



World Commission on the Ethics
of Scientific Knowledge and Technology
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**World Commission on the Ethics of
Scientific Knowledge and Technology**

**Summary Report on Decisions
Adopted at the Seventh Ordinary Session**

In private session on 12 October 2011, COMEST conducted its statutory business, including in particular election of the Bureau, and adopted several decisions based on the substantive work discussed in the course of the Ordinary Session and designed to take forward earlier work on an ethical framework for climate change policies, on science ethics and on nanotechnologies and converging technologies. COMEST also adopted a Statement on a Framework of Ethical Principles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Adaptation.

Statutory business

Pursuant to Article 6.1 of its Statutes, COMEST proceeded to elect its Bureau.

The status of outgoing Bureau members was first noted, pursuant to Rule 9.2 of the Rules of Procedure. The President, Mr Alain Pompidou (France), and the Rapporteur, Mr Johan Hattingh (South Africa), were not eligible, having served two Bureau terms, whereas the outgoing Vice-Presidents, Ms Hebe Vessuri (Venezuela) and Mr Rajaona Andriamananjara (Madagascar), were eligible for re-election.

After calling for nominations from its members for the four positions, COMEST elected by consensus the following Bureau, to serve until the next Ordinary Session:

- President Mr Khalid Al-Ali (Qatar)
- Vice-Presidents Ms Hebe Vessuri (Venezuela)
 Mr Rajaona Andriamananjara (Madagascar)
- Rapporteur Mr Henry Richardson (United States of America)

A discussion also took place on the Rules of Procedure of COMEST as adopted in 1999. Attention was drawn to a material error in Rule 9.1, which states, in contradiction to Article 6.1 of the Statutes, that the Bureau should comprise four Vice-Presidents. The Statutes taking precedence over the Rules of Procedure, and the invariable practice having been to elect two Vice-Presidents, it was agreed that revised Rules of Procedure should be adopted and submitted for the approval of the Director-General, pursuant to Article 9.1 of the Statutes.

However, rather than adopting revised Rules of Procedure with immediate effect addressing only the above technical concern, COMEST requested the Secretariat, after consultation with the Bureau, to submit detailed proposals for revision to the Extraordinary Session envisaged in 2012, taking account of other concerns expressed during the 7th Ordinary Session, including the absence of detailed rules for the conduct of elections, the possibility of requiring COMEST members to join a Working Group of their choice, and the absence of clear rules for decision-making, including outside sessions.

Organizational issues

At the invitation of the incoming President and of the Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, representing the Director-General, COMEST conducted a general review of its working methods. Concerns were expressed about the process and timing for the preparation of documents, which COMEST members noted with regret had been circulated too late to permit effective preparation of work at the session. In discussion on these organizational problems, it was agreed that COMEST was, in general, excessively dependent on the substantive input of the secretariat. In order to improve performance in this regard, it was agreed that working group chairs should take more direct responsibility for substantive work, with the technical support of the secretariat and under the overall coordination of the Rapporteur.

A wide-ranging review also took place of relations between COMEST and the International Bioethics Committee (IBC), with the participation of Mr Stefano Semplici, President of IBC, in his capacity as an *ex officio* member of COMEST. The very constructive discussion concluded that there were many areas of shared concern and that information should be regularly exchanged between the respective Presidents with a view to identifying potential synergies and joint actions. In addition to *ex officio* representation of IBC in COMEST, it was proposed to ensure representation of COMEST in all sessions of IBC. Finally specific measures for joint work were proposed in the area of nanotechnologies and converging technologies (see below).

COMEST reviewed the current mandate and composition of its working groups in light of the aforementioned discussion on working methods, of substantive requirements, and of the retirement at the end of 2011 of certain members closely associated with past work who will have completed two four-year terms.

With respect to the Environmental Ethics Working Group, it was noted that the retirement of its Chair, Ms Nadja Tollemache (New Zealand) and of Mr Ruben Apressyan (Russia), as well as Mr Hattingh, would leave it understaffed. Furthermore, it was suggested that Ms Vessuri might not wish to remain in two working groups. Among the remaining members, Mr Rainier Ibana (Philippines) was elected Chair by consensus.

The composition of the Environmental Ethics Working Group, as of 17 October 2011, is therefore as follows: Mr Ibana (Chair), Ms Tollemache, Mr Apressyan, Mr Hattingh and Mr Andriamananjara. An urgent need was noted to ensure that members currently not participating in any working group, along with members newly appointed to COMEST in January 2012, reinforce the Working Group. In addition, consideration should be given to formal involvement of non-COMEST members in the work of COMEST on environmental ethics, consistently with the initiative taken to establish a Francophone African working group on the subject.

