



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



International Bioethics  
Committee (IBC)



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



World Commission on  
the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge  
and Technology (COMEST)

**Mr Stanley Mutumba Simataa  
President of the General  
Conference**

16 December 2016

SHS/YES/BIO/16/134

Dear Sir,

Following your letter dated 6 April 2016 (Ref. GBS/SCG/16/031), we would like to inform you that the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) and the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) had jointly discussed the follow-up to the recommendations of the External Auditor's "Report on the governance of UNESCO and dependant funds, programmes and entities" during our respective sessions which were held together from 12 to 16 September 2016. During this discussion, the IBC and COMEST focused on the recommendations that might be applicable to our respective mandates and functions as advisory bodies, in particular recommendations 3, 8(i), 8(ii), 8(iv), and 10(iv).

At the onset, we would like to underline that the work methods of the IBC, the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC), and COMEST had been restructured for better synergy as early as 2014, even before the release of the External Auditor's report. In fact, paragraph 152 of the report (197 EX/28.INF Rev.) highlighted measures already taken in this regard as innovative efforts on the part of the three bodies. Through this initiative, there was a consolidation of the Secretariat of the IBC, the IGBC and COMEST, with an overall reduction of approximately 28% in staff cost. The sessions of the IBC, the IGBC and COMEST were combined whenever feasible, with an estimated reduction of 26% in interpretation cost.

Through the measures mentioned above, as well as additional ones taken in 2016, the following outcomes directly respond to a number of items under recommendation 3:

- In 2014, the joint session of the IBC and the IGBC was combined with the public meeting of the ordinary session of the IBC (instead of back-to-back), thus reducing the number of days from approximately 3 days to 1.5 days;
- In 2015, the sessions of the IBC and COMEST were held jointly, thus reducing the number of days for such sessions from approximately 10 days (when held separately) to 5 days; under this new arrangement, the number of days required for public meetings during the sessions were also reduced from 3 days (when held separately) to 1.5 days, thus increasing the time available for the advisory bodies to advance concretely on the drafting of their respective reports in private working

meetings during the sessions; in addition, this new arrangement also enabled both advisory bodies to provide inputs to each other's reports;

- In 2016, building on the measures already taken in 2014 and 2015, the public meetings of the sessions of the IBC and COMEST were held in conjunction with the joint session of the IBC and the IGBC, thus providing an opportunity for all 3 bodies to interact with each other for the first time; in concrete terms, this arrangement has also reduced the number of days required for all these sessions from approximately 10 days (when held separately) to 5 days;
- Through these measures, a number of agenda items that were common to the bodies were addressed at the same time, thus reducing redundancies in discussion.

In the last 3 years, these measures have helped build synergies between the IBC and COMEST, as well as reduce the number of days required for the Secretariat to support the advisory bodies' sessions. Further tweaks might be needed to this new arrangement to ensure that sufficient time is available for public discussion, but in general, the outcomes have been positive.

With regard to the suggestion to make annual meetings biennial under recommendation 3, it was agreed that this would adversely impact the work and role of both advisory bodies since we are called upon to provide ethical reflection and policy advice on very rapidly developing issues in science and technology. Reducing the frequency of our meetings would mean that we would not be able to address such issues in a timely manner, and thus significantly weakening the global leadership of UNESCO in bioethics and ethics of science and technology.

Referring to the suggestion to make more use of teleconferences, from our discussion, it was concluded that teleconferences would not be practical for plenary meetings and for meetings of a large number of participants, due to the technical and logistical limitations involving interpretation into the working languages of the advisory bodies, and the accommodation of the different time zones for members that are spread across all regions of the world. These limitations would affect the level of participation in our discussions, and consequently, lead to less diversity of perspectives in our work. This outcome is contrary to the core purpose of global ethical reflection on science and technology, and to the very essence of UNESCO. However, while teleconferences would not be practical for large meetings, they could still be useful for smaller group meetings. It was agreed that the advisory bodies will explore the practicality of using teleconferences for smaller groups working on the drafting of specific chapters of their respective reports, with support from the Secretariat. This could help strengthen the preparatory process for larger face-to-face meetings. Members of both advisory bodies also stressed that such smaller teleconferences should complement face-to-face meetings, and not replace them, based on the reasons mentioned above.

