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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Meeting of the Bureau of the International Co-ordinating Council (ICC) of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, Room XIV (Bonvin Building)
19-20 September 2016

Introduction

The meeting of the Bureau of the MAB International Coordinating Council (ICC) was held on 19 and 20 September 2016 at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris. The meeting was chaired by Mr Didier Babin (France) and was attended by the Vice-Chairs: Ms Suk-Kyung Shim (Republic of Korea), Ms Houria Khelifi (Algeria), Mr Adepoju Olatunde Adeshola (Nigeria), Mr Valery Neronov (Russian Federation) and Mr Pedro Gamboa Moquillaza (Peru) who is also the rapporteur. Some observers from the Member States attended the opening and first part of the Bureau meeting.

The full list of participants and observers is given in Annex 1.

Item 1 of the Agenda: Opening of the Meeting

1. On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Han Qunli, the Secretary of the MAB-ICC and Director of the Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences (SC/EES), welcomed the members of the Bureau and Observer Delegates present at the meeting.

Item 2 of the Agenda: Opening Remarks by the Chair of the MAB Bureau

2. In his opening remarks, Mr Didier Babin, Chair of the MAB International Coordinating Council (ICC) and of the MAB Bureau, thanked all Bureau Members, the MAB Secretary and the team. He reiterated the importance of the Lima 4th World Congress of Biosphere reserves (4WNBR) and its outcomes, which are very encouraging for the MAB Programme. Furthermore, Mr Babin highlighted the importance of this Bureau meeting especially with regard to the Exit Strategy, and suggested to have another Bureau meeting before the 29th session of the MAB ICC. The Chair pointed out that the Exit Strategy shall be seen as a quality strategy to improve the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). It should be seen in a positive and a constructive way, and as a process to strengthen rather than weaken the MAB Programme and its WNBR. He also mentioned that the Vice-Chairs should be involved in this process to discuss the Exit Strategy within regions and to support its implementation. He also stressed that their participation to regional meetings would bring added value to it.

Item 3 of the Agenda: Adoption of the agenda

3. The Chair proposed a revision of the draft agenda in order to focus on the items that require decisions of the Bureau. The items included in the draft agenda only for presentation and discussion will be examined at the end of the meeting. Mr Neronov proposed two partnership activities of Russia to be discussed within the MAB Partnership item. The Chair introduced a new item to the agenda "The road map on implementation of the Lima Action Plan (LAP)". The Chair pointed out that a gap for the replacement of the MAB Secretary should be avoided. The agenda was then adopted with these revisions. The approved agenda is in Annex 2 to this report.

Item 4 of the Agenda: Reports by the Vice-Chairs of the MAB Bureau

4. Ms Suk-Kyung Shim (Republic of Korea) representing the Group IV reported that since the Lima Congress many national meetings were held. In this regard, she mentioned a workshop in the Republic of Korea which focused on BR managers and local communities where LAP and necessary actions are to be taken at a national level were presented and discussed. Many subregional and/or regional events are scheduled for the autumn of 2016.

5. Ms Houria Khelifi from Algeria representing Group V (b) thanked Peru for the successful Lima Congress and the MAB Secretariat for the opportunity to attend the MAB Bureau meeting to represent the views and opinions of the Arab Region. She noted that in general, follow up activities to the Lima Congress had been limited until now within the ArabMAB region due to the holiday period. However, she mentioned two ArabMAB events planned to be held in Algeria later this year: one workshop organized with the support of the UNESCO Cairo Office and the ArabMAB regional network meeting which will focus on the implementation of the MAB Strategy and the Lima Action Plan in the Arab Region. It will be followed by the meeting of the Bureau of ArabMAB. She recalled that several biosphere reserves in the Arab region have been or are working on their periodic reviews. The Exit Strategy poses challenges for some of the biosphere reserves in the region. One example is the Radom Biosphere Reserve in Sudan. It is host to important wildlife, but the MAB national Committee in Sudan and related experts and scientists cannot finalize the periodic review report of the site as the region is subject to civil conflicts, making information and data collection in the biosphere reserve very difficult. Conservation and sustainable development actions are also difficult to implement due to security concerns. Ms Khelifi stressed that several biosphere reserves around the world are likely in a similar difficult situation as the Radom Biosphere Reserve, and that it would be important to give them special consideration and treatment in the context of the Exit Strategy.

