



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# Executive Board

Hundred and eighty-second session

# 182 EX/57

PARIS, 19 August 2009  
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Item 57 of the provisional agenda

## REVISION OF THE STATUTES OF THE WORLD COMMISSION ON THE ETHICS OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY (COMEST)

### SUMMARY

Under item 182 EX/56, the Executive Board is invited to consider recommending that the General Conference initiate the process for a possible universal declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change, which could lead to the development of a draft declaration for submission to the 36th session of the General Conference. The World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) would be expected to play a major role in advising the Director-General in the course of this work and its possible follow-up.

In order to enable COMEST to make the contribution expected of it, in the context of its other major commitments, to advise UNESCO on programmes in science ethics, the ethics of nanotechnologies and environmental ethics teaching, its capacity should be reinforced by giving it a structure identical to other expert advisory bodies, including specifically the International Bioethics Committee.

With this in mind, it is proposed to revise the Statutes of COMEST to expand its membership and Bureau and to increase the frequency of ordinary sessions.

Financial and administrative implications: see paragraph 7.

Action required of the Executive Board: see decision in paragraph 8.

## I. BACKGROUND

1. At its Sixth Ordinary Session (16-19 June 2009), the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST), drawing conclusions from its ongoing work on the ethical implications of global climate change, noted that, in view of the nature and extent of the scientific, social and human challenges of global climate change, which necessitate adoption of policies at the global level to address the pressing needs of the most vulnerable in the face of major uncertainties and the exigencies of international cooperation, it is urgent to determine universal ethical principles to guide responses to such challenges. COMEST therefore recommended that UNESCO should develop an ethical framework of principles in relation to climate change.

2. Under item 182 EX/56, the Executive Board is invited to consider recommending that the General Conference request the Director-General to commence work on a draft universal declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change, which could lead to development of a draft declaration for submission to the 36th session of the General Conference. The World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) would be expected to play a major role in advising the Director-General in the course of such work and its possible follow-up.

3. In addition to new work on ethics and climate change, COMEST has significant commitments in the area of science ethics – including contributing to monitoring of the implementation of the 1974 Recommendation on the Status of Scientific Researchers –, ethics of nanotechnologies and environmental ethics teaching.

4. On the basis of experience with analogous feasibility studies and with their follow-up in other areas of ethics, such as bioethics, the additional workload required by extensive consultation requirements on the development of a universal declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change is unlikely to be manageable by COMEST in its current configuration.

5. In order to enhance the capacity of COMEST, consistent with the tasks requested of it, it is therefore appropriate to modify the Statutes of COMEST in order to align its structure with that of the International Bioethics Committee. Pursuant to Article 10 of the Statutes, “The present Statutes may be modified by the Executive Board at its own initiative or on a proposal by the Director-General”.

6. The specific modifications proposed are as follows:

- the number of members should be expanded from 18 to 36, in order to ensure a wider range of expertise and better geographical representation (Article 3.1);
- the current status of ex officio membership (Article 3.5) should be abolished to compensate for the increase in individual membership, without prejudice to participation in the work of COMEST by specialists from international scientific programmes or associations pursuant to Articles 3.1 and 3.6 of the Statutes;
- the frequency of ordinary sessions should be increased from biennial to annual (Article 5.1);
- the Bureau should be expanded by the creation of two additional positions of Vice-President (Article 6.1) and the timing of elections and the term of office of Bureau members should henceforth be specified by the Rules of Procedure, by analogy with the Rules of Procedure of the International Bioethics Committee.

7. Increased membership of COMEST will entail an additional recurring financial cost for organization of sessions and Bureau meetings of \$140,000 per biennium, for which allocations will be made within the Draft Programme and Budget (35 C/5 Rev. for MP III). No financial implications

are taken into account in this estimation of the contribution of COMEST to any work on a universal declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change. Such implications are addressed in document 182 EX/56.

## II. CONCLUSION

8. Accordingly, the Executive Board may wish to consider adopting the following draft decision:

The Executive Board

1. Having examined documents 182 EX/56 and 182 EX/57,
2. Considering that it would be advisable to amend the Statutes of COMEST in the event that the General Conference were to decide to ask the Director-General to initiate work on a possible universal declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change,
3. Decides pursuant to Article 10 of the Statutes, to adopt the amendments proposed in document 182 EX/57, with effect from the date on which both of the following conditions have been met:
  - (a) the General Conference has adopted a decision to ask the Director-General to initiate work on a declaration or similar instrument on ethical principles in relation to climate change; and
  - (b) funding has been secured within the Approved Programme and Budget (35 C/5 for MP III) to cover the additional recurring financial costs entailed by the amendments.

## ANNEX

### Statutes of the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST)

#### As adopted by the Executive Board at its 154th session (154 EX/Decision 3.4.2)

##### Article 1

A World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology, hereinafter called “the Commission” (category V), is hereby established.

##### Article 2

The Commission shall be responsible for advising the Organization on its programme concerning the ethics of scientific knowledge and technology. It shall also be mandated:

- to be an intellectual forum for the exchange of ideas and experience;
- to detect on that basis the early signs of risk situations;
- to perform the role of adviser to decision-makers in this respect; and lastly,
- to promote dialogue between scientific communities, decision-makers and the public at large.