On the other items under recommendation 3, we would like to point out that only the essential meetings of the advisory bodies financed under the regular budget are convened; that only essential agenda items related to the work of the advisory bodies are addressed in our meetings; that our Statutes have already provided our Bureaus with delegated authority to make decisions related to our meetings, and to any other issues entrusted to them by the respective bodies; and that our work is widely disseminated through the internet as well as through

the various UNESCO activities in bioethics and ethics of science and technology.

On recommendation 8(i) concerning the introduction of a screening system for individual candidates for the offices of chair and vice-chair, since members of the IBC and COMEST are already experts in the field of work of our respective advisory bodies, this was deemed to be unnecessary. On recommendation 8(ii), we would like to point out that our respective Rules of Procedure already placed a limit of two consecutive terms (4 years maximum) for Bureau members. Furthermore, our respective Statutes also placed a limit of two consecutive mandates (8 years maximum) for members to serve on the advisory bodies. On recommendation 8(iv), the advisory bodies were in favour of introducing training for the offices of chair and vice-chair, and the Secretariat will work with the respective Bureaus to prepare the necessary materials and briefings for this purpose.

With regard to recommendation 10(iv), based on our function as advisory bodies, and on the fact that we are composed of independent experts, both bodies were, in principle, strongly in favour of a public declaration of interest arrangement for our members. However, it was suggested that the content and form of this arrangement should be consistent for all relevant and similar bodies across UNESCO. As such, we look forward to further guidance from the Organization on this recommendation.

We hope that our discussion on the above recommendations could be useful for the Working Group on governance, and we wish you all the best with the important task ahead of you.

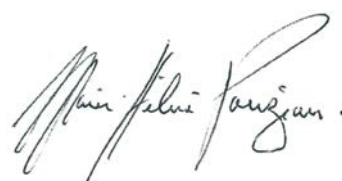
We remain at your disposal should you have any questions.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



**Johannes van Delden**  
*Chairperson*  
*International Bioethics Committee*



**Marie-Hélène Parizeau**  
*Chairperson*  
*World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology*

cc. Secretariat of the General Conference

## FACT SHEET

QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE FILLED OUT BY THE SECRETARIATS OF UNESCO'S INTERNATIONAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES

### World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST)

#### 1. Committee/Institute/Convention/Commission/Programme

##### a. Mandate and objectives

The mandate and objectives of COMEST are as outlined in Article 2 of its Statutes:

The Commission shall be responsible for advising the Organization on its programme concerning the ethics of scientific knowledge and technology. It shall also be mandated:

- to be an intellectual forum for the exchange of ideas and experience;
- to detect on that basis the early signs of risk situations;
- to perform the role of adviser to decision-makers in this respect; and, lastly,
- to promote dialogue between scientific communities, decision-makers and the public at large.

##### b. Do you have specific goals for the work foreseen in the current biennium?

Yes

##### c. Number of members and length of mandate periods for members

As per Article 3 of its Statutes, COMEST has 18 members appointed by the Director-General for a four-year mandate, renewable once. The Presidents of UNESCO's five intergovernmental scientific programmes (IOC, MAB, MOST, IGCP and IHP), of the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) and the Intergovernmental Committee, and those of the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences (ICPHS), the International Council of Social Sciences (ICSS), the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs are also invited to participate in the work of the Commission (as ex-officio members).

##### d. Are the members organized by electoral groups?

Members are independent experts so they are not identified by electoral groups; however, the Director-General has ensured that experts from all electoral groups are represented on the Commission.

##### e. Intergovernmental or personal capacity/expert capacity of members

As per Article 3 of its Statutes, COMEST members are independent experts serving in their personal capacity.

##### f. Have chairperson or/and Members States received introduction to the work and working methods?

All members of the Commission receive training on the work and working methods of COMEST every two years.

