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Twenty-third session

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<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme/about-mab/icc/icc/23rd-session-of-the-mab-council/>

**Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda:
REPORT BY THE SECRETARY OF THE MAB PROGRAMME**

1. This report briefly reviews salient outcomes of activities undertaken by the Secretariat of the MAB Programme, with a particular emphasis on actions undertaken to implement decisions and recommendations of the 22nd session of the International Co-ordinating Council (ICC) of the MAB Programme held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, from 31 May to 4 June 2010. The report is based on information that the Secretariat has up to 31 May 2011. At the time of when the Secretary of the MAB Programme will introduce this report to the ICC on 28 June 2011 he may add new information that may become available during the intervening period.

2. The MAB ICC will meet for its 23rd session in Dresden, Germany, 40 years after it first met at UNESCO in 1971. To commemorate the 40th anniversary of the MAB Programme the 23rd session of the Council will be preceded by an International Expert Conference on the theme: “For Life, For the Future: Biosphere Reserves and Climate Change” on 27th and the morning of the 28th of June, 2011. This international conference will adopt a Dresden Declaration providing guidance for the future of the MAB Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) during the remaining years of this decade of the new millennium. The Secretariat of the MAB Programme would like to express its sincere gratitude and appreciations to the German Government for the generous support and the excellent co-operation provided in the organization of both the international conference as well as the 23rd session of the MAB ICC.

3. Commemorative activities for the 40th anniversary of the MAB Programme are being implemented by many ICC Member and Observer States; these are likely to be included in Member States presentations of their reports as part of agenda item 6 – Reports on Actions Undertaken by Member States in the Context of the MAB Programme. Representatives of the many regional MAB and Biosphere Reserve (BR) networks as well as selected ecosystem networks are also due to present their reports under the same agenda item. In planning activities for the 40th commemorative year in 2011, the MAB Secretariat sent out a questionnaire to Member States seeking ideas and suggestions, as recommended by the ICC at its last session held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, in 2010. A special website integrated within the MABNet provides details (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme/mab40/>) of the various activities that are being implemented to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the MAB Programme. The Secretariat welcomes comments and suggestions of the ICC Member and Observer States to further improve the presentation of the web-based information as well to enhance the scope of activities undertaken.

4. The 40th anniversary of the MAB Programme and its achievements, particularly the importance of the activities of the WNBR in the context of UNESCO preparations for and follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 attracted mention from several Members of the 186th session of the Executive Board of UNESCO that met at UNESCO Headquarters in May 2011.

The Secretariat seeks the guidance of the ICC and observer Delegations on ways and means of building up on this interest in strengthening and improving the visibility of the MAB Programme and its WNBR further, particularly as part of discussions during the 187th session of the Executive Board (September-October 2011) and the 36th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO (October-November 2011) on programming and budgetary priorities for the biennium 2012-2013. The MAB Secretariat has negotiated with the UNESCO General Conference Secretariat to set aside 3 November 2011 during the General Conference as a special day for MAB and WNBR in recognition of the 40th anniversary of the MAB Programme. Exhibits, films and presentations are planned and a reception featuring food and beverages and specialties from biosphere reserves is foreseen. The Secretariat seeks the agreement of the ICC to formally announce 3 November 2011 as the “MAB and biosphere reserve day” during the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference and to invite all UNESCO Member States to collaborate with the Secretariat to organize events that not only reflect on MAB’s past achievements but also project its future dedicated to sustainable development practice.

5. The 35th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in 2009 adopted decision 35C/31 based on a draft resolution proposed by Germany and supported by more than 30 UNESCO Member States requesting the Director General of UNESCO to promote the visibility and recognition of MAB and WNBR as platforms for sustainable development within UNESCO and the broader UN system. The same decision called for a report on the implementation of the Madrid Action Plan (MAP) for Biosphere Reserves (2008-2013) to be submitted to the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference. This report will be based on the interim evaluation of the implementation of MAP during the first three years (2008-2010) to be reviewed by the 23rd session of the ICC under agenda item 7 and decisions and recommendations of the Council on that report.