##### Article 3

1. The Commission shall be composed of 18 members, appointed by the Director-General following consultation with the National Commissions and Academies of Science in the Member States, and serving in a personal capacity. It shall have an open-ended structure and may bring in specialists on specific subjects.

2. The members shall be appointed for a four-year term, renewable once. In the event of the resignation or death of a Commission member, the Director-General shall appoint a replacement for the remainder of the current term.

#### As proposed for adoption by the Executive Board at its 182nd session

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- to perform the role of adviser to decision-makers in this respect; and lastly,
- to promote dialogue between scientific communities, decision-makers and the public at large.

##### Article 3

1. The Commission shall be composed of ~~48~~ **36** members, appointed by the Director-General following consultation with the National Commissions and Academies of Science in the Member States, and serving in a personal capacity. It shall have an open-ended structure and may bring in specialists on specific subjects.

2. The members shall be appointed for a four-year term, renewable once. In the event of the resignation or death of a Commission member, the Director-General shall appoint a replacement for the remainder of the current term.

3. One half of the members of the Commission shall be replaced every two years. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 2 above, when appointing the first members of the Commission, the Director-General shall designate the nine members whose term shall expire on 31 December 1999.

4. The members of the Commission shall be chosen from among eminent personalities in the fields of science, professional engineering, law, philosophy, culture, religion or politics, having the competence and the authority necessary to fulfil the functions entrusted to the Commission, taking due account of geographical distribution and ensuring coverage of the various disciplines and schools of thought.

5. The Presidents of UNESCO's five intergovernmental scientific programmes (IOC, MAB, MOST, IGCP and IHP), of the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) and the Intergovernmental Committee, and those of the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences (ICPHS), the International Social Science Council (ISSC), the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs shall be invited to participate in the work of the Commission.

6. The Commission shall define, in agreement with the Director-General, the conditions under which certain specialists, representatives of non-governmental organizations or personalities may be consulted in person, on the questions listed in its programme.

#### Article 4

1. The Member States and Associate Members of UNESCO may participate as observers in the meetings of the Commission.

2. States which are not members of UNESCO, but members of the United Nations system organizations, may participate as observers in the Commission's meetings at the invitation of the Director-General.

3. One half of the members of the Commission shall be replaced every two years. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 2 above, when appointing the first members of the Commission, the Director-General shall designate the nine members whose term shall expire on 31 December 1999.

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2. States which are not members of UNESCO, but members of the United Nations system organizations, may participate as observers in the Commission's meetings at the invitation of the Director-General.

3. The United Nations and the other organizations of the United Nations system with which UNESCO has concluded mutual representation agreements may participate as observers in the Commission's meetings.

4. The Commission shall define, in agreement with the Director-General, the conditions under which other intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations with similar purposes to those of the Commission may be invited to attend its debates.

#### Article 5

1. The Director-General shall convene the Commission in ordinary session once every two years. He/she may convene extraordinary sessions at the request of the President of the Commission, and subject to the availability of the necessary resources.

2. The Director-General, in consultation with the Bureau of the Commission, shall set the date and place of each session.

3. Any Member State of UNESCO, or member of one of the United Nations system organizations, may invite the Director-General to convene a session of the Commission on its territory.

#### Article 6

1. At each of its ordinary sessions, the Commission shall elect a President, two Vice-Presidents and a Rapporteur, who shall form the Bureau of the Commission and shall remain in office until the following ordinary session.

2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 above, the Director-General shall appoint the first President of the Commission.

3. The Director-General shall convene the Bureau, in consultation with the President, and shall be represented at the Bureau's meetings.

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#### Article 6

1. ~~At each of its ordinary sessions, t~~The Commission shall elect a President, ~~two~~**four** Vice-Presidents and a Rapporteur, who shall form the Bureau of the Commission ~~and shall remain in office until the following ordinary session.~~ **The timing of elections and the term of office of Bureau members shall be specified by the Rules of Procedure pursuant to Article 9.1 hereunder.**

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3. The Director-General shall convene the Bureau, in consultation with the President, and shall be represented at the Bureau's meetings.

#### Article 7

1. The Director-General shall provide the staff and the resources needed to ensure the operation of the Commission's Secretariat.
2. The Director-General of UNESCO shall designate a member of the UNESCO Secretariat as the Executive Secretary of the Commission.

#### Article 8

1. The travel expenses and subsistence allowances payable to Commission members in connection with meetings shall be borne by UNESCO, in accordance with the applicable travel regulations.
2. The costs arising from the participation of specialists, in connection with any hearings requested by the Commission, shall be borne by UNESCO, in accordance with the applicable travel regulations.
3. The international non-governmental organizations invited to participate in the Commission's work shall bear the expenses arising from the participation of their representative in the Commission's sessions.
4. The running expenses of the Commission shall be financed by an allocation made for that purpose by the General Conference at each of its ordinary sessions or by extrabudgetary resources that States may donate for that purpose.

#### Article 9

1. The Commission shall establish its Rules of Procedure, which shall be submitted to the Director-General for approval.
2. The Director-General shall draw up the agenda of the Commission's sessions, after consultation with the President of the Commission.
3. After each session, the Commission shall submit to the Director-General a report on its work, and its recommendations. The Director-General shall transmit the results of the Commission's work to the governing bodies of the Organization, and to the bodies concerned by the Commission's proposals.

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