##### g. Are Observers authorized to participate and/or take the floor?

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Observers are authorized to participate in the public meetings of COMEST (Article 4 of its Statutes), and will be given the floor by the Chairperson if time allows.

h. Meeting frequency and length

COMEST meets every two years in ordinary sessions (4 to 5 days).

COMEST usually meets in extraordinary sessions on years when ordinary sessions are not convened (4 to 5 days).

COMEST Working Groups also meet once a year between ordinary and extraordinary sessions whenever RP funds are available, or when a host country/institution can be found (2 to 3 days).

i. How many languages are interpreted during the meetings?

English and French (only for ordinary and extraordinary sessions; the Working Groups normally waive the need for interpretation during their meetings due to financial constraints).

j. Where do the meetings take place?

COMEST ordinary and extraordinary sessions take place alternately in Paris and in another venue outside of HQ (whenever a host country can be found).

The Working Group meetings take place either in Paris or outside of HQ (whenever a host country/institution can be found).

k. Overall budget, including corresponding funding sources broken down as follows:

	<b>RP 2016-2017</b>	<b>Other sources 2016-2017</b>
<b>Organizing meetings</b>	US\$130,000	US\$15,000 (fundraising)
<b>Operational activities</b>	US\$13,000	
<b>UNESCO staff (approximate budget in lump sum)</b>	US\$284,000 (cost shared by IBC (40%), IGBC (20%) and COMEST (40%) under a consolidated Secretariat)	

2. Bureau (if any)

a. Number of members, mandate period, number of times for possible reelection

As per Article 6 of its Statutes, the Bureau is composed of 1 Chairperson, 2 Vice-Chairpersons and 1 Rapporteur. As per Rule 9 of its Rules of Procedure, the Bureau is assisted by the Executive Secretary of COMEST. The Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Rapporteur serve for a mandate of 2 years, with immediate eligibility for re-election only once.

b. Intergovernmental or personal capacity/expert capacity?

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As per Article 3 of its Statutes, Bureau members serve as independent experts in their personal capacity.

c. Meetings frequency and length

Bureau meetings are ad-hoc, depending on issues that need a Bureau decision. The Bureau would usually meet in the framework of an ordinary or extraordinary session, or during a Working Group meeting, for about 1-2 hours, depending on the issues that need to be discussed. In addition, the Bureau would also hold email consultation on any urgent issues that might arise between sessions, or between Working Group meetings.

d. Are observers allowed to participate and/or speak?

No.

e. Interpretation during the meetings?

Yes. However, the Bureau normally waive the need for interpretation when meeting at a venue outside of HQ due to financial constraints.

f. How many languages interpreted during the meetings?

English and French.

g. Where do the meetings take place?

On an ad-hoc basis, either in Paris or at a venue outside of HQ, depending on where the sessions and Working Group meetings are held. The Bureau also holds email consultation on urgent issues.

h. Are minutes of the meetings of the Bureau prepared? Are the minutes distributed and to whom?

The conclusions and decisions of the Bureau are prepared and distributed to the entire Commission.

### 3. Rules of procedure

a. Who adopts the rules of procedure?

As per Article 9 of its Statutes, COMEST establishes its Rules of Procedure, which is submitted to the Director-General for approval.

b. Preparation of meeting

i. Who decides agenda?

As per Article 9 of its Statutes, the agenda for COMEST sessions are prepared by the Director-General in consultation with the Chairperson of the Commission.

ii. When are documents sent out?

As per Rule 3 of its Rules of Procedure, the provisional agenda for ordinary sessions are sent out 60 days in advance, while the provisional agenda for extraordinary sessions are sent out 30 days in advance. All other working documents are usually sent out 3 to 4 weeks in advance.

