Report

Fourth Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO on the occasion of the 39th session of the General Conference
(Friday, 27 October 2017, UNESCO headquarters)

Prepared by the Rapporteurs:

Dr Lubna Selaibeekh, Secretary-General of Bahrain National Commission for UNESCO, and
Ms İrem Alpaslan, Assistant Secretary-General of Turkish National Commission for UNESCO

The Fourth Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO took place at UNESCO Headquarters on 27 October 2017. It was attended by more than 160 participants representing 136 Member States/Associate Members and 21 Field Offices.

Opening Session

Mr James Bridge, Secretary-General of the United Kingdom National Commission, was elected as the Chair of the meeting, whilst Dr Lubna Selaibeekh, Secretary-General of Bahrain National Commission, and Ms İrem Alpaslan, Assistant Secretary-General of the Turkish National Commission, were elected as Rapporteurs.

The agenda, introduced and adopted at the opening session, was comprised of the following four main topics:
1. "Effective implementation of SDG's, mainly SDG 4 through sharing of experiences, and other endeavours";
2. "Regulatory framework regarding associations, Centres and Clubs for UNESCO";
3. "Strengthening the role of National Commissions in coordinating UNESCO programmes and expanding their cooperation with HQ and other National Commissions";
4. "Promoting efficient interaction between National Commissions and UNESCO Field Offices".

In his introductory speech Mr Eric Falt, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Public Information, emphasized the importance and relevance of the event as evidenced by more than 120 National Commissions participating in the meeting. He thanked the Chinese National Commission for their support provided to ensure interpretation during this meeting as well as organization of two Consultation Meetings on UNESCO Clubs movement with the WFUCA Executive Board members and National Commissions in May and June 2017 respectively. He also appreciated the Turkish National Commission’s support by co-hosting the Reception on the occasion of the current meeting.

Referring to the previous meetings organized in Kazakhstan, China and the Headquarters, ADG also indicated that collaboration and sharing between National Commissions had increased and become more productive. In this regard, several examples of regional/sub-regional networks and gatherings were provided such as Europe/EFTA, Nordic, Portuguese-speaking, Visegrad, and Central America.

He informed the participants that the Kenya National Commission proposed to generously host the Fifth Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO in June next year.
As regards the topics to be discussed during the 39th session of the General Conference, Mr Falt highlighted the following three items directly related to the National Commissions: Draft Regulatory Framework Regarding Associations, Centres and Clubs for UNESCO\(^1\), Principles and Conditions of the Participation Programme and Emergency Assistance\(^2\), and the Proposals for Qualitative Dialogue Between Member States and NGOs, including within the Governing Bodies\(^3\).

Finally, he stated that the Annual Report of the National Commissions for UNESCO would be continuously published as the fifth edition, which, like the previous one, was to be published online only in a bilingual format due to financial constraints. Suggestions to enhance content and presentation were encouraged.

**Topic 1: Effective Implementation of SDG’s, mainly SDG 4 through sharing of experiences and other endeavors**

The two presenters for this topic were Mr Jean-Yves Le Saux, Director of the Bureau of Strategic Planning, and Ms Anna D’addio, Senior Policy Analyst of the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report).

Mr Jean-Yves Le Saux gave a general outline of the new environment of 2030 Agenda on. He focused on several different aspects such as a premium on national ownership and assistance at the country level, a universal agenda addressing all countries and groups. He said that no goal or target should be considered met unless it was met for all social and economic groups, leaving no one behind.

Mr Le Saux also stated several core thematic areas of direct relevance to UNESCO’s mandate such as quality education (SDG 4), science, technology and innovation for sustainable development (SDG 17), fresh water (SDG 6 and 15), Ocean (SDG 14), the promotion of culture as a key enabler of sustainable development (SDG 11) as well as transversal areas such as gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, youth, inequalities and peaceful societies. He described SDG 16 towards “just, peaceful, equitable and inclusive societies” as a key SDG for UNESCO as introducing peace and sustainable institutional dialogue lies at the core of the mandate of the Organization.

Mr Le Saux defined two entry points for the National Commissions. First is the universality of the Agenda, which allows the National Commissions to be involved either as part of UNESCO or within their countries. Second is the resource mobilization, which Mr Le Saux described as a role not just for the Secretariat but also for the National Commissions.