6. The mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the Madrid Action Plan during 2008-2010 outlines both strengths and weaknesses; some networks such as the Ibero-American, have undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of MAP during 2008-2010 in Latin America and the Caribbean, thanks to voluntary support of Chile which co-ordinated the mailing of questionnaires and synthesizing responses received. This mid-term evaluation, based on information obtained from 147 MAB National Committees and biosphere reserves was presented and discussed at the 1st Ibero-American Biosphere Reserve Conference held in November 2010 in Puerto Morelos, Mexico with the participation of more than 250 persons. Generously supported by the Mexican and Spanish Governments this 1st Ibero-American Biosphere Reserve Conference resulted in an Action Plan with targets and actions linked to the Madrid Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves (2008-2013) and the Puerto Morelos Declaration highlighting the importance of biosphere reserves for sustainable development in the context of global climate change. During the last AfriMAB network meeting held in Nairobi in September 2011, 25 countries reported on the status of MAP implementation at national levels. New information may emerge from forthcoming regional meetings, such as the EuroMAB Network due to meet in Lake Vanern Biosphere Reserve in Sweden immediately after the 23rd session of the MAB ICC in Dresden, Germany. However, in many parts of the world responses received by the Secretariat to questionnaires sent out were restricted to selected countries and biosphere reserves and this dimension of the evaluation process needs clear improvement when MAP is due for its final evaluation in 2014.

7. It is evident that implementation of the MAP requires strong commitment from authorities responsible for biosphere reserves, MAB National Committees and Focal Points as well as UNESCO National Commissions. These national and local authorities are assigned lead responsibilities for attaining well over 50% of the 31 targets of MAP. Based on lessons of the mid-term evaluation of the MAP (2008-2010) the Secretariat wishes to solicit stronger engagement of such national and local authorities to improve implementation of MAP during 2011-2013. The Council may consider inviting the UNESCO Executive Board and the General Conference to call upon Member States to consider investing appropriately in strengthening UNESCO National Commissions, MAB National Committees and Focal Points and biosphere reserve authorities in order to improve implementation of MAP during 2011-2013 and linking

those investments to the work of appropriate national and local sustainable development agendas.

8. Specific areas of the implementation of the MAP, for example the communication strategy with its global, national and local level dimensions, need greater resources and capacity during the period of 2011 and beyond. The Secretariat is hopeful that some of the 40th anniversary commemorative activities will boost capacities in the Secretariat and in Member States on aspects related to communications, information exchange and sharing of knowledge and lessons linked to sustainable development practice in biosphere reserves. Increasing interest in exchanges between biosphere reserves will help in this regard; the Secretariat is pleased to note the exchange visit from representatives of biosphere reserves from the Republic of Korea and Vietnam to German biosphere reserves just prior to the time of the International Conference and the 23rd session of the MAB ICC in Dresden, Germany.

9. The importance of national and local level initiatives in the implementation of MAB and WNBR initiatives has been the principal reason guiding the document included as Annex 1 to the working document SC-11/CONF.202/8. This document is intended to replace the earlier document on "Guidelines for the Establishment of MAB National Committees". The International Support Group (ISG) established by the 21st session of the MAB ICC in 2009, and authorized by the 22nd session of the ICC in 2010 to review, under the Presidency of the Vice-Chair of the Bureau of the MAB ICC for the Arab Region, Mr. Mohamed El-Zahabi, all revisions to statutory documents related to MAB and WNBR has recommended that the ICC does not consider Annex 1 of SC-11/CONF.202/8 as a statutory text. Instead, ISG has suggested that the Member States be invited to review this document and to provide suggestions for its revision and finalization so as to enable the Member States to use the document as a guide to implement MAB and WNBR activities at the national level. The ICC may wish to adopt the recommendations of the ISG and also request that Member States report back on their efforts to implement the suggestions in Annex 1 of SC-11/CONF.202/8 to the 24th session of ICC in 2012.

