



World Commission on the Ethics  
of Scientific Knowledge and Technology

8<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session  
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## **Draft Action Plan (2013 – 2015)**

**to Follow Up the Decision of the Executive Board of UNESCO on the  
Desirability of Preparing a Declaration of Ethical Principles in  
Relation to Climate Change (190 EX/ Decision 10)**

**DRAFT n° 2**

**May 2013**

## 1. PURPOSE

The World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) has been contributing actively to UNESCO's work on environmental ethics since its creation in 1998.

In a decision adopted by its Extraordinary Session in July 2012 in Paris, COMEST proposed its ongoing work on ethical issues in climate change adaptation might further be extended in due to cover ethical principles in relation to climate change in a more comprehensive manner.

In October 2012, at its 190<sup>th</sup> session, the Executive Board of UNESCO welcomed "the proposal by COMEST to conduct background work towards a framework of ethical principles for climate change, which would, if it proves feasible, be available for the consideration of UNESCO in 2015". The Executive Board further recommended that "further consideration be given to the desirability of preparing a declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change at the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference, on the basis of the technical background work of COMEST (.....), of the outcome of negotiation processes under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and of prior discussion by the Executive Board to be scheduled in 2014." (190 EX/Decision 10)

This action plan, which is designed to follow up the above decision, proposes that COMEST i) finalize the report entitled "Background for a Framework of Ethical Principles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Policies"; ii) extend its work to establish a more comprehensive framework including issues of climate change mitigation; and iii) raise awareness among policy makers, experts, the general public and the media on the ethical principles in relation to climate change.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Completing its report on "The Ethical Implications of Global Climate Change" at its 6<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, June 2009), COMEST judged that, in addition to analytical work, a stronger impetus with respect to climate change is required, in order to ensure that ethics does not remain confined within a language of concern but extends its reach to a practically oriented language of response.

On this basis, COMEST recommended to UNESCO 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.

Considering the recommendation of COMEST in the context of international discussion on the subject - *inter alia* the initiatives taken by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - the General Conference of UNESCO, at its 35<sup>th</sup> session in 2009, concluded that "ethical principles in relation to climate change may be the subject of a declaration and that further study of this issue is necessary." (35 C/Resolutions 36)

Since the General Conference in 2009, the desirability of preparing a declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change has been discussed several times by UNESCO Member States, including at the 185<sup>th</sup> session (2010), the 186<sup>th</sup> Session (2011) and the 190<sup>th</sup> session (2012) of the Executive Board, and the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference (2011). However, no decision has hitherto been made to proceed with the drafting of such a declaration.

In parallel with consideration by the UNESCO governing bodies, COMEST has continued its own substantive work in consultation with expert communities and regularly provided the outcomes for consideration by UNESCO.

COMEST adopted at its 7<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session (Doha, Qatar, October 2011) “A Framework of Ethical Principles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Adaptation”, taking account of scientific and scholarly findings in relevant disciplines and of the diversity of expert opinions. COMEST considered that this Framework of Ethical Principles could, if Member States wished to build on it, constitute a consensual and practical basis for certain aspects of a universal declaration of ethical principles in relation to climate change. However it also recognized that issues of climate change mitigation require further consideration and elaboration.

At the 7<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session, COMEST further launched a process to draft a report entitled “Background for a Framework of Ethical Principles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Policies”, in order to lay out the thinking behind the aforementioned framework, including COMEST’s decisions to focus in this instance on climate change adaptation; and to propose specific responsibilities that help indicate the concrete tasks that need to be carried out if the principles are to be satisfied. The report will be finalized at the 8<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session.

While acknowledging the difficulty of elaborating consensual and relevant ethical principles to address all aspects of climate change, in particular mitigation, COMEST, at its Extraordinary Session (Paris, France, July 2012), reaffirmed that “determination of universal ethical principles in relation to climate change would complement other efforts under way within the United Nations system, subject to explicit articulation of UNESCO action with discussion on implementation of UNFCCC” and proposed to pursue its work on ethical principles in relation to climate change in order to establish a more comprehensive framework, dealing with all aspects of the subject, for adoption, at the latest, at its Ordinary Session in 2015.

Having been welcomed by the Executive Board, this proposal now requires implementation, through specific and practical steps, leading to delivery of relevant interim material by end of June 2014 and of a final report by end of June 2015.

