



STAB 6

**UCH/15/6.STAB/9
2 July 2015
Original: French**

**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

**CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF THE UNDERWATER CULTURAL
HERITAGE**

SIXTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY BODY

**30 April 2015
Paris, UNESCO Headquarters, Room XIV (Bonvin)
10 am – 6 pm**

**Item 9
Report**

The present document contains the report of the Sixth Session of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body (STAB) (Paris, 30 April 2015).

The Sixth Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body (hereinafter “**STAB**”) for the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (hereinafter “**the Convention**”), took place at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, on **30 April 2015**. It was attended by eight of its 12 members, namely Mr Augustus Babajide Ajibola (Nigeria), Mr Constantin Chera (Romania), Ms Dolores Elkin (Argentina), Mr Michel L’Hour (France), Ms Maria Elena Barba Meinecke (Mexico), Mr Ovidio Juan Ortega Pereyra (Cuba), Mr Xavier Nieto Prieto (Spain) and Mr Auron Tare (Albania). Four members, Mr Jasen Mesić (Croatia), Mr Seyed Hossein Sadat Meidani (Islamic Republic of Iran), Ms Ouafa Ben Slimane (Tunisia) and Mr Vladas Zulkus (Lithuania) were absent. Also present were Observer State delegations and representatives from accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs). UNESCO representatives served as the Secretariat of the meeting. Simultaneous interpretation was provided in English and in French. As no Rules of Procedure had been adopted for the Advisory Body, the Rules of Procedure of the Meeting of States Parties were applied *mutatis mutandis*.

I. Opening and Election of the Bureau

(Item 1 of the agenda, *document UCH/15/6.STAB/1*)

The session was opened on 30 April 2015 at 10 a.m. by Mr Alfredo Perez de Armiñán, Assistant Director-General for Culture, who was followed by Ms Mechtild Rössler, Deputy Director of the Division for Heritage. They welcomed the participants, new members and newly accredited NGOs. They then congratulated and thanked Mr Xavier Nieto for his support to the mission to Haiti and stressed the importance of sending further missions to Panama and to Madagascar. The importance of STAB’s actions to support States Parties where they lacked skills or required scientific expertise was also highlighted.

The STAB members then proceeded to elect a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. Mr Augustus Babajide Ajibola (Nigeria) was elected as Chairperson, Mr Ovidio Juan Ortega Pereyra (Cuba) as Vice-Chairperson, and Mr Michel L’Hour (France) as Rapporteur by means of **Resolution 1/STAB 6**.

II. Adoption of the Agenda

(Item 2 of the agenda, *document UCH/15/6.STAB/2*)

The newly elected Chairperson, Mr Ajibola, then took the floor and proposed the agenda for adoption by STAB. The NGO Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee (JNAPC) proposed the addition of a new item that would allow them to present a report on the wreck of HMS Victory which had sunk in 1774. The coordinator of UNITWIN, Selçuk University, Turkey, also took the floor to request the addition of a new item regarding collaboration and coordination between the UNITWIN network and STAB. Following these interventions, the agenda was adopted with the addition of items 6a and 6b, by means of **Resolution 2/STAB 6**.

III. Secretariat Report

(Item 3 of the agenda, *no document*)

Mr Ajibola then asked the Secretariat, represented by Ms Rössler and Ms Guérin, to report on the Fifth Session of the Meeting of States Parties which had preceded the current STAB meeting, and on the actions taken to implement decisions since the Fifth Meeting of STAB. Ms Guérin gave explanations on the two STAB missions requested by Madagascar and Panama, which were then followed by a short presentation by Mr Xavier Nieto Prieto on STAB’s previous mission to Haiti. These explanations gave rise to a lively discussion. All the experts and participants commended the success of the mission in Haiti and stressed that such practical and useful work should be continued.

Mr Armiñán, Assistant Director-General for Culture, thanked Mr Nieto once again for his work. He drew attention to the question of the availability of budgetary funds for the missions, and to the need to elect a mission leader for the missions requested by Madagascar and Panama. Lastly, the Secretariat stressed the importance of finding support within NGOs in order to create an efficient network to respond to emergencies as quickly as possible.

IV. Change of Statutes

(Item 4 of the agenda, *document UCH/15/6.STAB/4*)

The following agenda item – consideration of the modifications of the STAB Statutes – directly followed the discussion on the missions.