6. Mr Adepoju Olatunde Adeshola from Nigeria who represents Group V (a) thanked the Chair of the Bureau and the Secretariat for the excellent Lima Congress and excellent follow up. He noted that Africa welcomed the Exit Strategy, and stressed that even though there are still 75 countries worldwide which do not have BR, focus should be placed on consolidating the current network. As Vice Chair of the MAB Bureau and coordinator of AfriMAB's Western African countries, he visited Rwanda and met the MAB national committee; underlining that there is a need to improve communication of this country with the MAB Programme. He mentioned that he participated in a workshop in Tanzania related to the Green Economy project implemented by UNESCO and funded by KOICA. He informed that some countries, as a follow up to the Lima Congress, are developing national Lima action plans – such as Ghana and Nigeria. He thanked the MAB Secretariat for supporting the establishment of a trust fund for AfriMAB (AfriBioFund). He informed the Bureau that he is currently raising awareness of the MAB Programme with ECOWAS and AfDB.

7. Mr Valery Neronov (Russian Federation) representing the group II thanked the MAB team and MAB Bureau for an excellent organization of the Lima Congress. He informed about Russia's immediate follow-up, such as distributing a number of press releases. He highlighted the great impact of the Lima Congress and its outcomes on the future of the MAB Programme in Russia. He also expressed his gratitude to Mr Han Qunli and Ms. Meriem Bouamrane for their visit to Russia and for the overall technical assistance provided with regard to the Exit Strategy. He informed about new forthcoming nominations coming including a Russia-Kazakhstan TBR. He also informed about plan on a further TBR with Mongolia and with China. He updated about the Silk Road Initiative and key actions taken and events held in this regard. He also informed about Russian plans to establish Geoparks. He proposed to conduct a Russian session during the 29th session of ICC, as 2017 is the Russian Year of Protected Areas and Year of Ecology. The Russian MAB Committee proposed to organize a special exhibition, currently pending a decision by the Russian authorities.

8. Mr Pedro Gamboa Moquillaza from Peru representing the Group III took the floor and informed about activities within Latin America and the Caribbean since the Lima Congress, held in March this year. Mr Gamboa stressed that the IberoMAB Network has been very active. Two hundred and fifty

participants from 21 countries represented IberoMAB at the 4th World Congress on BRs. They took this opportunity to participate in the 17th IberoMAB meeting held during the event. The two major topics discussed by the Network were gender and environmental education. As a result of this meeting a Working Group composed by Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Spain and representatives of UNESCO was established in order to review and adapt the current IberoMaB Action Plan 2010-2020 to the Lima Action Plan 2016-2025. Moreover, he mentioned that the network would implement five actions. The update of the Action Plan is scheduled for December 2016. The next IberoMAB meeting will take place in Colombia in 2018. Furthermore, Mr Gamboa mentioned that IberoMAB is exploring different funding sources. For this reason, the Network, in collaboration with the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development (AECID) and the Spanish Autonomous Authority for National Parks (OAPN), are coordinating the Seminar on “Funding Sources for the IberoMaB Network”, to be held in Antigua, Guatemala, from 7 to 11 November 2016. Finally, Mr Gamboa mentioned that Peru and Ecuador would present the first South American transboundary biosphere reserve called Forests for Peace Biosphere Reserve in Peru including two existing biosphere reserves in Peru and Ecuador.

9. Mr Didier Babin (France) representing the Group I informed about the planned EuroMAB meeting to be held in France in April 2017 in Bassin de la Dordogne Biosphere Reserve. He also mentioned that France considers the Exit Strategy as a vehicle to improve the WNBR. He informed about several initiatives and plans facilitating exchange between BRs.