The details and thematic focuses, as well as SDG relations to Major Programmes are provided in the [presentation](#) of Mr Le Saux.

The second presenter - Ms Anna D’addio, Senior Policy Analyst of the GEM Report team, briefly introduced the GEM Report that had been given a mandate by the international community in 2015 to provide global monitoring of SDG 4 and its related targets. Every year the Report analyzes progress made and persisting challenges in education. The presentation focused mainly on the

---

\(^1\) 39 C/54  
\(^2\) 39 C/51  
\(^3\) 39 C/42
governance aspects of accountability mechanism and was accompanied with a video to illustrate “how complex is the accountability”.

The facts and figures with the recommendations of GMR are provided in the presentation of Ms. D’addio entitled “Accountability in Education: Meeting Our Commitments”. GEM Report is available online at: https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2017/accountability-education

About 10 National Commissions participated in the open discussion of the first topic and expressed multiple opinions.

Overall, the SDGs are viewed as a momentum and a good opportunity for National Commissions to collaborate, further their work and make messages more relevant. National Commissions can play much more active role in policy dialogue and resource mobilization for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The latter is not so much about the money as it is about the long-term partnership and agreement upon joint actions. The effectiveness of National Commissions’ focus on common denominators and determining priority objectives reflect the needs of each country or region. The participants agreed that cooperation among National Commissions is highly valuable for the SDGs implementation as sharing best practices and learning from each other are beneficial and embedded in this universal Agenda. Also, National Commissions’ roles in facilitating and outreaching activities as well as transforming and sharing information with wider audiences are regarded as their added value in relation to the 2030 Agenda. UNESCO's clear and recognized role and mandate in SDG 4 facilitate National Commissions’ actions and participation under this goal.

Some suggestions that were put forward during the meeting are as follows:

- To better focus the Secretariat’s presentations on SDGs on the potential role of National Commissions in the implementation of SDGs, namely on how National Commissions’ activities will be transformed into UNESCO's contribution to the 2030 Agenda;
- To draft a strategy on cooperation among the National Commissions and the Secretariat in implementing, coordinating and monitoring SDGs for its further discussion at the Fifth Interregional Meeting of National Commissions;
- To facilitate partnerships and the exchange of best practices among National Commissions for greater information and experience sharing regarding SDGs;
- To strengthen partnerships beyond governments, involving civil society and private sector, to take concrete actions on 17 SDGs based on common denominators;
- To look for ways to strengthen national capacities in managing indicators related to SDGs;
- To consider establishing National committees on SDGs/SDG4, or working groups for each target within National Commissions or at their initiative.

**Topic 2: Strengthening the role of National Commissions in coordinating UNESCO programmes and expanding their cooperation with HQ and other National Commissions.**

The networks and cooperation initiatives between the National Commissions are described as a bi-directional achievement. Initiatives shared during the meeting showcased various approaches to networking.

The discussions highlighted that the networking and meetings should lead somewhere, and have tangible results and outcomes. This was mentioned especially with respect to the agenda of future interregional meetings. Active participation of National Commissions in the design, format and
content was underlined. The importance of tangible results was also highlighted in connection with national priorities, regarded as a key for implementation.

National Commissions are in a strong position to understand and assess UNESCO designations and to support multinational nominations thereby achieving UNESCO’s goals at the national level. Their capacity in mobilizing expertise at the national and international levels plays an important role in capacity building of peace and its integration in inter alia comprehensive education policies. Also in relation to the first topic on SDGs, National Commissions are called upon for the mobilization of their experts, to support the implementation of SDGs.

The mandate of National Commissions in the use of UNESCO name, acronym and logo is an important part of their work at the national level and regarded as a good practice. Therefore the Recommendation 21 of the External Evaluation “revising the 2007 Directives so as to increase the Organization’s control over the use of its name and to assess, when such use is authorized, the corresponding risks and benefits” may heavily increase the workload of the Secretariat and have a negative impact on National Commissions.