10. MAB and WNBR activities have also received support in many target countries of the One UN initiative, for example in Cape Verde, Rwanda, Tanzania and Vietnam. These initiatives where the MAB Secretariat provided back-up support to efforts of UNESCO Regional, Cluster and National Offices have built capacity and helped raise awareness of the relevance of MAB and WNBR to national level environmental, biodiversity and sustainable development initiatives. Lessons learned from these countries may help others to better link MAB and WNBR as platforms for national and local-level sustainable development programmes and initiatives within the framework of UNDAF and other in-country multi-lateral agency co-ordination frameworks.

11. The ISG, under the Presidency of Mr. Mohamed El-Zahaby, also reviewed the statutes of the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves as well as the International Coordinating Council of the Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB) included as Annexes 2 and 3, as well as 4 and 5, respectively, to document SC-11/CONF.202/8. These annexes include both the current versions of the statutes under consideration and the track-change version of all amendments made to the statutes following 4 meetings of the ISG; average participation in each of the ISG meetings included 30-40 ICC Member and Observer Delegations. Except where indicated, all amendments proposed were accepted unanimously by those Member States present during the discussions of the ISG. The Secretariat invites the Council to adopt both the statutes of the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves and the MAB International Coordinating Council, with any further changes that the ICC may consider necessary, so that they could be considered for adoption by the Executive Board and General Conference sessions of UNESCO to be convened at UNESCO Headquarters during September-November 2011. Once, the UNESCO General Conference adopts the statutes of the MAB International Coordinating Council, the ICC may wish to consider appropriate amendments to its rules of procedure at its 24th session in 2012.

12. The ISG also compared the provisions of the Statutory Framework for the WNBR with the vision, mission, actions and targets of the MAP for biosphere reserves (2008-2013).

Although the ISG noted that selected targets of MAP aim to attain results that are beyond the scope of the Statutory Framework of the WNBR the ISG was of the view that the ICC should defer any revisions to the Statutory Framework of the WNBR until such time when the MAP for Biosphere Reserves (2008-2013) has been fully implemented and a final evaluation of the achievements of MAP has been undertaken in 2014.

13. The ICC will examine the recommendations of its Bureau on new proposals for biosphere reserves and extensions and modifications to existing biosphere reserves in the World Network under agenda item 8. The Bureau is expected to consider the recommendations of the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves which met at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in February 2011 to examine these proposals in detail. The ICC will also be informed of the decision of one Member State, i.e. Australia, to withdraw one (Mcquarie Island) of its sites from the World Network because the site does not meet criteria set by the 1995 Statutory Framework for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

14. The periodic review of biosphere reserves continue to grow in its importance for ensuring quality of the work carried out in individual biosphere reserves. Recommendations of the International Advisory Committee on this matter, both from an overall perspective and for individual sites for which reports were submitted by Member States in 2010 are detailed in document SC-11/CONF.202/7. Following extensive discussions on this subject last year, the Secretariat has been communicating with Member States and has been receiving more information on country plans to undertake periodic review exercises as well as on steps taken to implement recommendations emanating from the reports. Nevertheless, more than 100 sites continue to be in the category of biosphere reserves that had never undertaken periodic reviews. The International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves recommended that the ICC consider inviting those countries that have never undertaken biosphere reserves to withdraw their sites from the World Network. The ICC may wish to recall that at its last session in 2010 it set 2013 as the deadline for countries that have never undertaken a periodic review to either inform the MAB Secretariat of their plans and a time table to complete such a review; the outcome of such a review may result in eventual withdrawal of a site from the WNBR.