Item 5 of the Agenda: Report of the Secretary of the MAB Programme

10. The Secretary of the MAB Programme, Mr Han Qunli, introduced its report (Annex 3). He highlighted that information on the progress in the implementation of the MAB Strategy and the Lima Action Plan provided at the intersessional meeting of EXB on 9 September 2016 was very well received. He mentioned that a number of countries during their intervention referred to the Exit Strategy. A separate document on the implementation of the MAB Strategy and the Lima Action Plan was prepared for the upcoming 200th session of EXB and is available online. Mr Han Qunli also informed that the MAB Secretariat sent a request to the MAB National Committees to provide inputs on national implementations of the LAP. Their feedback will be available online before the next session of the Executive Board. So far, quite positive feedback have been received. The Secretary made a small correction in point 1 regarding an availability of the MAB Strategy and LAP in six United Nations languages. Currently it is available online in three languages – English, French and Spanish. Translations into other United Nations languages are being done through Regional Offices. By the 200th session of EXB the LAP might be available in six languages.

11. Mr Han Qunli briefed about the IUCN World Conservation Congress organized in Hawaii in August 2016 in which he and Ms. Meriem Bouamrane participated. As an immediate follow-up, a technical liaison group including SC/EES (both MAB and the UNESCO Global Geoparks programme) and World Heritage will be established, and the Ramsar Secretariat will be invited to be a part at a later stage. In this regard, he mentioned that the Jeju Government (Republic of Korea) has proposed to establish a UNESCO category 2 centre under the MAB Programme in support of internationally designated areas (IDAs). Furthermore, he informed about an initiative of the Venice Office for a Global MAB Youth Forum and the development of a Green Academy in Africa (promoted by the Addis Ababa Office).

12. The MAB Bureau thanked the Secretary for his report and welcomed proposed items as *inter alia* giving visibility to MAB/WNBR through UNESCO’s messages on relevant international days, and the proposal of Jeju to create UNESCO category 2 centre on internationally designated sites. The MAB Bureau also pointed out the importance to strengthen coordination between WH sites, BRs and Global Geoparks; while keeping in mind of the necessity to maintain the specificity of the MAB Programme and the WNBR.

13. The MAB Bureau also expressed interest in receiving more information on paragraph 2 of the Secretary’s Report – in particular with regard to financial issues. The Bureau highly welcomed the

information of para. 10 and the strong links between the CBD and the MAB Programme. The Chair stressed that Aichi Biodiversity Target 14 (By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities and the poor and vulnerable.) highly concerns BRs, local communities and indigenous people. It is an excellent opportunity for the MAB Programme to be more visible and active. The Chair recalled decision IPBES/3/18 made by IPBES 3, which **inscribed the MAB Programme and its WNBR as key strategic partner in the task force on knowledge, information and data (deliverables 1 (d) and 4 (b) of the workplan)**. The Chair encouraged the Secretariat and the MAB Programme to reply to this invitation

14. With regard to the Exit Strategy item, the MAB Bureau suggested that a list be established of countries that received reminders before the deadline. The MAB Secretariat was requested to inform the MAB Bureau members beforehand on its technical and advisory missions and to inform the MAB Bureau members on subsequent recommendations in order to enable them to provide additional support at the regional level.

Item 6 of the Agenda: Road Map for Implementation of the Lima Action Plan

15. This item was proposed by the Chair of the MAB Bureau. Mr Didier Babin expressed that it would be desirable for BRs, MAB National Committees, different organizations and United Nations agencies to see in practice how the LAP is implemented and presented. In this regard he proposed to have a document that converts the MAB Strategy and LAP into a specific roadmap showing the national needs, key players, indications of how specific items are to be implemented, by whom and within a specific time-frame. It might also help to know which resources are needed and where and how to mobilize them. In this regard, he took note that it may also help to know what kind of partnerships exists and are needed.