The contribution of a National Commission and its participation in the implementation of UNESCO programmes would rely largely on the staff, structure and capacity. This is regarded as one of the parameters that affect the diversity in levels of contribution. In this respect, capacity building and engagements (visits) are still considered important for the National Commissions to be able to contribute equally or at least at a minimum level. Central services suffer the most from the financial crisis thereby both capacity building activities for National Commissions and other related programmes such as the Participation Programme are affected. Nevertheless, both the Secretariat and the National Commissions should endeavor to develop innovative methods.

The participants warmly welcomed the proposal of the Kenyan National Commission to host the Fifth Interregional Meeting of National Commissions on June 26-28, 2018.

Following were the findings and recommendations of the session:

- To facilitate the exchange of “good practices” stories on this topic;
- To use preparation of the Fifth Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for real discussions on how to cooperate on implementing and monitoring SDGs, to build a specific strategy ahead;
- To establish Working Group on the contents and format of the 5th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions and to identify clearly the items for discussion, 1-2 crosscutting initiatives while also taking into account the difference in capacity and structure;
- To include this topic in the agenda of all National Commissions meetings;
- To start creating regional spaces for youth;
- To develop capacity-building for National Commissions to help them contribute at more or less equal level to UNESCO’s work;
- To set up a roster of National Commissions that are ready to engage with other National Commissions on capacity-building, specifying their strong and weak points;
- To develop guideline for basic structure of National Commissions;
- To provide additional support to National Commissions so that they can initiate activities and be more involved in implementing UNESCO programmes;
- To update public information material about UNESCO and adapt it to the needs of all National Commissions;
To better link UNESCO programmes to national priorities and build up effective partnerships at the national level and to increase collaboration among National Commissions within specific UNESCO Programmes, Lists, Registers:

- To look for ways to activate debate and exchange between National Commissions through various National Commissions networks.

**Topic 3: Regulatory framework regarding Associations, Centres and Clubs for UNESCO**

A brief introduction with suggestions was made by Mr Eric Falt, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Public Information, and followed by an open discussion on this topic.

Mr Eric Falt referred to the Action Plan for enhancing the cooperation of UNESCO’s Secretariat with National Commissions and its recommendations, especially recommendation 6, which calls upon National Commissions to accredit, monitor and assess as appropriate the Associations, Centres and Clubs for UNESCO in their respective countries. With a view to implementing recommendation 6 of the Action Plan, two consultation meetings on a draft Regulatory Framework were organized in May and June 2017 respectively, with participation of the WFUCA Executive Board members and some 40 Member States represented by National Commissions and Permanent Delegations. He informed that the document 39 C/54 included this draft, which was submitted to the General Conference for adoption.

He stressed that the draft Framework reflected upon various cases and concerns, which were raised by National Commissions stemming from their national experience. In this regard, he also mentioned that in some countries such as in China, Japan, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, this movement was functioning very well and fully supported by their National Commissions. However, in other countries from all regions, there are cases where the name of UNESCO was used inappropriately for financial purposes or political declarations, thereby risking the Organization’s visibility and image.

As for the key provisions of the Framework, Mr. Falt touched upon four main issues:

Firstly, the Framework proposes the use of either “Clubs” or “Associations” as part of the Movement because “Centres of UNESCO” may be confused with Category 2 Centres. Secondly, the Framework reaffirms the National Commissions’ authority and responsibility to provide supervision. Thirdly, the Framework sets out rules of engagement where the Clubs and Associations are required to submit to the National Commission an action plan at the beginning of each year, as well as an activity report at the end of the year. Finally, the Framework requires the Clubs and Associations to commit not to use their entities for political purposes and any profit-making enterprise; not to make statements in the name of UNESCO or of their National Commission; and not to take upon themselves to undertake the rights and prerogatives of UNESCO.

A variety of questions and comments were shared during the open discussion. Some participants indicated that the name of the national entities should be better clarified. Some representatives stressed that the activities of the Clubs and Associations should not be limited with strict rules. Others highlighted that more focus should be given to the projects and activities as to how they reflect the mission of UNESCO, rather than to the issue of misuse of emblem and name of the Organization. As such, special attention was called for to some complex cases related to the Clubs movement such as initiating programmes that are not of UNESCO; awarding honorific doctorates and peace ambassadors; registering UNESCO names to the national business registers. The National Commissions therefore will require sufficient tools to prevent such situations.
The findings and recommendations of the discussion are summarized as follows:

- To define the competencies of the World Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centers and Associations (WFUCA) and to better regulate its activities;
- To establish an Ad Hoc Committee to discuss ways to better diffuse and implement the Regulatory Framework in Member States after its adoption by the General Conference;
- To intervene and support National Commissions in most complicated cases of unauthorized use of UNESCO’s name;
- To help with capacity-building in the field of cooperation among National Commissions and Clubs for UNESCO, especially in the countries facing difficulties in this area;
- To foster cooperation between Clubs for UNESCO of different countries.

