive Board and the General Conference.

IV. Second meeting of the tripartite working group

10. In order to advance in its deliberation and finalize the Action Plan on the Follow-up to the Review of the Cooperation of UNESCO's Secretariat with National Commissions for UNESCO, the open-ended tripartite working group met for the second time on 21 and 22 February 2013 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. Prior to this meeting, a Draft Discussion Paper containing a series of findings and recommendations with a view to improving the cooperation of UNESCO with National Commissions was prepared by the co-Chairs and the Secretariat on the basis of the previous discussions, and circulated to all Permanent Delegations and National Commissions.

11. The meeting was attended by 180 participants from 110 countries, including 45 National Commissions and 95 Permanent Delegations, as well as members of the Secretariat. The meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Mohamed Sameh Amr, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Arab Republic of Egypt to UNESCO and Neil Walter, Chairman of the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO. Mr Juan Antonio Fernandez Palacios, President of the Cuban National Commission for UNESCO and Cuba's Representative to the Executive Board, was nominated as the Rapporteur. The meeting was organized around the following four sessions:

- Legal framework and structural issues of the National Commissions
- Actions to be taken by individual Member States including Permanent Delegations and National Commissions
- Strengthening interactions and partnerships among National Commissions
- Improving cooperation between National Commissions and the Secretariat – both at Headquarters and at Field Office level

12. The meeting reviewed and adopted 14 findings and recommendations with detailed responsibilities and clear time-lines for its implementation. These group's findings and recommendations are included in the below Draft Action Plan for consideration by the Executive Board at its 191st session.

Draft Action Plan

PREAMBLE

Guided by the desire to further enhance the cooperation between Member States, their National Commissions and the Secretariat,

Recognizing that the UNESCO Constitution (Article VII) sets the foundation and legal framework for the establishment of National Commissions,

Bearing in mind that the Charter of National Commissions for UNESCO reaffirms that it is for each Member State to define the range of responsibilities and the nature of the function of its National Commission.

Considering the need to promote exchanges and networking among National Commissions in the context of their diversity in organisation and status by sharing information and best practices in a transparent and cooperative manner,

Emphasizing the responsibility of the Secretariat, including all programme sectors and field offices, to work with Member States and their National Commissions

The Open-ended Tripartite Working Group adopts the following findings and recommendations:

I. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 1**

The UNESCO Constitution (Article VII) and the Charter of National Commissions for UNESCO set the foundations and legal framework for the establishment and functioning of National Commissions. They specify basic roles and responsibilities of the UNESCO Secretariat, Member State Governments and National Commissions in this regard. Certain additional responsibilities have been given to National Commissions (for example, in the fields of decentralization, public information, partnerships with civil society, and use of UNESCO's name and logo) by subsequent resolutions and decisions of the General Conference and the Executive Board (Ref. Resolutions 27 C/ 13.12, 28 C/13.5, 29 C/60, 30 C/83, 34 C/86 and 36 C/104, Decision 174 EX/34).

As regards the responsibilities of the National Commissions, the Working Group does not at this stage consider that it is a priority to revise or update either UNESCO's Constitution or the Charter of National Commissions. The guiding principles laid out in these documents - and relevant above-mentioned resolutions and decisions taken subsequently by the General Conference and the Executive Board - should however be drawn to the attention of all Member State governments and National Commissions.

It is recommended that, where they have not already done so, Member States adopt legal or administrative instruments specifying the role and the organization of their National Commission within the national context.

Other Member States could review as appropriate their existing provisions to ensure that full account is taken of the relevant legal documents and recent decisions of the Governing Bodies (Ref. Resolutions 27 C/ 13.12, 28 C/13.5, 29 C/60, 30 C/83, 34 C/86, 36 C/104 and Decision 174 EX/34) as well as international best practice.

All Member States are invited to provide information to the Secretariat on the legal status (with a copy of the legal text establishing its National Commission where possible) and organization of their National Commission (with a copy of its organizational chart where possible).