16. The Vice-Chairs agreed on this idea and appreciated this pro-active proposal of the Chair. Tasks were given to the Secretariat to set up the appropriate framework for the draft roadmap, to identify major stakeholders and to define relevant correlations and present it at the next Bureau meeting.

17. The MAB Secretary responded that a concrete roadmap will facilitate Member States and their BRs to take actions and that this will be very useful. The document might be ready by March next year.

18. Several ideas were then expressed by the Bureau members on how to draft this roadmap. The issue what status such a document would have will be discussed at the next Bureau meeting.

19. The MAB Secretary pointed out that Secretariat reminded all Member States to start the development of national plans and seek their approval by stakeholders, as they are the basis for fundamental actions. In this regard, the Chair's proposal is quite timely. The roadmap shall help the Member States to establish effective means for local/national governments to be engaged in the implementation process. The Chair proposed that the MAB Secretariat prepare a first draft by the end of this year through consultations with MAB Bureau. This document should be a helpful and useful tool enabling a better coordination between different players during the implementation of the LAP.

20. The MAB Secretariat is exploring possibilities for online reporting of LAP implementation which will make reporting easier. An internal meeting on such online reporting was already held internally at UNESCO. The MAB Secretary is making a further effort to have it operational at the level of the Secretariat and he expressed his wish that ICC will agree on this online reporting.

Item 7 of the Agenda: Update on Status of Implementation of the Exit Strategy

21. The Secretariat introduced the item on the update on the status of the Exit Strategy, adopted by the MAB Council in 2013. The purpose of the Exit Strategy is to improve the credibility and the quality of the WNBR and to help Member States set the required standards for their biosphere reserves to become fully functional and to conform to the criteria of the Statutory Framework. The Exit Strategy concerned 260 sites in 72 countries, including four (4) transboundary sites.

22. The Secretariat provided an update on the contacts established with countries and sites that did not send any reply by the deadline of 2015, countries and sites for which the recommendations indicate that the site is not meeting the criteria, and sites which sent the report after the 2015 deadline. The Secretariat also highlighted issues encountered with some sites such as ongoing conflicts, requests for technical assistance and for extension of the deadline.

23. The Chair highlighted the importance of the Exit Strategy, which is a quality strategy for improving the World network, and for supporting the improvement of sites and the involvement of local communities. He highlighted the importance of communicating positively on the strategy and to use it to make the WNBR stronger and not weaker. He also acknowledged the efforts made by many countries.

24. Several Vice-Chairs mentioned specific cases where war and conflicts are going on and requested that special attention be brought to these sites.

25. After the introduction made by the Secretariat, specialists responsible for each region updated the MAB Bureau members on the situation of the sites concerned by the exit Strategy, their respective progress and difficulties.

26. The Chair thanked the Secretariat for the presentation. He reminded that the objective of the discussion was not to know whether a country is active or not, but whether the biosphere reserve fulfills or not the criteria. The Exit Strategy must be linked to fulfillments and not to intentions, and the periodic review allows for the presentation of a site's results. The MAB-ICC cannot take a decision without qualitative information.

27. Finally, he stressed the importance of respecting decisions that have been taken, particularly those of the MAB-ICC, which has already yielded results given the positive responses of a large number of countries, as well as of respecting the countries that followed the rules and provided periodic reviews.

28. Following the discussion, the Bureau recalled that the objective is to reinforce the WNBR and to improve its quality. The aim is to support the countries in their efforts and to help them in order to reinforce the World Network.

29. Despite complex, diverse, sometimes contradictory situations, it is important to establish a common rule and to be fair in the proposed decisions.

30. The Bureau also considered three cases of countries: those that do not wish to remain part of the World Network; those that did not send a reply to the communication of the Secretariat; and those in a situation of armed conflict.

31. The Bureau encouraged the Secretariat to continue contacting the different countries on an appropriate level in order to stimulate the concerned countries and sites to provide the requested information and to respond by the 30 September 2016 deadline.

