



INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

Twenty-Third Session of the Assembly
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Agenda Item: 5.1

FINANCING AND OWNERSHIP OF IOC'S PROGRAMMES
"WE HAVE A PROBLEM"

Given the reduction of 20% of UNESCO's contribution to the IOC Regular Budget, Member States will have, as soon as possible, to collectively reflect on possible future scenarios as a possible basis for the reformulation of the Commission's medium- and long-term plans. To start that process, this document was prepared by Officer J. Valladares, for the consideration of the Assembly at the present session; it assesses the overall funding for IOC, analyses the existing, and proposes new funding mechanisms including extrabudgetary contributions from Member States through a voluntary pledging system.

The Assembly will be invited to: (i) **comment** on this document; (ii) **decide** whether to constitute an intersessional Working Group with the aim of preparing a set of proposals on new funding mechanisms for adoption by the 24th IOC Assembly to strengthen the capacity of the Commission to meet its adopted obligations in the medium and long terms; (iii) **decide** on interim measures using existing regulations and arrangements for the biennium 2006–2007.

“We have a problem”

1 Since its establishment in 1960, the IOC has had to operate in the rapidly changing circumstances characteristic of the second half of the twentieth century, which had obvious effects both within its governing bodies, the Executive Council and the Assembly, and its parent organization, UNESCO.

2 These circumstances, highly varied in origin, were, for instance, political, relating to the interests of and relations among Member States, scientific and technological, as a result of continuous developments, and economic (linked to the availability of the resources needed to meet new challenges).

3 Over the years, the Commission and its Member States have displayed an ability to adapt to change and in many instances to lead the way. This has resulted in programmes with worldwide coverage, the regional sub-commissions, pioneering management mechanisms, and many other relevant issues that develop between assemblies.

4 We operate, with many issues yet unresolved, but at the same time marking out a path in which developed and developing, continental and coastal countries endeavour all together, day by day, to be more ingenious, creative and tolerant of diversity in order to come closer to finding solutions to the most varied ocean issues.

5 In this context, and in recognition of the complexity of the subjects covered by oceanography, UNESCO has declared the IOC to be a flagship programme with functional autonomy under its Statutes, revised in 1999.

6 This has made it possible to subsist austere for many years on the budgets allocated by an organization that acknowledged and appreciated us, and the contributions we have received in solidarity from some Member States and other international organizations.

7 We have always been recognized as the body of scientific reference and coordination in the diversity and immensity of ocean-related themes, as we have been assigned the role of focal point for marine sciences and ocean services within the United Nations system.

8 We have initiated many programmes independently or jointly with relevant organizations (World Meteorological Organization – WMO, United Nations Environment Programme – UNEP, International Maritime Organization – IMO, Food and Agriculture Organization – FAO and the Scientific Committee on Oceanic Research – SCOR). They all demand of us ever greater levels of responsibility and participation.

9 In recent years we have arrived at a very precarious relationship between resources available and commitments undertaken or delegated.

10 However, our circumstances have changed again!

11 We have been affected by two very different events that occurred recently and we are still feeling their repercussions:

- the most destructive tsunami ever recorded occurred on 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean, leaving some 300,000 people dead or missing;

- a significant reduction in the budget allocated to the Commission by UNESCO for the 2006–2007 biennium.

12 At a time when we are managing the present almost in deficit, this new change in circumstances forces us to rethink our medium- and long-term plans.

13 Any decision adopted at the next session of the Assembly will determine our future, not through a mere change in the balance of themes of interest, but by affecting our identity as an oceanographic commission that is also, at the moment, intergovernmental.

14 Aware that this kind of assessment will go beyond the limited terms of the debate during the Assembly, we must take a break in our daily routine to think about:

“where we are”, and

“where we want to go as an intergovernmental body dedicated to oceanography”.