Given the retirement at the end of 2011 of Mr Pompidou, Chair of the Science Ethics Working Group, and in order to improve the efficiency of the work of COMEST and to ensure that transversal science ethics concerns are appropriately reflected in all COMEST's activities, it was decided to merge the Working Groups on Science Ethics and on Nanotechnologies and Converging Technologies into a new Science Ethics Working Group with a

specific focus, in addition to general science ethics concerns, on nanotechnologies and converging technologies. Mr Phillippe Busquin (Belgium), outgoing Chair of the Working Group on Nanotechnologies and Converging Technologies, was elected by consensus as Chair of the newly formed working group.

Furthermore, on the recommendation of the Working Group on Nanotechnologies and Converging Technologies, COMEST ratified the cooptation of three non-COMEST members actively involved in its work.

The composition of the Science Ethics Working Group, as of 17 October 2011, is therefore as follows:

- COMEST members: Mr Busquin (Chair), Ms Tafeeda Jarbawi (Palestinian Territories), Ms Martá Kollárová (Slovakia), Ms Susana Sommer (Argentina), Ms Hebe Vessuri (Venezuela) and Mr Kim Hwan-Suk (Republic of Korea),
- non-COMEST members: Ms Ineke Malsch (Netherlands), Mr Bert Gordijn (Netherlands) and Mr Bak Hee-Je (Republic of Korea).

Discussion also took place on sessions to be held in 2012-13.

It was agreed that the President should propose to the Director-General, pursuant to Article 5.1 of the Statutes, the organization of an Extraordinary Session to be held in Paris – unless an alternative invitation were in due course to be received from a UNESCO Member State – in either late June or early July 2012. The Secretariat was requested immediately to check the availability of all COMEST members, including those not present at the Ordinary Session, with a view to finalizing the dates of the proposed Extraordinary Session by end November 2011.

It was further agreed that the President should recommend to the Director-General that the Ordinary Session to be organized in 2013, pursuant to Article 5.1 of the Statutes, be held in June, and if possible in Central or Eastern Europe – the only region in which COMEST has not yet met in session. In light of this concern, Ms Kollárová proposed to discuss at the earliest opportunity with the Slovak National Commission for UNESCO whether there might be interest in convening the 2013 Ordinary Session in Slovakia. Furthermore, the secretariat undertook to ensure that all Member States in the region are informed about the discussions of COMEST on location of the 2013 Ordinary Session and given the opportunity to invite the Director-General to convene it on their territory, pursuant to Article 5.3 of the Statutes.

Decisions with respect to work on ethics and climate change

After debate on the draft report on “An Ethical Framework for Climate Change Policies” submitted to it for consideration,¹ COMEST decided on a three-track strategy for continuation of its work in this thematic area.

- A two-page statement on “A Framework of Ethical Principles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Adaptation”, elaborated during the session on the basis of the discussion on the draft report, was revised and adopted in draft. The final version of the document, after stylistic and substantive revision by the Bureau in conjunction with the outgoing Rapporteur, Mr Hattingh, to ensure its conformity with the spirit in which it was adopted by the Ordinary Session, is appended to the present report.
- It was agreed that the draft report should be reworked, under the responsibility of the Working Group on Environmental Ethics, in order to turn it into an analytical background document supporting the aforementioned Framework. A second draft of the document will be submitted to the Extraordinary Session proposed in 2012.
- It was proposed that an international conference on climate change ethics be convened in late 2012, based on a concept note to be drafted jointly by COMEST and the secretariat, for which the three reports of COMEST on various aspects of the subject² would serve as background documentation. Leading international experts in the field would be invited to prepare papers responding to the various substantive areas identified by the work of COMEST. Advance versions of the papers would be discussed by the Environmental Ethics Working Group, either in a preparatory seminar or online, with a view to ensuring the effectiveness of the proposed conference in producing material that could be published in an edited volume in 2013 with the potential to serve as a reference on the subject. It was proposed that the outcome publication should pursue three related objectives: to provide substantive closure for the various strands of COMEST's work on climate change, to ensure the visibility and credibility of the work of COMEST, and to shape international agendas on climate change by reference to ethical concerns and principles. It was noted, however, that the aforementioned proposal could not be funded solely from the regular budget of UNESCO and would require specific partnerships and/or fundraising, to which COMEST members undertook to contribute.