32. It was also decided that at the next Bureau meeting after the Advisory Committee in 2017, it will be necessary to discuss the procedure to follow in order for the MAB-ICC to take decisions, by reviewing the files received and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

33. The reports that arrived after the deadline (i.e. from countries submitting a periodic review for the first time after the deadline of the Exit Strategy of 30 September 2015) will also be reviewed by

the Advisory Committee during its next session in 2017 in order to be submitted to the MAB-ICC for its decision, with a clear mention that the report has been received after the deadline.

34. Beyond technical aspects, political issues involved in the Exit Strategy have been raised.

35. The Bureau discussed the necessity to think about a long-term mechanism to support countries to fulfill the criteria after the implementation of the Exit Strategy.

36. The Chair also proposed to consider how to mobilize support for sites that do not meet the criteria but want to remain within the World Network and/or return to it.

37. One of the questions raised was to reflect on how the World Network could support these sites. Another aspect is to examine how to support the transition of the concerned sites, and how to support the sites that encounter difficulties in meeting the criteria or in reporting on results achieved for the submission of a periodic review. A proposal should be presented by the Secretariat at the next MAB Bureau.

38. Finally, the Chair asked the Secretariat to carry out an analysis on concerned sites, based on the information received by 30 September 2016, and to try to identify typical problems (technical, governance-related, drafting of a periodic review) encountered in these sites, and to propose a way regarding the modalities and the means (including financial means) to help these biosphere reserves meet the criteria. This analysis should also make suggestions on the modalities to engage the World Network in support of these sites, in addition to the support provided by the Secretariat and UNESCO field offices. This analysis should be presented for the consideration by the Bureau at its next meeting.

Item 8 of the Agenda: Governance of the MAB Programme

39. The MAB Secretary introduced this item for brainstorming at the Bureau in order to know if it would be worthy to propose for the agenda of the next ICC.

40. He informed that General Conference made a decision that the agenda of each UNESCO statutory meeting should have an item on the status of implementation of recommendations relating to the evaluation of the governance of governing bodies of the organisation. The guiding principle of this decision is to ensure that UNESCO programmes are governed in more transparent, consistent and efficient way.

41. He drew the attention of the MAB Bureau on four ideas:

- (1) MAB-ICC should allow space to promote bottom-up and cross-cutting initiatives. This could be done through specific forums on, for instance:
 - local governments: their roles and contributions
 - private sector: partnerships and financial resources mobilization
 - youth engagement
 - DRR– climate change action
- (2) An annual theme decided by MAB-ICC could be promoted at the international level; it could be accompanied by key annual message on subjects such as restoration, green employment, BR mitigating climate change impacts, etc.
- (3) Inviting countries to develop working groups within LAP on issues such as Lima Action Plan reporting, MAB Science Committee, green economy, special modules for operational guidelines, social media, etc.

- (4) Developing a global information sharing and reporting system and promote more online service for LAP.

Item 9 of the Agenda: Development of Biosphere Reserve's Operational Guidelines for the WNBR

42. The MAB Secretariat presented document SC-16/CONF.228B/Bureau.4 on a proposal for operational guidelines for the WNBR (OP-WNBR). The presentation recalled the background for this item and underlined the rationale to develop OP-WNBR and the steps which have already been done in that direction. The Bureau was kindly requested to provide advice and guidance on the title of the document, the structure and drafting process, as well as the next steps.

43. Members of the Bureau welcomed the proposal and agreed that it was timely and absolutely essential for MAB Programme and WNBR to have its operational guidelines the key end users of which would be BR managers, MAB national committees and potential BRs. The OP-WNBR should guide the end users in the application of the statutory framework of WNBR and serve as jurisprudence (and thus reduce discrepancies) for various aspects dealing with nomination, management and monitoring, legal issues, zonation, governance, etc. of biosphere reserves. The proposed guidelines should be more focused since the guidelines must be a practical tool which would address and give concrete responses and solutions to issues raised by end users. The OP-WNBR should foster the sharing of tools and solutions and be as much pragmatic as possible.