Initially, the Secretariat read out the document and explained the importance of the role of the Rapporteur, newly established by the modification to the Statutes made by the Meeting of States Parties, stressing the Rapporteur's responsibility in verifying the accuracy of the report made to the Meeting of States Parties on STAB recommendations. The new rules in the Statutes regarding the organization of missions were then explained and welcomed by the experts.

STAB then proceeded to adoption under item 4 by means of **Resolution 4/STAB 6**.

V. Operational Assistance to States Parties

(Item 5 of the agenda, *document UCH/15/6.STAB/5*)

The Chairperson then invited Mr L'Hour, former Chairperson of STAB, to report on the mission in **Haiti**. Mr L'Hour gave the floor to Mr Nieto, the expert who led the mission.

Accordingly, Mr Nieto presented the detailed report on the mission to Haiti, explaining that in May 2014, the United States explorer Barry Clifford had announced that he had discovered the remains of the *Santa Maria* off Cap Haitien. The Haitian authorities had requested an evaluation of the investigation project proposed by Mr Clifford and a mission to Haiti to verify the identification of the wreck presumed to be the *Santa Maria*, which was duly conducted. All the experts and the Secretariat congratulated Mr Nieto for the work he had accomplished in sometimes sensitive circumstances.

Mr Armiñán asked Mr Nieto for clarification about the mission, with two questions: the first concerned the possibility of finding the wreck of the *Santa Maria* on land and not underwater. The second concerned the site of the *Santa Maria*: he asked whether there was any historical data that could lead to fruitful archaeological excavations.

Mr Nieto answered that, based on the most likely hypothesis, the *Santa Maria* had sunk near the coast and the wreckage was most probably buried under sediment transported over time by the Grande Rivière du Nord. To conclude, he evaluated the chances of success of a research operation at the site as particularly limited, and said that a highly skilled, multidisciplinary international team equipped with high-tech instruments would be needed for such a mission to succeed.

Thanking Mr Nieto, the Chairperson reminded participants of the Meeting of States Parties (MSP) resolution regarding Madagascar, and then gave the floor to the Madagascan Minister of Culture and Crafts, Ms Brigitte Rasamoelina, asking her to explain the context of the mission requested by **Madagascar**, and the situation with regards to the wreck site off the island of Saint-Marie.

The minister explained that, following a request from the Madagascan authorities, UNESCO should send a mission to evaluate the state of a wreck lying in the bay of Sainte-Marie. The wreck had, for several weeks, been under exploration by a British film production company which raised fears

over the irreversible damage that may have been inflicted to the archaeological site. The situation was considered to be of concern by the authorities of Madagascar, which had ratified the Convention. The Meeting of States Parties that had preceded the current STAB meeting had already decided to respond favourably to the request from Madagascar and to send a STAB mission to assess the state of the underwater cultural heritage in the bay of Sainte-Marie. The financing however remained to be identified.

Mr L'Hour then took the floor and explained that since the 2000s, many treasure hunters had come not only to the bay of Saint-Marie but to many places along the coast of Madagascar, particularly on the west coast of the island. He added that the underwater cultural heritage there was in great danger and it was essential thus to send a technical mission modelled on that of Haiti.

The Secretariat however stressed the importance of finding the funds to finance the mission. A discussion on the financing of STAB missions ensued, and it was decided to try to identify financial resources, particularly focusing on various sponsors.

The Chairperson then proposed Mr Michel L'Hour as mission leader for the planned mission to Madagascar, and designated the other members of the mission, notably Mr Auron Tare from Albania.

Next, the Chairperson reminded the meeting of the Resolution and proposed examining the mission requested by **Panama**.

The Ambassador of Panama explained the situation. Following a request from the Government of Panama, STAB should send a mission to assess the state of the historic *San José* wreck. The *San José* was a Spanish galleon that had sunk in the archipelago of Las Perlas in the seventeenth century. Since 2003, the company "Investigaciones Marinas del Istmo" (IMDI) had had a contract to commercially exploit the wreck. The Meeting of States Parties held the day before the current STAB meeting had decided to answer favourably the request from Panama's National Institute for Culture and to send the STAB mission during the first two weeks of July.

The aim of the mission was to evaluate, in cooperation with experts from Panama, the actions led by IMDI. For the experts, it would also involve establishing a plan to manage the conservation of the *San José* galleon wreck and the artefacts collected from it. The ambassador specified that the costs would be met by the Government of Panama and that the team should arrive on 6 July 2015.