15. The ICC may recall that during discussions on this agenda item at its last session, Austria raised the issue that several biosphere reserves designated prior to 1995 are unlikely to be re-designed to meet the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework criteria for the World Network and offered to host a meeting to discuss the future of those sites continuing to have some status within the MAB Programme. Such a meeting was organized at UNESCO Headquarters in February 2011 with the participation of members of the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves and two Austrian specialists, to address the possibility of including these sites in a separate category that tentatively has been called "MAB Research Sites". The meeting recommended to the ICC that the working title for such sites be "support/study sites for the MAB Programme" and that selection criteria for such sites should be established by the Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (see document SC-11/CONF.202/12 on this issue). The ICC may consider these recommendations and guide the Secretariat on what steps must be taken in order to explore this issue further while minimizing any undesirable incentives and messages that creating a new category of sites parallel to the World Network may entail.

16. The electronic working group established under the Chairmanship of the Chair of the French MAB National Committee, Prof. Robert Barbault, has made some progress in revising the nomination and periodic review forms. An update will be provided during the Council session. The Secretariat will soon place the revised drafts of these two forms in the MABNet to invite comments from all interested Member States with a view to submitting a consolidated version for review by the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves at its next meeting in early 2012. Based on the recommendations of that meeting of the Advisory Committee, revised versions of both forms will be submitted to the consideration of the 24th session of the MAB ICC in 2012.

17. The ICC will receive from the Bureau of the MAB ICC recommendations for the winners of the MAB Young Scientists Research Grants: 10 nominees for receiving the grants from the regular UNESCO contributions and 2 laureates for receiving the special awards being sponsored by the Government of Austria in the context of the International Year of Forests in 2011. Austria financed two similar supplementary awards already in 2010 in celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity. UNESCO participation in activities of the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010 resulted in the Conference of Parties of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) that met in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010 adopting a joint CBD-UNESCO initiative on biological and cultural diversity. The International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves recommended Mr Nazir Hani from Lebanon as the winner of the Michel Batisse Award for Biosphere Reserve Case Studies; the Members of the Bureau have endorsed this recommendation and Mr Nazir Hani from Lebanon is here with us in Dresden to present his case study to the ICC under agenda item 12.

18. In line with the overall priority UNESCO assigns to Africa, several initiatives in Africa have been implemented since the conclusion of the last session of the ICC in June 2010. The governance of the AfriMAB network has been strengthened by the adoption of its Charter and statutes and by the election of a Bureau elected for 2 years. An East African Biosphere Reserve group has been initiated to support the transboundary initiatives in the sub region. Capacity building on carbon trade and REDD+ related matters have been carried out at regional and sub regional levels. The Regional Post-Graduate Training School on Integrated Management of Tropical Forests, known by its French acronym, ERAIFT, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), received 30 students from more than 10 African States for 2010-2011. During its current phase between 2009 and 2013, ERAIFT intends to train more than 100 African professionals and has committed to ensuring that the last intake for 2012-2013 will include equal number of trainees from English and French-speaking African countries. ERAIFT hosted the first meeting of the South-South Co-operation for tropical forests, during December 2010 in Kinshasa, DRC, in accordance with an MoU it signed with the Federal University of Para, Belem, Brazil, and the Indonesian MAB National Committee at the time of the 21st session of the MAB ICC convened on Jeju Island, Republic of Korea, in 2009. A work programme that includes exchange of students and staff has been established and will be the subject for further discussion and refinement at the second meeting to be hosted by Indonesia in September 2011. The Director of ERAIFT is co-operating closely with the MAB Secretariat and the UNESCO Office in Kinshasa, DRC, to prepare a feasibility study for establishing a UNESCO Category I Centre in ERAIFT; the feasibility study is due to be submitted for the consideration of the UNESCO Executive Board at its forthcoming session in September-October 2011.

19. The Secretariat wishes to thank the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation for organizing a special training workshop for African Biosphere Reserve Managers in parallel to the 23rd session of the ICC in Dresden, Germany. The UNESCO-MAB/UNEP-GEF Project for capacity building among six West African Biosphere Reserves' authorities and communities that concluded in 2009, recently received very positive comments from an independent evaluation giving encouragement to the Secretariat to explore launching other such projects for strengthening MAB and WNBR activities in Africa. The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation has invited participation of the MAB Secretariat in a joint mission scheduled for November 2011 that aims to link the application of the biosphere reserve concept to trans-border co-operation for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in Southern Africa.