44. The members of the MAB Bureau unanimously welcomed the proposal of an electronic web based living evolving document, composed by independent modules, drafted through a collaborative process in consultation with end users; the development of the modules would be coordinated by a MAB Working Group. The living character of the document would require that it be hosted by an adequate website and also that the information is updated in a regular basis. It was proposed that access to the updating of information could be made accessible beyond the MAB Secretariat. These are critical issues which have to be solved in advance with UNESCO KMI services. The Chair proposed to explore the possibility to have the OP-WNVR as a smartphone application. He proposed the promotion of techniques that would facilitate access to the information. He also emphasized that the OP-WNBR should be developed through a creative and innovative process. It should be a dynamic process to be conceptualized through social media means within the MAB Programme and its end users.

45. With regard to the identification of the topics of the modules, it was requested that MAB Secretariat send a questionnaire to the end users to identify what are the priority issues that they want to be addressed in the OP-WNBR. A first list of topics will then be consolidated and sent to the end users for validation. Some topics have already been identified by members of the Bureau (governance, support role of UNESCO Chairs and category 2 centres, zonation ...). The MAB Chair shared a document presenting key issues to be addressed, complementing the questionnaire.

46. The OP-WNBR title seems too bureaucratic and directive, and thus a new denomination should be sought which would express its pragmatic, open, operational and user-oriented features.

47. The MAB Bureau endorsed the development of the OP-WNBR, a prototype of which should be presented to the next MAB-ICC. Based on the discussion, the MAB Bureau asked the MAB Secretariat to:

- Identify priority topics (through a collaborative process) to be developed in the prototype.
- Explore the various options to accommodate the format and open update the process of the OP-WNBR.
- Prepare a prototype to be discussed at the next IACBR meeting and Bureau meeting.
- Prepare a TOR for the intended Working Group.

Item 10 of the Agenda: Preliminary Proposal for the Creation of the MAB Communication Strategy and Action Plan

48. The Secretariat introduced item 10 on the proposal for the creation of a MAB communication strategy and action plan. The Lima Action plan endorsed by the 4th World Congress of Biospheres and adopted by the MAB Council gives the responsibility to the MAB Secretariat for the creation and implementation of a communication strategy and action plan, alongside national and subnational authorities and MAB national committees and regional networks. This communication strategy would need to be presented at the MAB Council session in 2018 for approval.

49. The Secretariat highlighted that the global strategy could be developed with contributions from across the MAB Programme and WNBR in order to ensure collective ownership. Clear objectives need to be agreed upon to support a change in the way the organization communicates about the MAB Programme and its WNBR. The suggested approach is to engage the World Network to help design the communication and engagement strategy so that it is not top-down but rather a shared engagement journey. The Secretariat made reference to the toolkit on branding and stakeholders engagement developed by the MAB Secretariat within EuroMAB, which contains key elements of a global strategy (objective, audiences, messages, tactics and measurement).

50. The Secretariat also indicated that based on the experience of the EuroMAB work on communication and branding, highlighted particular problem relates to how BRs engage with local stakeholders. The process to prepare this global communication and engagement strategy will include: (1) to bring the MAB Programme and the World Network together through exchange with all stakeholders and to organize technical discussions with a core communication team to align with overall objectives; (2) to use existing tools and approaches available to draft the communication strategy through teamwork with stakeholders and representatives from all regions; (3) to develop a methodology to enable broad participation of biosphere reserves in the implementation of the strategy. The dialogue and technical discussions could be held in UNESCO Paris, including at the next MAB Bureau meeting as well as during meetings of the regional networks.

51. The Chair welcomed the work carried out on communication as regarded French and within EuroMAB, and said that the highly positive changes in communication had been visible, in particular at the last World Congress on Biosphere Reserves. The development of the global communication strategy should answer questions such as what distinguished MAB and biosphere reserves from other UNESCO brands and other protected area systems, and what was the specific message of biosphere reserves and the MAB Programme. He recalled that tools had been developed and important aspects had been discussed at past workshops, in particular in Lima. It was essential to continue and strengthen the work already done, in particular with the team of professionals called upon in the context of the EuroMAB network. He also mentioned the need to launch deeper reflection on both internal and external target messages, using different kinds of media, with professional support. The importance of jointly building the strategy with biosphere reserves by means of the genuine engagement of those actively involved was emphasized.