After consultation, Mr Nieto was designated mission leader. STAB experts Dolores Elkin (Argentina), Helena Barba Mei (Mexico), and Ovidio Pereyra (Cuba) would also be part of the team.

STAB then adopted **Resolution 5/STAB 6**.

VI(a). Report on the wreck of HMS *Victory*

(Additional item of the agenda, *no document*)

In an additional item, the representative of the accredited NGO JNAPC reported on new developments in the case of the HMS *Victory* wreck and mentioned the possibility of a future ratification of the 2001 Convention by the United Kingdom. On that point, he explained that in 2014, an impact study on the 2001 Convention had been conducted, and that the study's conclusions were in favour of a ratification of the Convention. Lastly, he invited experts from States that had ratified the Convention to meet Britain's new leaders to present the positive aspects of the Convention.

VI(b). Report on collaboration between STAB and UNITWIN

(Additional item of the agenda, *no document*)

The representative from UNITWIN then commended the work of STAB and proposed a close cooperation with the UNITWIN/UNESCO Network of Underwater Archaeology. He stressed the importance of exchanging information between the Secretariat, NGOs and the UNITWIN Network which already included 21 universities teaching underwater archaeology.

The STAB experts enthusiastically welcomed this initiative and stressed its importance. The membership of new universities was discussed and close collaboration encouraged. The Secretariat also once again presented the conditions for UNITWIN membership.

VII. Best Practice

(Item 7 of the provisional agenda, *document UCH/15/6.STAB/6*)

At its Fifth Meeting, STAB recommended that the Meeting of States Parties consider for designation as best practice all initiatives taken in exemplary manner and in conformity with the Convention, permitting a large public access to knowledge about underwater culture heritage. It also recommended that the Meeting invite States Parties to the Convention to provide examples of best practice, suggesting a number of criteria, and that it ask STAB to review the examples of best practice.

The Meeting of States Parties had discussed the issue and requested STAB to identify more criteria for the examples of best practice, as those already identified were exclusively based on access to the heritage. Other aspects, such as preservation, research and site protection, were still overlooked and it would be preferable that they also be given consideration.

The Chairperson gave the floor to STAB members on the subject. They highlighted the importance of access to the heritage and of the work undertaken so far, but also welcomed the request and the interest of the Meeting of States Parties.

Argentina however stressed that best practices for research on and activities directed at underwater cultural heritage were already reflected in the Annex to the Convention and that that should not be modified. The Secretariat confirmed that a manual containing guidelines to the Annex did already exist, and that it had been translated into several languages and approved by STAB. It had been produced to guide States.

Mr L'Hour took the floor, stressing the importance of focusing on problems that particularly affected the conservation of objects and the protection of sites. He suggested making an inventory of the guides and books on conservation and restoration in order to establish a recommended bibliography that would be accessible to all.

After in-depth discussion, it was decided that two working groups would be established to propose criteria to identify best practices, one group for conservation and one group for site protection. STAB then adopted **Resolution 6/STAB 6** to that effect.

At the end of the discussions on the item, Mr L'Hour proposed drawing up a **list of international experts** in the different areas of expertise concerning archaeological research and conservation in order to be able to react as quickly as possible in emergency situations and to have experts available for STAB missions. The proposal was welcomed by all the experts present and discussed at length. It was decided that such a list would be established, its use would be reserved for STAB and it would not be made public. STAB members should provide a complete CV for the experts they proposed, and written confirmation from the experts themselves that they would be ready to respond favourably to mission requests from the Meeting of States Parties or its Bureau. Only

experts able to demonstrate a perfectly exemplary career with respect to the rules of the Convention and its Annex would be eligible for inclusion on the list.

STAB then debated the **impact of climate change** on the underwater cultural heritage. Several experts took the floor and presented the ways in which climate change was affecting archaeological sites. The importance of STAB's participation at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21) was stressed. **Resolution 7/STAB 6** was adopted on the two last points.

VIII. Date and Venue of the next Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body (STAB)

(Item 7 of the provisional agenda, *document UCH/15/6.STAB/7*)

After the debates, STAB adopted **Resolution 8/STAB 6** and requested the Director-General to convene the Seventh Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee in spring 2016.