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INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

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Item 3.1 of the Provisional Agenda

THE FUTURE OF IOC

A PROPOSAL BY THE OFFICERS TO THE MEMBER STATES, JUNE 2007

Summary. Prepared by the Officers of the Commission, this paper challenges the Member States to recognise and address the reality of IOC as an element of UNESCO and the UN system as it functions today, considering the serious mismatch between the demands on IOC and its capacity to plan and deliver. Building on previous reviews, the paper presents possible “futures” of the Commission and proposes a series of options for strengthening it.

The Assembly will be invited to consider establishing a sessional working group to discuss proposals on the future of IOC.

Introduction

1. The Officers of the Commission, in accordance with our mandate and responsibility towards Member States and the world community involved in Ocean Affairs, have been debating how to respond to severe circumstances that are putting at risk a viable future for the IOC. It is clear that the current crisis demands appropriate and urgent measures by Member States.
2. The current mandate of IOC clearly defines its vocation in providing the scientific knowledge, observations and services that are needed to provide an effective stewardship of the oceans. Changing the circumstances of IOC, either inside or outside of UNESCO, will require intergovernmental negotiations and maybe, at its final phase, an Intergovernmental Conference. In our view the adoption of a Convention or other appropriate instrument for IOC, establishing the commitment of Member States of IOC with respect to its Mission, is a minimum requirement.

Background

3. Following the main recommendation of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Conference on Ocean Research (Copenhagen, 11–16 July 1960; in UNESCO document 11 C/PRG/7) the Commission was created as an intergovernmental body within UNESCO, through the adoption of Resolution 2.31 by the General Conference of UNESCO at its eleventh session (11 C/resolutions, Nov.–Dec. 1960). Then the General Conference granted functional autonomy to IOC at its 30th Session when it approved the modified Statutes of the Commission in November 1999 (30 C/Res.22). The history of IOC has been marked by the tension between its recognized usefulness and success on one side, and the simultaneous limitations due to its inadequate standing as an independent organization capable of achieving its purposes and functions, on the other.
4. Member States have been confronted with these intrinsic constraints since the initial negotiations which lead to the decision to establish IOC as part of an existing UN organization. [In fact more than one existing UN organization was interested in hosting the new Commission.] Nevertheless, a resolution of the issues implicit in the arrangement has been systematically postponed.
5. The purposes of IOC as defined in Articles 2 and 3 of its current Statutes (IOC/INF-1148, 1999) maintain all their initial functions and reflect the expectations of IOC Member States and of the world community regarding the promotion of international cooperation and coordination of “programmes in research, services and capacity-building”. This main focus calls for the establishment and coordination of programmes addressing larger scales of temporal and spatial ocean observations and, thus, of the stability and continuity of international cooperation required at the global and regional levels to maintain them.
6. The world community faces growing challenges arising from climate variability and change, marine environmental degradation and pollution, biodiversity losses, and natural hazards.
7. Confirming and preserving the current Mission of IOC has a undeniable advantage of keeping all aspects of oceanographic research, observations and services under a common roof, avoiding the splitting them in their physical, chemical geological and biological components under several Programmes and different agencies. Further, the permanent and very important mandate to build the capabilities to acquire and use the knowledge about the oceans for the benefit of societies, would have a firm, secure niche in the UN system. As experience has shown, the current mandate of IOC has a strong appeal to a variety of differentiated constituencies, both in the developed and developing world and at the national and global level. In fact, this appeal, which constantly calls for an increased level of activities, reflects a series of urgent needs that emerge when the nations are confronted with the increasing development and use of their ocean resources and their coastal zones.

The current position of IOC

8. This paper challenges the Member States to recognise and address the reality of IOC as an element of UNESCO and the UN system as it functions today, and the serious mismatch between the demands on IOC and its capacity to deliver. The demand derives from Member States, the resources for a response from a range of sources.

9. Roughly, UNESCO budgetary contribution to IOC represents 1% of the UNESCO total budget. The amount is allocated to IOC by UNESCO's governing organs, as one of the many budget decisions they adopt every two years. In return, the IOC is required to report bi-annually to the General Conference on the execution of its Programme (see item 3.3). Through the IOC Statutes the Governance of IOC is delegated by the General Conference of UNESCO onto the IOC Assembly. According to its Statutes and Financial Regulations (IOC-XXIV/Inf.4), the IOC Assembly discusses and approves the IOC Programme and Budget, but has no authority with respect to the resources that UNESCO assigns to IOC. In other words, the guidance given by IOC Member States and captured in the IOC Programme, is not binding on the process of resource allocation by UNESCO to IOC.

10. Set against this we find IOC is challenged to address, for example, climate impacts in the coastal zone, global marine assessment, ocean-related aspects of global hazards, and coordination of the implementation of the coastal observing system, while at the same time maintaining and sustaining existing activities as demanded by Member States. The resource drain has left several programmes with totally inadequate operating funds, way beyond critical mass, so that they now exist in name only.