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 2**

Each Member State has developed its own way of operating its National Commission, as provided for in UNESCO's Constitution. It is important that each Member State's National Commission should reflect its particular political, legal and administrative context. The Working Group is agreed that, although there are certain features in common to all National Commissions and a measure of standardization can be helpful, no single model can or should be adopted for all National Commissions. Each National Commission's mandate, organizational structure, working modalities and programme priorities, even though guided by the UNESCO Constitution and the Charter of National Commissions, should be decided on its own.

The Working Group recommends that the principle of the diversity of National Commissions continue to be respected.

II. ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN BY INDIVIDUAL MEMBER STATES, INCLUDING PERMANENT DELEGATIONS AND NATIONAL COMMISSIONS

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 3**

Member States have primary responsibility for providing their Commissions with appropriate status and authority as well as the human and financial resources needed to carry out the work of their National Commission in accordance with UNESCO's Constitution and the Charter of National Commissions.

The Working Group recommends that all Member States review the status and structure of their National Commissions and their secretariats to ensure that they have the authority, the capacity and the expertise to work effectively in UNESCO's areas of competence, with their governments, government agencies, as well as intellectual communities, civil society partners, UNESCO Secretariat at Headquarters and field offices and other National Commissions, and fulfill their advisory function.

Member States are requested to ensure that the Secretariat has up-to-date information on the status, organization and resourcing levels of their National Commission.

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 4**

The high turnover of appointees to the positions of President/Chair and Secretary-General in a large number of National Commissions creates instability and discontinuity in their National Commission's work. Moreover the mandates of these appointees are in some cases not well defined.

The Working Group recommends that each Member State consider appointing the Secretary-General of its National Commission for a reasonable period of time and that each appointee be issued with a clear and well defined mandate. In view of common practices, the Working Group recommends Member States to consider appropriate measures to ensure continuity.

Member States are requested to ensure that the Secretariat has up-to-date information on their approach to the appointment of President/Chair and Secretary-General of their National Commission.

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 5**

With the recent adoption of the Comprehensive Partnership Strategy, UNESCO is increasing its engagement with the government donors, private sector and other funding partners. National Commissions are considered by the Working Group to have the potential to benefit from public and private partnerships. Value is seen in National Commissions engaging more closely and extensively with public and private partners in order to support their own programmes as well as to encourage support and

contributions to UNESCO.

The Working Group recommends that National Commissions be encouraged to establish and/or expand the network of partners in their countries and that they may seek sponsorship in accordance with clearly established principles and procedures which are consistent with national legislation and UNESCO's comprehensive partnership strategy.

Member States are invited to report to the Secretariat on actions taken pursuant to this recommendation, and on any lessons learned or experience gained that might be useful to other National Commissions.

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 6**

A number of National Commissions have recently started to work more closely with the various UNESCO networks and civil society partners in their respective countries. These networks include UNESCO Chairs, National Committees of Intergovernmental Programmes, networks such as ASPnet, UNESCO Clubs and Associations, Category 2 Centres and Non-Governmental Organizations. Given the large number and great diversity of these networks, coordination and governance are often needed to better monitor and facilitate their activities. National Commissions are well placed to play such a facilitating, coordinating and monitoring role.

The Working Group recommends that National Commissions and Secretariat consider ways of engaging more closely with the larger UNESCO family, partners and networks, with a view to exchange advice, guidance and, as appropriate, coordination and support. National Commissions have a particular role to play (under the relevant Directives) on the use of UNESCO's name, acronym, logo and internet domain names. Member States are invited to report to the Secretariat on steps taken to create synergies and work more closely with the UNESCO-related bodies in their country.

The Working Group also recommends that National Commissions actively work with civil society and NGOs based in their respective countries, including legally established national branches of those international NGOs which have established official relations with UNESCO in line with the new "Directives concerning UNESCO's partnership with non-governmental organizations". They should contribute to the fostering of UNESCO's partnership with NGOs by identifying and helping new interested non-governmental partners to join the UNESCO-NGO network.