¹ Session document SHS/EST/COMEST2011/EN/pub-20.

² Viz. the report on *Ethical Implications of Global Climate Change*, the interim report *Towards an Ethical Framework for Climate Change*, and the report to be produced on the analytical background for the Framework of Ethical Principles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Adaptation, as specified in the second track of the present decision point.

Decisions with respect to work on science ethics

After detailed discussion of the draft report on science ethics submitted to it for consideration,³ and taking account of the outcomes of other processes in the same area,⁴ COMEST reached the conclusion that further textual revision would not produce an outcome ensuring focus and added value. It was judged that the current draft report on science ethics incorporated too much background material and did not propose specific enough conclusions.

Noting that other institutional processes, with many of which UNESCO was associated, had produced significant clarification of general ethical principles to regulate science and the professional conduct of scientists, COMEST agreed that its own work should, while building on and if appropriate extending those achievements, focus on the complementary areas of science governance and science and society relations.

With regard to planning of the future work of COMEST, it was further agreed that a connection should be sought between finalization of a preliminary statement on science governance and science and society relations and consideration by the UNESCO Executive Board of the report of the Director-General on implementation of the 1974 Recommendation on the Status of Scientific Researchers. UNESCO Member States have been invited to formulate their observations on implementation of the Recommendation by 15 January 2012, taking account *inter alia* of the recommendations made by COMEST at its 6th Ordinary Session, and the Director-General's report will be considered by the Executive Board at its 189th session, expected to be held in April 2012. It was noted that publication of a COMEST document before the Executive Board session is likely to ensure its visibility and relevance, and furthermore to contribute to a discussion on the 1974 Recommendation that will give due regard to ethical issues.

In order to achieve this objective, the Chair of the Working Group on Science Ethics was requested to meet with the secretariat at the earliest opportunity in order to establish a timeline and working method, which should be communicated to the Bureau for information.

Decisions with respect to work on the ethics of nanotechnologies and converging technologies

COMEST considered the recommendations made to it by the Working Group on Nanotechnologies and Converging Technologies, which met in Brussels, Belgium, on 27-28 April 2011. After discussion, it was decided to accept and to implement all of the proposed decisions, viz.:

³ Session document SHS/EST/COMEST2011/EN/pub-19.

⁴ Including specifically the reports of the OECD Global Science Forum on *Best Practices for Ensuring Scientific Integrity and Preventing Misconduct* (2007) and on "Facilitating International Research Misconduct Investigations" (2009); the 2008 ICSU report on *Freedom, Responsibility and Universality of Science*; the 2010 Singapore Statement on Research Integrity; and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity proposed by the European Science Foundation in its 2010 report on *Fostering Research Integrity in Europe*.

- Extension of the Working Group, as reconfigured, to co-opted non-COMEST members, as discussed above.
- It was agreed to adopt a pragmatic approach to definitional issues. Instead of trying to state what “nanotechnologies” or “converging technologies” are, COMEST should state clearly, in ethical terms, which questions it proposes to address. While the term “ethics of nanotechnologies” remains convenient, what COMEST is really engaged in is an ethical approach to certain problems related to nanotechnologies, building on the analysis proposed in its 2008 report.⁵
- While COMEST should ultimately aim at elaborating ethical principles bearing on the problems identified as deserving attention, work in 2012 should first proceed on a consultative basis in order to survey stakeholders’ views as to problems and to the ethical principles that can help to address them. The Working Group was requested to liaise with the secretariat to elaborate proposals for such a consultation to be put to the Bureau in due course.
- IBC should be involved in COMEST work on nanotechnologies and converging technologies, following the successful precedent of the aforementioned meeting in Brussels in April 2011. Specifically, it was agreed that IBC should be invited to nominate one or two of its members to join the COMEST Working Group, as reconfigured.
- COMEST should make its work more visible, ideally through a high-profile event in 2012, to be organized on the basis of extrabudgetary support, *inter alia* to present the outcomes of the proposed consultation on stakeholders’ views.
- Consistently with the recommendations adopted at its 6th Ordinary Session, COMEST should participate actively in follow-up of the regional meeting on nanotechnologies organized by UNESCO in May 2009 in Doha, Qatar, with the objective of setting a course for an ethical approach to nanotechnologies in the Arab region, based on the commitment of institutions that have the capacity to support an ambitious initiative. The Working Group was requested to liaise with the secretariat in order to elaborate concrete proposals to be brought to the attention of the Bureau in due course.