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- iii. Are they sent out in paper form?  
No. All working documents are sent out in electronic format by email.
- iv. Can you opt out of receiving printed documents?  
All working documents are sent out in electronic format by email.
- v. Who decides the timetable?  
The Director-General in consultation with the Chairperson of the Commission.
- vi. Who convenes the meeting?  
The Director-General.
- vii. Do you open up for video meetings?  
Video meetings for a plenary meeting or a large Working Group meeting are not practical due to the number of participants, and the different time zones of experts across the world. However, the Commission will start exploring the use of video/phone meetings for smaller drafting groups (3-4 persons maximum) to prepare specific chapters of its reports.
- viii. Can there be extraordinary sessions?  
Yes.
  - i. If yes: how? As per Article 5 of its Statutes, extraordinary sessions of the Commission can be convened by the Director-General at the request of the Chairperson of the Commission, subject to the availability of necessary resources.
- ix. Do you appoint sub groups or sub committees?  
Yes, the Commission does form ad-hoc Working Groups.
  - i. If so for what duration and for which tasks? The Working Groups are formed to work on the drafting of the respective reports of COMEST, and will remain in place until the work on the report is completed.
- c. Decision-making
  - i. Who prepare draft decisions?  
COMEST does not prepare decisions, but reports and recommendations (Article 9 of its Statutes); all draft reports and recommendations are prepared by the Working Groups, to be discussed and adopted by the Commission in plenary.
  - ii. Until when can member states suggest new draft decision or amendments?  
COMEST is an advisory body composed of independent experts in their personal capacity, so this question does not apply. However, Member States are able to provide their feedback on COMEST's reports and recommendations during its sessions, which will be taken into consideration by C as appropriate.
  - iii. Are observers allowed to participate and/or speak?

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Observers are authorized to participate in the public meetings of COMEST (Article 4 of its Statutes), and will be given the floor by the Chairperson if time allows.

iv. How are decisions adopted?

The reports and recommendations of COMEST are adopted by consensus.

#### 4. Relation to General Conference and Executive Board and to other intergovernmental organs

a. Do you formally submit proposals for the program and budget of UNESCO (C/5)?

No.

a. If yes, how? N/A

b. How do you follow-up the General Conference's resolutions?

If there is a resolution of concern to COMEST, the COMEST Secretariat will bring it to the attention of the Chairperson for follow-up as appropriate, either through discussion in the Bureau or in plenary meetings of the Commission.

c. Do you give input to the Executive Board in your field of competence?

As requested or as deemed necessary.

d. Do you report on your activities to the General Conference and/or to the Executive Board more than once during each four year programme period?

Yes, twice every four years in a REP document to the General Conference.

e. How do you follow-up the Executive Board decisions?

If there is a decision of concern to COMEST, the COMEST Secretariat will bring it to the attention of the Chairperson for follow-up as appropriate, either through discussion in the Bureau or in plenary meetings of the Commission.

f. Does a specific framework exist to collaborate with other international and intergovernmental bodies?

The Presidents of UNESCO's five intergovernmental scientific programmes (IOC, MAB, MOST, IGCP and IHP), of the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) and the Intergovernmental Committee, and those of the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences (ICPHS), the International Council of Social Sciences (ICSS), the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs are invited to participate in the work of the Commission (as ex-officio members). All other cooperation is on an ad-hoc basis.

#### 5. Any others comments regarding the governance of international and intergovernmental bodies



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The follow-up to 38 C/Resolution 101 was jointly discussed with the IBC during our session in September 2016. The conclusions of our discussion was transmitted to your office on 16 December 2016, in a joint letter between myself and the Chair of IBC.

**6. Please provide the reference and if possible hyperlink to the relevant statutory documents, including General Conference Resolutions establishing the bodies and relevant Executive Board decisions**

General Conference Resolution: 29 C/Resolution 13

([http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001102/110220e.pdf#xml=http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?database=gctd&set=0058559C67\\_2\\_62&hits\\_rec=113&hits\\_lng=eng](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001102/110220e.pdf#xml=http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?database=gctd&set=0058559C67_2_62&hits_rec=113&hits_lng=eng))

Executive Board Decision: 154 EX/Decision 3.4.2

([http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001120/112019e.pdf#xml=http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?database=extd&set=0058558DB0\\_3\\_348&hits\\_rec=186&hits\\_lng=eng](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001120/112019e.pdf#xml=http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?database=extd&set=0058558DB0_3_348&hits_rec=186&hits_lng=eng))

Statutes of COMEST: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002344/234440e.pdf>

Rules of Procedure of COMEST: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001573/157361e.pdf>