Finally the Working Group calls upon National Commissions to accredit, monitor and assess as appropriate the Associations, Centres and Clubs for UNESCO in their respective countries so as to ensure that activities implemented by Clubs and Centres for UNESCO will be in line with the mission and objectives of UNESCO and the name and logo of UNESCO be properly used by them. The National Commissions may withdraw the accreditation of Associations, Centres and Clubs for UNESCO which are not meeting the required standards, including the "Directives concerning the use of the name, acronym. Logo and internet domain names of UNESCO".

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 7**

Most National Commissions report regularly to their government and partners. Some Commissions communicate also with their counterparts within – and even outside - the region to which they belong. Regular communication and reporting mechanisms such as newsletters contribute to the visibility and public awareness of the activities they undertake, to the profile of UNESCO and to the promotion of effective working partnerships and best practices.

The Working Group recommends that each National Commission report on a regular basis to its government as well as to its members and partners. These activity reports should as a rule be done on an annual basis and on a commonly agreed template.

The Working Group also believes that regular newsletters should be encouraged. All such reports should be shared with other interested National Commissions, Permanent Delegations and the Secretariat, which collects and posts them on UNESCO's website.

III. STRENGTHENING INTERACTIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS AMONG NATIONAL COMMISSIONS

➤ Finding and Recommendation 8

Regional and sub-regional consultations and meetings, as well as informal gatherings of National Commissions during the sessions of the Executive Board and the General Conference, are critical not just to enhancing communication with the Secretariat but to strengthening collaboration among National Commissions and deriving maximum benefit from this global network of like-minded agencies.

The Working Group recommends to maintain biennial regional meetings of the National Commissions. In this regard, the Working Group calls on Member States and other funding partners to co-fund and/or host regional meetings of National Commissions every two years, one of which would include every four years consultations of Member States and their National Commissions on the upcoming programme cycle.

The Working Group recommends that the informal meetings held on the margins of the Governing Bodies meetings be prepared in a manner that will optimize the possibilities for exchanging information and sharing experiences. In particular, the working group recommends that the Secretariat implement structured participatory events with clearly defined outcomes, which will improve both effectiveness and the exchange of best practice. These meetings will be prepared with appropriate advance consultation regarding the needs and wishes of the participants.

➤ Finding and Recommendation 9

It is clear that a number of National Commissions, particularly those from developing countries or more recently established, would benefit from the opportunity to work more closely with other National Commissions and to receive assistance from them in the form of training, knowledge and experience sharing and occasional secondments or funding grants. This can be done within the same regional grouping, on a North/South or South/South basis or wherever a need on the part of one National Commission can be matched with the ability and readiness of another National Commission to help out. A number of examples have been drawn to the Working Group's attention of where such arrangements have been very successful.

The Working Group recommends that each National Commission which is in a position to assist other less well-equipped National Commissions take steps to make its position known and actively explore avenues for lending a hand in this way. Twinning system, staff exchange programme and cooperative network among National Commissions are most welcome and encouraged.

It is further recommended that National Commissions be invited to report to the Secretariat on their experience with such arrangements from time to time, so that their experience can be used by others.

IV. IMPROVING COOPERATION BETWEEN NATIONAL COMMISSIONS AND THE SECRETARIAT, BOTH AT HEADQUARTERS AND AT FIELD OFFICE LEVEL

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 10**

Although established with different status and structures, assigned different responsibilities and tasks and operating in different ways with distinct audiences and partners, National Commissions and UNESCO field offices have a common mandate to advocate the mission and carry out the work of UNESCO.

They are called upon to work together and to complement each other's effort in promoting UNESCO's activities, partnerships and visibility at country and regional levels.

The respective roles of these two networks are not clearly defined, and in some cases there is considerable confusion and misunderstanding about their respective responsibilities and roles. Inadequate communication and consultation between the two entities is widespread.