Decisions with respect to work on the ethics of the information society

Welcoming the overview discussion that took place at the session, with the participation in particular of representatives of the UNESCO Sector for Communication and Information, COMEST requested the secretariat to follow up appropriately on the discussion, including issues of privacy, malice and access to information, and aspects relating to youth.

⁵ COMEST, *Nanotechnologies and Ethics: Policies and Actions*. UNESCO, 2008.

It was noted that COMEST may have the opportunity to present its work at the upcoming meeting of the Bureau of the Information for All Programme (IFAP) in Paris in January 2012. More generally, it was regarded as desirable to ensure regular exchanges of information and views between COMEST and the IFAP Council.

Finally, it was agreed that COMEST should be involved, on a basis to be determined, in any activities organized by UNESCO at the annual Forum of the World Summit on the Information Society.

APPENDIX

A FRAMEWORK OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Adopted at the 7th Ordinary Session of the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) in Doha, Qatar (9-12 October 2011)

Preamble

Having considered the far-reaching global changes that would follow from unmitigated climate change whatever its causes, and

Taking into account the uncertain and highly politicized context within which any international and national actions are taken in efforts to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects, and

Noting its mandate to advise Member States and the Director-General of UNESCO, COMEST proposes the following framework of ethical principles and responsibilities, which can be used by States, international organizations, NGOs, CBOs, corporations, the media, local authorities, and individuals, to aid in the formulation and implementation of adaptation policies and address the effects of climate change:

Principles

The principles hereunder state the ethical basis on which responsibilities in respect of climate change may be established.

1. **Avoiding harming** people or the environment by failing to act in response to climate change or by responding to it in an ill-considered way.
2. **Fairness** in the distribution of the burdens of climate change, and the benefits of appropriately responding to it, with special reference to the position of vulnerable populations, future generations, and indigenous peoples, women, and children.
3. **Equitable access** to vital resources, to medical, scientific and technological developments, as well as knowledge about climate change and the measures taken to adapt to it.
4. **The intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind** in facing the shared challenges of climate change and the consequences of climate-related disasters.
5. **Environmental sustainability**, understood as embracing the protection of biodiversity and the integrity of ecosystems as the very basis of life on earth.

Responsibilities

The principles listed above give rise to stakeholder responsibilities in respect of climate change adaptation.

1. *To establish an adequate scientific knowledge base* about the causes of climate change, the different effects it has on different regions, and the different adaptation needs it generates in different parts of the world. This includes the establishment of the capacity to generate this scientific knowledge, to interpret it, and to share it with those who may require it for adaptation, wherever they are.
2. *To recognize, respect, and make appropriate use of local and indigenous knowledge* relevant to climate change adaptation.
3. *To promote adequate education and awareness building* to establish the basis on which the adaptation needs created by the challenges of climate change, and appropriate responses to it, can be grasped by relevant stakeholders.
4. *To disseminate information about climate change adaptation* that is scientifically sound and readily accessible.
5. *To build the capacity for appropriate ethical reflection* to enhance the ability of policy-makers and of societies in general to deal with the ethical challenges of climate change, taking into account cultural sensitivities.
6. *To empower* the victims of climate change and promote their genuine participation in the development and implementation of adaptation policies.
7. *To assist* those more vulnerable to the immediate effects of climate change where the capacity exists to offer such assistance.
8. *To provide assistance* for climate change adaptation where the capacity for it does not exist, in addition to development aid.
9. *To protect the common heritage* of humankind when developing and implementing climate change policies.
10. *To be sensitive and responsive* to the variety and variability of stakeholders' circumstances in developing and implementing policies to adapt to climate change.
11. *To assess the impact* of measures taken to respond to climate change with due regard to the fragility of ecosystems and the interests of vulnerable populations and future generations.
12. *To identify and overcome the common obstacles* that undermine the ability of stakeholders to appropriately respond and adapt to the challenges of climate change, such as the priority given to short-term social consequences, prejudice and bias, cognitive constraints, and the use of inappropriate methods of cost-benefit analysis, financial discounting, and impact assessment.
13. *To consider* the effects of climate change on *all life*, and not only on humans.
14. *To develop resilient policies* that can continue to function in the face of unexpected challenges brought about by climate change.

Stakeholders are encouraged to further explore and discuss these principles and responsibilities and to share the results of their deliberations with COMEST.