### **3. THE STEPS**

#### **Phase I (May - July 2013)**

- i) Adoption of the final draft of the action plan following up the Decision of the Executive Board of UNESCO (190 EX/Decision 10);
- ii) Discussion of a comprehensive framework of ethical principles in relation to climate change including a) the possible scope and orientation of the outcome and b) preliminary analysis of substance including mitigation issues and other issues not directly related to adaptation.

At its 8<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session, COMEST will adopt an action plan based on the present draft, for the elaboration of a comprehensive framework of ethical principles in relation to climate change. Whereas, in its previous work, COMEST has focused on *adaptation* issues, the new study will consider the more complex and political domain of ethical issues including climate change *mitigation*.

The objective of the process proposed herein is to produce-if feasible- a framework on ethical principles and responsibilities in relation to climate change, which will provide comprehensive intellectual background for possible action, integrating the work already carried out by COMEST.

Issues already identified for further discussion in this regard are listed in the Appendix hereafter.

The outputs of phase I will be reflected in the summary report on the proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session, which will present the action plan as adopted at the Session and the substantive discussions during and immediately following the Session.

## **Phase II (July 2013 – September 2014)**

### **i) July-October 2013**

- a. Broad-based stakeholder consultation on the statement adopted by COMEST in 2011 *A Framework of Ethical Principles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Adaptation* in order to identify more precisely the issues to be addressed by a comprehensive framework;
- b. Preliminary discussion within COMEST on major issues to be addressed in a comprehensive framework of ethical principles.

### **ii) November-April 2014**

- c. Preparation of a report entitled *Background for a Framework of Ethical Principles for Climate Change*.

The Consultation on the 2011 statement, is designed both to enhance the visibility of COMEST's work and to identify points of consensus and disagreement relevant to the possible development of a framework of ethical principles for climate change.

On this basis, a background report will be prepared for the consideration of COMEST at its session in 2014. The discussions at the 8<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of COMEST will provide fundamental substance to this preliminary work and the Environmental Ethics Working Group will play a key role in drafting. The first draft will be prepared by March 2014 for consultation with external experts. After consultation, the draft report will be discussed at the Extraordinary Session of COMEST in June 2014 (date subject to change).

At the Extraordinary Session, COMEST will make a judgment as to the feasibility of proceeding to develop a comprehensive framework of ethical principles for climate change. COMEST will also determine the appropriate form for such a framework.

The outcome of COMEST's discussions at its 2014 session will be reported to the Executive Board of UNESCO at its 195<sup>th</sup> session for its consideration, pursuant to 190 EX/ Dec. 10.

## **Phase III (July 2014 – June 2015)**

- i) Finalization, if feasible, of the framework of ethical principles for climate changes, including inter alia;
- ii) Second phase of broad-based stakeholder consultation.

If judged feasible at the 2014 session of COMEST, and subject to the decisions of the Executive Board at the 195<sup>th</sup> session, COMEST will proceed in phase III to elaborate a comprehensive framework of ethical principles for climate change. The document will be finalized, after a second round of consultation with experts, stakeholders, policy makers, and the public, at the 9<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of COMEST in June 2015 (date subject to change). A recommendation or statement by COMEST on the "Framework of Ethical Principles for Climate Change" may also be adopted upon the finalization of the document, if COMEST members wish.

If a “Framework of Ethical Principles for Climate Change” is adopted, it will be submitted to the Director General, who will reflect it in her report to the 38th session of the General Conference, in 2015, pursuant to 190 EX/Decision 10.

## APPENDIX

### ***Issues identified in earlier discussions within COMEST that deserve consideration in a comprehensive framework of ethical principles for climate change<sup>1</sup>***

#### **The issue of justice**

- ✧ The role of ethic in the specification of international solidarity
- ✧ The universalization of justice as equity
- ✧ The global reach of local justice

#### **The issue of resilience**

- ✧ The necessity of having more knowledge and action at a local level

#### **The issue of compensation**

- ✧ The compensation for complex global environmental challenges

#### **The value of frugality**

- ✧ The relevance of Asian thoughts and a virtue based ethical system

#### **The performative contradictions**

- ✧ The impossibility to universalize the objections to Universality
- ✧ The contradiction of the principle of uncertainty when applied to itself

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<sup>1</sup> The points hereabove are summarized from informal exchanges and should not be regarded as adequate statements of substantive positions on the issues referred to.