11. The recent document presented to the Assembly in 2005: "We have a problem" (IOC-XXIII/2 Annex 8), reiterated that the future of IOC was in the hands of its Member States. Despite the warnings and encouragement to "trigger joint reflection" and to think about "where we are" and "where we want to go as an intergovernmental body dedicated to oceanography", the IOC governing bodies have not yet tackled the increasing difficulties with which IOC is confronted with its present Statutes and governance structure in UNESCO.

United Nations and UNESCO issues

12. The issues relating to oceans cut across many UN Agencies and activities. The need for a coordinated approach is consistent with wider UN considerations. The Past Secretary General of the UN, Mr Kofi Annan led an important effort to reform the UN. The Report of the High Level Panel on UN System-wide coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Environment, published in November 2006 (A/61/583), contains a series of recommendations on the Reform process. The new Secretary General, Mr Yon Ki Moon, was elected with a mandate to steer the Reform process to a successful completion. Avoiding duplication, overlapping of mandates and streamlining the delivery of programmes at country level are overall priority objectives of the reform. The report has a much elaborated set of recommendations in the area of development. There it proposes to drastically streamline the work at the country level by "delivering as One" through a consolidated, unique programme, agreed by each national government. Re-enforcing the work in humanitarian assistance and strengthening the normative role of UNEP as the environmental pillar of the system are other of the recommendations of the High Level Panel.

13. UNESCO is also challenged by the new reform process. Being an organization, with multiple missions in Education, Culture, Natural and Human Sciences, and Information the challenges for UNESCO are many. It has been experiencing zero nominal growth budgeting. This policy, maintained over several budgetary cycles, has exposed UNESCO to an almost permanent state of crisis, increasing its dependence on extra-budgetary resources for programme implementation, eroding its identity and increasingly limited perspectives. IOC has suffered successively in this reducing budget process.

Possible futures for IOC

14. For the IOC and the oceans, various remedies have been proposed in earlier reviews:
- (i) The creation of a new independent specialized organization inside the UN dealing with Ocean affairs, built by bringing together the ocean and marine programmes existing in several other UN organizations and in the central Secretariat. (IOC/FURES I and II¹)
 - (ii) The creation of a new independent specialized organization inside the UN, dealing with the current mandate expressed in the statutes of IOC.
 - (iii) The adoption of a regime of assessed additional member State contributions, under the authority given by UNESCO to the Assembly of IOC under current Article 10 of the statutes (“Financial and other resources”).
 - (iv) A closer functional arrangement with one or more of the existing UN organizations or programmes (i.e. FAO, IMO, UNEP, WMO).
 - (v) The re-enforcement of the IOC with its current mandate inside UNESCO by obtaining a more secure budgetary horizon guaranteed by a negotiated and binding agreement with UNESCO.
15. Some of the changes enumerated above, are not mutually exclusive. They will all require a high level of political will from Member States. The general conditions of the intergovernmental interactions have changed since some of these possibilities were first considered as options and may need reviewing in the current context.

Proposals

16. Member States could elevate IOC to the status of a technical specialized agency within the UN. This would require an intergovernmental negotiation and the adoption of a protocol or convention that would include an agreement on assessed contributions. This option would be a major step forward in consolidating the mandate of IOC and in the commitment of Member States in support of its current mission.
17. Alternatively, or as a first step, arrangements could be considered in UNESCO to secure a more stable financial horizon. Options include either an agreement negotiated with UNESCO setting the long-term budget, or a new commitment from Member States. The latter may be done through a Convention or similar instrument.
18. We the Member States of IOC must make a careful assessment of these various options.
19. Member States should realise that the option of continuing with the present structure at the present level of funding can only be viable if expectations and demands of IOC are viewed in a stable and steady context and commensurate with the expected outcomes.
20. As Officers we ask the Member States to agree that fundamental structural changes are needed and to accept the challenge of identifying and committing to more effective future arrangements.
21. This Assembly is asked to put into action the process of institutional adjustments to provide the world community with a responsible and effective reconsolidated Intergovernmental

¹ Ad hoc study Group on Measures to Ensure Adequate and Dependable Resources for the Commission’s Programme of Work (First meeting, Paris, 21-25 Nov. 1988; IOC/FURES-I/3 [SC-89/WS-23]); (second meeting, Paris, 11-13 January 1990; IOC/FURES-II/3s [SC-90/WS-13])

Oceanographic Commission. Further steps could include the realization of an Extraordinary Session of the Assembly in 2008, where an initial agreement among the Member States of the IOC could take place leading to the organization of an Intergovernmental Oceanographic Conference for the year 2010.

22. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission reaches its 50th Anniversary in 2010. It would be a firm commitment for the future if that Conference, empowered with the appropriate delegated powers by the participating Member States, could adopt the final text of an appropriate agreed instrument.