20. Following the encouragement provided by the MAB ICC at its 22nd session, the MAB Secretariat has fostered the setting up of ad-hoc open ended working group exploring themes linked to MAB, WNBR, green economy and sustainable development. An urban ecosystem working group has been created. The group was derived from the participants of the UNESCO-MAB, SCOPE and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) symposium on "Urban Futures and Human and Ecosystem Wellbeing" held in Shanghai, China, in late October 2010. ICC Member and Observer States may wish to refer to the website <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/specific-ecosystems/urban-systems/> to know more

about the outcomes of this symposium and planned work of the urban ecosystem working group. A similar working group is in the making on the theme “Earth Resources and Biosphere Reserves” based on the outcome of a 1-day workshop held at UNESCO Headquarters on 15 February 2011, bringing together selected experts from the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves and the Bureau of the International Geosciences Programme of UNESCO as well as a small number of mining industry representatives. The working group will explore important issues of sustainable development in exploration and exploitation of minerals and oil and gas resources in biosphere reserves. Establishment of other such working groups covering themes such as tourism are currently under discussion.

21. The MAB Secretariat has contributed towards the drawing up of the Director General’s Climate Change Initiative which amongst others aims to advocate the use of biosphere reserves and World Heritage sites in REDD (Reduced deforestation and forest degradation) and REDD+ (REDD initiatives that are linked to concurrently furthering MDGs and other UN goals and objectives). The Secretariat is in communication with UNDP, UNEP and FAO which comprise the UN-REDD as well as bilateral governments such as Norway which strongly support tropical forest conservation initiatives. The Secretariat is actively engaging with discussions with private sector partners often facilitated by MAB National Committees and biosphere reserve co-ordinators in countries like Sweden and the United Kingdom to explore new partnerships in order to have biosphere reserves used as experimental sites for climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives within the context of sustainable development.

22. Partnerships, both from the public and private sector as well as from civil society organizations will become increasingly critical for implementation of the MAB and WNBR activities, including the implementation of MAP during 2011-2013. The next few years are likely to be challenging years financially as UNESCO’s Regular Programme (RP) Budget faces reductions in real value in the light of austerity measures introduced in many developed as well as developing countries. The MAB Secretariat has been particularly fortunate in receiving considerable support beyond the UNESCO RP budget, particularly from Spain which has contributed about US\$ 2-3 million per biennium for the implementation of MAP. Other countries like Germany which are hosting the 40th anniversary events and several other initiatives referred to in this report are also providing regular support. The ICC may wish to draw attention to Article IX, para. 3 of the current MAB Statutes (or Article IX, para. 4 of the proposed revised Statutes) where Member States have the option of providing earmarked or voluntary contributions to implementation of MAB and WNBR activities globally, nationally and locally and encourage all Member States to explore the feasibility to contribute towards the collective pool of resources needed for developing MAB and WNBR as worldwide platforms for sustainable development action and practice.

23. The Members of the ICC will consider the dates and venue of its 24th session under agenda item 13. At that time it would be important for the ICC Members to keep in mind that the Rio+20 Conference is scheduled for 4-6 June 2012. In order to enable Member States, ecosystem, MAB and biosphere reserve networks as well as the Secretariat and its partners to fully make use of this important event to highlight the work of MAB and WNBR, the ICC may wish to consider convening its 24th session a few weeks after the Rio+20 event. Such a scheduling of the 24th session of the ICC would also enable the Secretariat to introduce key messages deriving from the Rio+20 Conference into the discussions of the 24th session of the MAB/ICC.

24. Members of ICC as well as Observer States are invited to comment on the contents of this report and also to provide suggestions and advice on future activities and initiatives. In particular, the Secretariat seeks the guidance on specific suggestions underlined in this document and especially with regard to paragraphs 3, 4 and 7, respectively. Suggestions of the Secretariat with regard to issues to be addressed under the different agenda items may be given due consideration at the time of discussions of those respective items.