52. The Chair asked for details as to the practical implementation of the global strategy (timeline and budget). The Secretariat replied that it was possible to start the conversation without delay, with key actors in the MAB community who could be identified by the Bureau and at forthcoming regional meetings. The Secretary also reported on regular programme budget constraints and the need to conduct essential communication activities, such as website maintenance, production of the World Network map and the MAB activity report, and said that it was difficult to set aside a specific communication budget for the global strategy. He also highlighted the need to capitalize on the good experience from our ongoing communication work, and to share good practices. The Secretary asked the Bureau to provide guidance on methodology and on timeline and indicated that it was not entirely clear who should be the target audience. He also highlighted that it was necessary to look for extrabudgetary resources to develop this global communication strategy. The Secretariat mentioned two ongoing social media campaigns and reflected on the possible benefit to combine these two campaigns. Discussions focused on the need for mobilizing funds and the importance for

the different regional networks to define their communication needs and priorities. It was further highlighted that forthcoming regional meetings should put this item on their agenda before the venue of the MAB Council 2018 meeting.

53. Suggestions were made as to mobilization and communication in expert and specialist networks (MAB Flora and MAB Fauna). Other Bureau members said that the target audience should be the public in the broad sense of the word, and that some very good content was already available but that arrangements for communicating it had not been sufficiently developed. The need for communication experts in the Secretariat was raised and the issue of the necessary budget and the mobilization of partnerships to raise the budget was recalled.

54. After the discussions, the Chair made a differentiation between external and internal communication. He indicated that there was a real demand on branding and communication by stakeholders. He also said that the MAB message was more complex than that of world heritage and that it was necessary to call on professionals.

55. He reiterated that the work to reflect on the communication strategy should be continued, without waiting for the mobilization of extrabudgetary resources, using existing, low-cost tools, and feedback on information and results should continue to be reported. It was thus necessary to distinguish between two aspects: the global strategy to be adopted in 2018 by the MAB Council, for which sponsors and financial backing should be sought, supporting the Secretariat in the search for backing, including at the regional level; and the need to build on the positive impetus of Lima even with a restricted budget, so as to continue reflection on MAB's identity and overall message, and to continue to report experience from the field while introducing the global strategy in the medium term.

56. The Chair also proposed reflecting on events that were more frequent than the Lima World Congress, held once every eight to ten years. He suggested alternating MAB Council meetings with a more unifying event (thematic, scientific meetings, etc.). The Secretariat recalled that the Statutes stipulated that MAB Council meetings should be held once every 12 to 18 months.

57. The Chair also asked the Secretariat to reflect on how to communicate on the Exit Strategy, maybe to develop a specific positive communication strategy, and to get professional support for developing it.

Item 11 of the Agenda: MAB Research Themes and MAB Partnership

58. The MAB Secretary introduced this item and its two aspects. He pointed out that specific research themes of a global importance should be indicated for a MAB research agenda. These themes should benefit from comparative advantages of the MAB Programme and its WNBR. He recalled the MAB Strategy and in particular the LAP, which includes 11 actions focused on research.

59. Furthermore, the Secretary briefed about internal consultations that resulted in the identification of more than 20 different topics. He suggested to elaborate a brief proposal for the next Bureau meeting on selected themes to be considered as research agenda exclusively led by the MAB Programme.

60. A number of valuable suggestions and examples were then provided by all Bureau members. The need to have specific research themes was reiterated, and it was highlighted that a good base already exists within the MAB Programme and its WNBR. A special task group on research that existed within the MAB Programme in the past was recalled, and its re-establishment was proposed. This would be desirable also with regard to human health-related topics. Issues related to natural hazards and disasters were also mentioned.