The Working Group recommends that the "Guidelines for interface and cooperation between UNESCO field offices and National Commissions for UNESCO" endorsed by the Executive Board in April 2006 (174 EX/34 Annex) be reviewed and updated to take stock of current situation to enhance the collaboration between UNESCO field offices and National Commissions. It also recommends that Field Offices be reminded of the obligation to work in close cooperation with National Commissions as well as Member States in their region. Similarly, National Commissions should be reminded of the importance of keeping in touch with the Field Offices and keep them informed and consulted about any programmes of relevance at a regional level.

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 11**

Information and knowledge sharing between the Secretariat Headquarters and National Commissions is an important way of enhancing the capacity of National Commissions to engage in various activities of UNESCO. Significant improvements in communication have taken place recently through monthly newsletters, online posting and e-Forum discussions.

Further efforts must be made to enhance two-way communication, using the new ICTs as well as the more traditional methods of communication. Biennial meetings of regional National Commissions remain an important element in this.

The Working Group recommends that the UNESCO Secretariat facilitate the networking of National Commissions by gathering, highlighting and sharing information, knowledge and good practices with National Commissions on a more regular basis. This requires National Commissions to submit, in timely manner and preferably in electronic format, relevant information, newsletters, activity reports and proposals to facilitate the Secretariat's work.

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 12**

Member States' Governments, Permanent Delegations and National Commissions are not always kept informed of activities being undertaken by the UNESCO Secretariat (HQ and FOs) in their respective countries.

They occasionally learn about them only through the media. Bypassing National Commissions while conducting a project or implementing an activity in their country is neither courteous nor in conformity with the UNESCO Constitution (Article VII) and Charter of National Commissions.

The Working Group recommends that the UNESCO Secretariat ensure that Permanent Delegations and National Commissions be consulted about, informed in advance and involved where appropriate in every activity UNESCO is planning to implement in their countries, including staff missions and meetings with

officials and partners; and subsequently be informed of the outcome of these missions and meetings.

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 13**

All National Commissions need to constantly build and adapt their capacities and methods of work to effectively and efficiently play their role. Present training modalities and ways of seeking funding are in many cases no longer suited to current needs. There is an urgent need to explore and develop new ways of training by the Secretariat, drawing on the experience of both the Secretariat and National Commissions.

The Working Group recommends that the Secretariat develop training programmes to satisfy the various needs of different National Commissions. While face-to-face training can continue to be organized where needed and when funding sources are available, alternative cost-effective and targeted training modules should be further explored and developed, such as

- video conferences
- online training
- study visits or learning stays of members of Commissions at HQ or in field offices.

Initiatives of networking, partnership and cooperation among National Commissions for capacity-building purposes should be supported by the Secretariat.

➤ **Finding and Recommendation 14**

As principal beneficiaries of the Participation Programme, National Commissions rely on Participation Programme grants both to implement projects and to build their capacities and partnerships. The delay in approving requests for such items as equipment, celebration of anniversaries, training workshops and the publication of reports/news bulletins have triggered some concern.

Due to the incomplete presentation of a number of Participation Programme requests and the unsatisfactory quality of financial and evaluation reports on past grants, the whole evaluation and approval process has become problematic. It is understood that the Executive Board may be considering rules of eligibility and criteria for Participation Programme funding on the basis of the External Auditor's report.

The Working Group recommends that National Commissions and the Secretariat, including the Field Offices, work closely together to further improve the Participation Programme process. Special efforts need to be made in preparing the financial and evaluation reports.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES AND TIME-LINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned above, Permanent Delegations, National Commissions (both are in liaison with their government) and UNESCO Secretariat have the direct responsibilities to implement the respective recommendations.

Any reports by Member States on the implementation of recommendations 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9 are expected by 30 June 2014.

The Secretariat should submit a progress report on the implementation of all these recommendations to the Executive Board at its 196th Session (Spring 2015). The review of the "Guidelines for interface and cooperation between UNESCO field offices and National Commissions for UNESCO" (recommendation 9) could also be done on this occasion.