15 Our medium- and long-term management documents are now unfeasible. To give you an example, the draft 33 C/5 prepared by the Secretariat proposes reductions in Ocean Mapping, Harmful Algal Bloom and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Data Exchange programmes as well as a serious cut in Policy activities. These cuts will hamper seriously IOC’s capacities. This means that with the current allocations we are unable to meet or cannot meet properly planned commitments and responsibilities.

16 The Officers have planned a series of activities that could be called contingency activities:

- dispatching a letter to the Director-General and Members States of the UNESCO Executive Board to express our concern once more at the budget cuts and the little regard in which the Commission is held;
- applying the budget cut imposed by UNESCO (approximately 10% across the board) not to the implementation of the IOC budget in its entirety (including Staff Cost Allocation), but restricting it only to programme execution, which would then make it amount to almost 20%;
- engaging as soon as possible in collective reflection on possible future scenarios for the IOC which could be used to reformulate the organization’s medium- and long-term plans.

17 In our desire to liven up the debate and “trigger joint reflection”, we can see only one way of ensuring that we meet our commitments in the medium term, and this is by establishing and administering accounts for specific purposes to which Member States or future donors may contribute new and more resources, with the guarantee that they will be used exclusively for those purposes (reference to Art. 10 of IOC Statutes). Something like a “Partnership for the Oceans”, along the lines of similar arrangements which have existed within UNESCO for a few years now, as in the case of the World Heritage Centre.

18 In this way we could keep alive programmes for which there is most agreement and support. The accounts for specific purposes would be administered by the Executive Secretary, and overseen by our governing bodies, as would some that have already been established.

19 Contribution to these accounts would not entail any commitment on the part of Member States in that they would be absolutely voluntary, and the existence of the accounts would not represent any change in the priorities and decisions of the Assembly.

20 The systematic use of such accounts would make it possible to maintain, or plan in a better way, activities that would certainly have to be suspended in the current circumstances.

21 Owing to this mechanism we would also avoid passive or uncommitted attitudes that lower the IOC's visibility when special events occur (natural disasters, conferences convened by other organizations, initiatives outside the scope of the United Nations, and so on).

22 On the other hand, we would, in the long term, have a wider range of options linked quite obviously to our vision of the IOC's future role.

23 We must be quite clear that we are trying only to stimulate the reflection that will guide our action in the years ahead.

24 Possibly the first question to answer is whether we want our activities to evolve towards or develop into a non-governmental organization outside the UN system or whether we want our governments to maintain the initiative on ocean-related themes.

25 If we choose the first option, we do nothing and in a short time our history as the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, our representative nature and responsibilities will come to an end.

26 If, on the other hand, we choose the second option, we can begin to look into some ideas as possible forms of action:

- (i) further consolidation and vitalization of management through accounts for specific purposes ("Partnership for the Oceans"). This will make it possible to maintain our current profile, which might rise under the influence of the dynamics of donors' interests;
- (ii) suspension of all operational plans and activities and maintenance of the IOC as a forum for the presentation and discussion of ideas on research policies only, leaving the programmes and initiatives arising from those ideas to be implemented by other bodies.

UNESCO funds would thus be allocated in order to maintain the secretariat and to hold a few annual meetings, but not for the implementation of any theme;

- (iii) initiation of a process of change and steps to progress beyond the current state of affairs. In calling on our governments to ensure that they are informed of the challenges that technological developments pose to operational oceanography and the requisite coordination of the numerous ocean services, let us begin by considering the expansion of the current terms of reference so that the IOC actually becomes the body for the development and implementation of ocean policies at the intergovernmental level.

27 These are just three forms of action; there may be a few more, but even without a very elaborate analysis we can see that they give rise to three very different scenarios.

28 The circumstances that we face in today's globalized world mean that there can be no inaction without paying the price.

29 It is for us, as our governments' oceanography representatives, to open this debate and chart the course so that the necessary measures may be consolidated later on at the appropriate political levels.

30 Our communities have many demands and there is still a great deal to be done!

31 As you will see, this call to discussions aims to do much more than describe a programme and budget. Let that be a matter for discussions later on. For the moment let us agree on what future we want.