61. Other important topics such as biodiversity and climate change were highlighted. It was emphasized that many BRs collected large amounts of data and thus retrospective analyses could

be undertaken. The importance of including climate change-related themes to BRs research agenda was reiterated.

62. It was also suggested to set up partnerships with universities, academic and research institutions and UNESCO Chairs in order to define priority topics and catalyse relevant scientific research where Ph.D. students would be also involved. A coordinated guidance at MAB and BRs level would be helpful in this regard.

63. A Vice-Chair pointed out that the MAB Young Scientists Award scheme could be very useful instrument through which to implement the new MAB research agenda, and that selected priority topics could be directly linked to themes of the Award.

64. The Chair recalled the history of MAB Programme and its early priority as a research programme and stressed a number of opportunities for follow-up. All research themes are important, but it will be necessary to identify properly and distinguish topics that are exclusively defined by the MAB Programme and focused on BR research areas, and themes that are set up by other programmes and/or initiatives. By prioritization of certain topics, the MAB Programme will be able to provide the added value to its network of BRs. Consistency will also be ensured by setting up themes for young researchers and scientists. The Chair pointed out that the MAB Secretariat should be informed by the National Committees and BRs about ongoing and/or planned research within the network. Such a list/database would facilitate communications on this issue, and should therefore be set up.

65. An example of three major themes identified for the EuroMAB 2017 was shared by the Chair along with the idea to create an innovative partnership with universities in order to achieve the SDGs and establish functional connections between research conducted within and beyond BRs in this regard.

66. The issue of financial resources for research related activities was also pointed out. In this regard, the MAB Secretariat also mentioned several successful cases and good practices on partnerships and mobilization of extrabudgetary resources. Moreover, the importance of interdisciplinary themes was pointed out.

67. Bureau members recalled several BRs' regional and multidisciplinary initiatives in which partnerships are key for their successful implementation.

68. The Secretary thanked for all the valuable feedback received. He agreed on the importance of having a system to record information about ongoing research in the WNBR. As the MAB national reporting system does not provide such information systematically there is a need to better reflect research achievements in BRs globally.

69. The MAB Bureau agreed that the Secretariat will prepare for the next Bureau meeting a draft list of current research activities within BRs and relevant cooperation and partnerships with universities, UNESCO Chairs, etc.

70. The MAB Secretary recalled that the Lima Action Plan devotes a number of pages to existing partnerships. Two short illustrated presentations were done by Mr Neronov describing candidates that the Russian Federation would like to propose for MAB/WNBR partnership: the V. I. Vernadsky nongovernmental ecological foundation and the nonprofit partnership "Biosphere reserves of Eurasia". It was considered that, although both proved their active support to and excellent cooperation with the MAB Programme, they cannot be considered as the global partners of MAB yet. However, a letter from the MAB Secretariat appreciating their work and encouraging them to continue in their enhanced effort to support the MAB Programme and its partnership initiatives will be sent to the Russian MAB Committee.

71. The MAB Secretariat was asked to continue reporting about MAB partnership development in the future meetings of MAB Bureau and MAB ICC.

Item 12 of the Agenda: Items of the 29th session of the ICC MAB Programme

72. The MAB Bureau suggested that MAB Secretariat prepare a document on this Item for the next MAB Bureau meeting

Item 13 of the Agenda: Any Other Matters

73. The participants of the MAB Bureau meeting paid tribute of a minute of silence to Mr Bonaventure Guedegbe – the National Focal Point in Benin for the UNESCO MAB programme, and one of the founding members of the African network of biosphere reserves (AfriMAB) – who passed away on 28 August 2016. Dr Bonaventure Guedegbe played an instrumental role in the MAB Programme. His passing is a great loss both for the MAB Programme and the AfriMAB Network.

Item 14 of the Agenda: Closure of the Meeting

74. The Chairperson of the MAB Bureau thanked all delegates attending the MAB Bureau meeting and the MAB Secretariat for their work and fruitful discussions, and declared the meeting as closed.