**Topic 4: Promoting efficient interaction between National Commissions and UNESCO Field Offices**

In his brief presentation Mr Axel Plathe, Director for Field Support and Coordination, covered various aspects of working in the field and introduced key data on this topic. He also highlighted key parameters including 2030 Agenda, review of the UN development system by UNSG (physical presence, role of UN resident coordinator and common operational services) along with recommendations and evaluations by external audits of the field network.

The relations between National Commissions and Field Offices were summarized by: common purpose (contribution to peace and security by promoting collaboration through education, science and culture), unity of action (working together to accomplish UNESCO’s mandate) and difference in legal/administrative structures and reporting lines.

Following were presentations by four Directors of Field Offices: Ms Ann Therese Ndong Jatta, Director of the Multi-Sectoral Office in Nairobi for East Africa, Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, Director of New Delhi Cluster Office, Ms Katherine Grigsby, Director of UNESCO Office in Kingston and Ms Krista Pikkat, Director of UNESCO Office in Almaty (this link includes the details of these presentations).

After the presentations an open discussion was held to exchange information and views among the participants.

The discussion under this topic interleaved with Topic 2, focusing on the enhancement of cooperation between the National Commissions and Field Offices. Participants called for joining forces to handle regional issues and to achieve concrete results in the regions where both the Field Office and National Commissions exist. Some participants underlined and thanked for support in capacity and finances provided by the Field Offices allowing for their participation in the General Conference.

Under this topic the following actions were suggested by the representatives:

- To create a Network of UNESCO Field Offices in the Arab region and define at least a joint regional strategy
- To facilitate closer communication between National Commissions and Field Offices through monthly newsletter
- To organize regular meetings of National Commissions with Field Offices in addition to the Interregional Meetings.
- To increase relevance of UNESCO activities in national contexts using various resources such as Participation Programme, extra-budgetary funds etc.

All interventions emphasized that National Commissions should receive special attention from Member States because they are important in contributing to the implementation of UNESCO activities and projects. Efforts and cooperation among National Commissions should be mobilized both at the bilateral level between Member States and at regional/interregional levels to provide support in all available forms and improve the performance of National Commissions.

In light of the difficult financial situation of UNESCO, it is necessary to use and reinforce the support provided by some National Commissions by involving the regional offices in capacity building projects for National Commissions.

North-South cooperation will strengthen UNESCO's role and help it achieve the goals of sustainable development. In this context, a strong networking of National Commissions, if established, will be a source of strength for the Organization as they are cooperating and supporting agencies to implement UNESCO programmes and activities.

The meeting was formally closed by Ms Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO.


She stated that the Charter of National Commissions for UNESCO reaffirms the diversity of National Commissions that is seen as a strength and a source of enrichment for the Organization. While too much diversity may prevent opinions from converging, striking the right balance, between diversity and unity, and certainly cooperation must always prevail.

Ms Bokova welcomed the initiatives taken to establish cooperative networks and stated that she always believed in National Commissions as one of the greatest strengths of UNESCO. She ended her speech by thanking the National Commissions for their support, dynamism, energy and commitment to UNESCO, all-important as never before.

Mr James Bridge, Chair of the Meeting, thanked the Director-General, the members of the Secretariat as well as the representatives of the National Commissions. He said that working at a grass roots level was needed more than ever to support multilateral action.

Ms Marjutka Hafner, Secretary-General of the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO, took the floor to thank Ms. Irina Bokova on behalf of all National Commissions. She expressed sincere gratitude to the DG for providing National Commissions with unyielding support, for mentioning the role of National Commissions on every possible occasion at the General Conference and Executive Board, and for enabling the National Commissions to reach the current level of development.

The meeting ended with a family photo shoot followed by the reception generously co-hosted by the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO.