

RULES OF PROCEDURE

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES
TO THE CONVENTION CONCERNING
THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL
AND NATURAL HERITAGE



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World Heritage Convention

The Rules of Procedure were last revised by the General Assembly of States Parties at its twenty-fourth session (UNESCO, 2023).

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Adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention at its second session (Paris, 24 November 1978) and amended at its tenth session (Paris, 2-3 November 1995) (following which the Rules then numbered 13.6 and 13.7 were aligned with the Rule then numbered 13.4, pursuant to the 23rd session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee (5-10 July 1999)), at its thirteenth session (Paris, 30-31 October 2001), at its fourteenth session (Paris, 14-15 October 2003), at its sixteenth session (UNESCO, 24-25 October 2007), at its seventeenth session (UNESCO, 23-28 October 2009), at its first extraordinary session (UNESCO, 13-14 November 2014) and at its twenty-fourth session (UNESCO, 22-23 November 2023).

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I. FUNCTIONS OF THE ASSEMBLY

Rule 1 - Functions of the Assembly

Articles 8.1, 8.3 and 16.1 of the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference on 16 November 1972 (hereinafter the “Convention”), provide for the functions of the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention (hereinafter the “Assembly”).

II. PARTICIPATION

Rule 2 - Parties to the Convention

The representatives of all States Parties to the Convention may participate, with the right to vote, in the work of the Assembly.

Rule 3 - Observers

- 3.1 The representatives of Member States of UNESCO not parties to the Convention and of permanent observer missions to UNESCO may participate in the work of the Assembly as observers, without the right to vote and subject to Rule 16.3.
- 3.2 Representatives of the United Nations and organizations of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations that have concluded mutual representation agreements with UNESCO, may participate in the work of the Assembly as observers, without the right to vote and subject to Rule 16.3.
- 3.3 Representatives of other intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations, invited by the Director-General may participate in the work of the Assembly, without the right to vote and subject to Rule 16.3.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE ASSEMBLY

Rule 4 - Ordinary and Extraordinary Sessions

- 4.1 The Assembly shall meet every two years in ordinary session in accordance with Articles 8.1 and 8.3 of the Convention.
- 4.2 The Assembly shall meet in extraordinary session if it so decides or at the request of at least one third of the States Parties.

Rule 5 - Date and Place

- 5.1 The Director-General shall determine the date of the ordinary session, in accordance with Articles 8.1 and 8.3 of the Convention. The Director-General shall communicate such date to all States Parties and observers.

- 5.2 Unless the date has been decided by the Assembly, the Director-General shall determine the date of the extraordinary session, which shall then be set no later than sixty days, unless logistically not possible, following the date of the request referred to in Rule 4.2. The Director-General shall communicate such date to all States Parties and observers.
- 5.3 Ordinary and extraordinary sessions shall be held at the Headquarters of UNESCO, unless the Assembly decides to meet elsewhere.

Rule 6 - Online sessions

- 6.1 The Assembly may hold online sessions only during periods of emergency or in exceptional circumstances rendering *in praesentia* meetings impracticable.
- 6.2 At an ordinary or extraordinary session, the Assembly may decide to hold an online session by simple majority of States Parties present and voting.
- 6.3 Should at least one third of the States Parties propose the holding of an online session while the Assembly is not in session, the Director-General shall consult all the States Parties by correspondence. The Assembly shall hold an online session unless one third of the States Parties disagrees to the proposal.
- 6.4 Elections by secret ballot held pursuant to the present Rules in the course of an online session shall be conducted *in praesentia*. The Secretariat shall make the necessary arrangements therefor, including the place and time of the election, which shall be notified to States Parties in advance of the ballot. Other voting held pursuant to the present Rules shall preferably be conducted *in praesentia*.

Rule 7 - Provisional Agenda

- 7.1 The provisional agenda of the session shall be prepared by the Director-General.
- 7.2 The provisional agenda of an ordinary session shall include:
 - a) Any question required by the Convention and the present Rules of Procedure;
 - b) Any question the inclusion of which has been decided by the Assembly at a previous session;
 - c) Any question referred by the Committee;
 - d) Any question proposed by the States Parties to the Convention;
 - e) Any question proposed by the Director-General.
- 7.3 The provisional agenda for an extraordinary session shall only include those questions for which the session has been convened.
- 7.4 The Secretariat shall circulate to the States Parties and observers the provisional agenda at least sixty days before the opening of an ordinary session of the Assembly and as soon as possible, and preferably fifteen days before the opening of an extraordinary session.

Rule 8 - Adoption of the Agenda

The Assembly shall adopt its agenda at the beginning of each session.

Rule 9 - Amendments, deletions and new items

The Assembly may amend, delete or add new items to the agenda so adopted if so decided by a two-thirds majority of the States Parties present and voting.

IV. BUREAU

Rule 10 - Bureau

- 10.1 The Bureau shall consist of the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson(s) and the Rapporteur.
- 10.2 The Bureau shall coordinate the work of the Assembly and fix the order of business of the session. It shall also assist the Chairperson in carrying out her or his functions.
- 10.3 The Bureau, convened at the request of its Chairperson, shall meet as frequently as deemed necessary. The Bureau may, if the Chairperson deems it appropriate, be consulted by correspondence.

Rule 11 - Election of officers

- 11.1 The Assembly shall elect the Chairperson, four Vice-Chairpersons and the Rapporteur at the opening of each session in conformity with the principle of equitable geographical representation.
- 11.2 The term of office of the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson(s) and the Rapporteur will run from the opening of the session of the Assembly in which they are elected until the closing of the session.

Rule 12 - Powers and duties of the Chairperson

- 12.1 In addition to exercising the powers and duties which are conferred upon her or him elsewhere by the present Rules of Procedure, the Chairperson shall open and close each plenary meeting of the Assembly. S/he shall direct the discussions, ensure observance of the present Rules of Procedure, accord the right to speak, put questions to the vote and announce decisions. S/he shall rule on points of order and, subject to the present Rules of Procedure, shall control the proceedings and the maintenance of order. S/he shall not vote, but s/he may instruct another member of her or his delegation to vote in her or his place.
- 12.2 Should the Chairperson be absent during a meeting, or part thereof, her or his powers and duties shall be exercised by one of the Vice-Chairpersons, selected according to the English alphabetical order of the States members of the Bureau commencing with the country of the Chairperson. A Vice-Chairperson acting as Chairperson shall have the same powers and duties as the Chairperson.

V. CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

Rule 13 - Quorum

- 13.1 A quorum shall consist of a majority of the States Parties referred to in Rule 2 and represented at the Assembly.
- 13.2 The Assembly shall not decide on any matter unless a quorum is present.

Rule 14 - Public nature of meetings

Meetings shall be held in public unless decided otherwise by the Assembly.

Rule 15 - Subsidiary bodies

- 15.1 The Assembly may establish such subsidiary bodies, including working groups, as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions.
- 15.2 The Assembly shall define the composition and the terms of reference (including mandate and duration of office) and, if necessary, the quorum of such subsidiary bodies at the time of their establishment.
- 15.3 Each subsidiary body shall elect its Chairperson.
- 15.4 In appointing members of subsidiary bodies, due regard shall be given to principle of equitable geographical representation.

Rule 16 - Order and time-limit of speeches

- 16.1 The Chairperson shall call upon speakers in the order in which they signify their wish to speak.
- 16.2 For the convenience of the discussion, the Chairperson may limit the time to be allowed to each speaker.
- 16.3 The consent of the Chairperson must be obtained whenever an observer wishes to address the Assembly.

Rule 17 - Draft resolutions and amendments

- 17.1 Draft resolutions and amendments may be proposed by the States Parties and shall be transmitted in writing to the Secretariat of the Assembly, which shall circulate them to all participants.
- 17.2 As a general rule, no draft resolution or amendment shall be discussed or put to the vote unless it has been circulated sufficiently in advance to all participants in the working languages of the Assembly.

Rule 18 - Points of order

- 18.1 During the discussion of any matter, a State Party may rise to a point of order and the point of order shall be immediately ruled upon by the Chairperson.

18.2 A State Party may appeal against the ruling of the Chairperson. The appeal shall be put to the vote immediately, and the Chairperson's ruling shall stand unless overruled by a majority of the States Parties present and voting.

Rule 19 - Procedural motions

During the discussion of any matter, a State Party may propose a procedural motion: suspension or adjournment of the meeting, adjournment of the debate or closure of the debate.

Rule 20 - Suspension or adjournment of the meeting

During the discussion of any matter, a State Party may move the suspension or the adjournment of the meeting. Such motions shall not be debated but shall be immediately put to the vote.

Rule 21 - Adjournment of the debate

During the discussion of any matter, a State Party may move the adjournment of the debate on the item under discussion. On moving the adjournment, the State Party shall indicate whether it moves the adjournment *sine die* or to a particular time which it shall specify. In addition to the proposer of the motion, one speaker may speak in favour of, and one against, the motion, after which the motion shall be immediately put to the vote. The Chairperson may limit the time to be allowed to speakers under this rule.

Rule 22 - Closure of the debate

During the discussion of any matter, a State Party may move the closure of the debate on the item under discussion, whether or not any other speaker has signified her or his wish to take part in the discussion. If application is made for permission to speak against the closure, it may be accorded to not more than two speakers, after which the motion shall be immediately put to the vote. If the Assembly is in favour of the closure, the Chairperson shall declare the closure of the debate. The Chairperson may limit the time to be allowed to speakers under this rule.

Rule 23 - Order of procedural motions

Subject to Rule 18.1, the following motions shall have precedence in the following order over all other proposals or motions before the meeting:

- a) to suspend the meeting;
- b) to adjourn the meeting;
- c) to adjourn the debate on the item under discussion;
- d) for the closure of the debate on the item under discussion.

VI. WORKING LANGUAGES

Rule 24 - Working languages

- 24.1 The working languages of the Assembly shall be Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.
- 24.2 Speeches made at the Assembly in one of the working languages shall be interpreted into the other languages.
- 24.3 Speakers may, however, speak in any other language, provided that they make their own arrangements for interpretation of their speeches into one of the working languages.
- 24.4 The documents of the Assembly shall be issued in all the working languages.

Rule 25 - Deadline for the distribution of documents

The documents relating to the items on the provisional agenda of each session of the Assembly shall be distributed, either in paper format or electronically, at the latest thirty days before the opening of the ordinary session, and as soon as possible in the case of an extraordinary session, to all States Parties and observers.

Rule 26 - Summary records

The Secretariat shall prepare summary records of all statements made during the plenary meetings of the Assembly in English and French for approval at the opening of the next session.

VII. VOTING

Rule 27 - Voting rights

Each State Party shall have one vote in the Assembly.

Rule 28 - Consensus

Every effort shall be made to adopt decisions in the Assembly by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions shall be adopted by vote.

Rule 29 - Conduct during voting

After the Chairperson has announced the beginning of voting, no one shall interrupt the voting except on a point of order in connection with the actual conduct of the voting.

Rule 30 - Simple majority

- 30.1 When the Assembly resorts to voting, decisions shall be taken by a simple majority of the States Parties present and voting, except as otherwise provided for in the present Rules of Procedure.

- 30.2 The decision concerning the amount of the contributions, in the form of a uniform percentage applicable to all States Parties which have not made the declaration referred to in paragraph 2 of Article 16 of the Convention, shall be determined by a simple majority vote of the States Parties present and voting which have not made the above-mentioned declaration.

Rule 31 - Voting by show of hands and roll-call

- 31.1 Except as otherwise provided for in the present Rules of Procedure, voting shall be by show of hands.
- 31.2 When the result of a vote by show of hands is in doubt, the Chairperson may take a second vote by roll-call. Vote by roll-call shall also be taken if it is requested by not less than two States Parties. The request shall be made to the Chairperson before voting takes place or immediately after the vote by show of hands.
- 31.3 When a vote is taken by roll-call, the vote of each State Party participating shall be inserted in the summary records.

Rule 32 - Order of voting on proposals

- 32.1 If two or more proposals, other than amendments, relate to the same question, they shall, unless the Assembly decides otherwise, be voted on in the order in which they were submitted. The Assembly may, after each vote on a proposal, decide whether to vote on the next proposal.
- 32.2 A motion requiring that no decision be taken on a proposal shall have priority over that proposal.

Rule 33 - Voting on amendments

- 33.1 When an amendment to a proposal is moved, the amendment shall be voted on first. When two or more amendments to a proposal are moved, the Chairperson shall put them to the vote, starting with the amendment deemed by her or him to be the furthest removed in substance from the original proposal, and so on. In case of doubt, the Chairperson shall consult the Assembly.
- 33.2 If one or more amendments are adopted, the amended proposal shall then be put to the vote.
- 33.3 A motion is considered an amendment to a proposal if it merely adds to, deletes from or revises part of that proposal.

Rule 34 - Meaning of the expression “States Parties present and voting”

For the purpose of the present Rules of Procedure, the expression “States Parties present and voting” means States Parties casting an affirmative or negative vote. States Parties who abstain from voting are considered as not voting.

VIII. ELECTION AND TERM OF OFFICE OF THE COMMITTEE

35.1 - Procedures for the presentation of candidatures to the World Heritage Committee¹

- a) The Secretariat shall ask all States Parties, at least three months prior to the opening of the General Assembly, whether they intend to stand for election to the World Heritage Committee. If so, its candidature should be sent to the Secretariat at least six weeks prior to the opening of the General Assembly.
- b) Members of the World Heritage Committee may stand again for election after a gap of 6 years after the expiry of their mandate.
- c) At least four weeks prior to the opening of the General Assembly the Secretariat shall send to all States Parties the provisional list of States Parties candidates. The Secretariat will also provide information on the status of all compulsory and voluntary contributions to the World Heritage Fund made by each of the candidates. This list of candidatures will be revised as necessary.
- d) This list of candidatures shall be finalised 48 hours before the opening of the General Assembly. No other candidatures nor payments of compulsory and voluntary contributions to the World Heritage Fund (for the purpose of presenting a candidature to the Committee) will be accepted in the 48-hour period prior to the opening of the General Assembly.

35.2 - Election of members of the World Heritage Committee

- a) The election of members of the World Heritage Committee shall be conducted by secret ballot whenever five or more delegations having the right to vote so request, or if the Chairperson so decides.
- b) The election of the members of the World Heritage Committee shall be conducted on the basis of the composition of the electoral groups of UNESCO, as determined by the UNESCO General Conference at its most recent session, it being understood that “Group V” shall consist of two separate groups, for the African States and Arab States respectively.
- c) Seats shall be allocated for each electoral group as follows: two (2) seats for Group I, two (2) seats for Group II, two (2) seats for Group III, three (3) seats for Group IV, four (4) seats for Group Va, two (2) seats for Group Vb. An additional seat shall be allocated for Group III and Group IV on a rotational basis.
- d) Notwithstanding, at each election, due consideration shall be given to the election of at least one State Party which has never served as a Member of the World Heritage Committee.

¹ Resolution **13 GA 9** (paragraph 6) invites the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, to voluntarily reduce their term of office from six to four years.

- e) In case the above formula cannot be practically applied, an exceptional arrangement may be made to accommodate such special circumstances.
 - f) Ballot(s) for allocated seat(s) shall precede the ballot(s) for the remaining seats to be filled. Unsuccessful candidates in a ballot for any allocated seat shall be eligible to stand for election in subsequent ballot(s).
- 35.3 Before the election begins, the Chairperson shall appoint two tellers from among the delegates present; s/he shall hand to them the list of States Parties entitled to vote and the list of States Parties candidates. S/he shall announce the number of seats to be filled.
- 35.4 The Secretariat shall distribute to the delegations a voting paper in the form of a list of all the States Parties which are candidates.
- 35.5 Each delegation shall cast its vote by encircling the names of those States Parties for which it desires to vote.
- 35.6 The tellers shall collect from each delegation their voting paper and shall proceed to count the votes, under the supervision of the Chairperson.
- 35.7 Voting papers on which all names of States Parties have been circled shall be considered to be abstentions.
- 35.8 Voting papers on which more names have been circled than there are seats to be filled shall be considered invalid.
- 35.9 a) Ballot for the allocated seats
- The candidate(s) obtaining in the first round the highest number of votes shall be declared elected in the sequential order of the number of votes obtained from the highest to the lowest, up to the number of seat(s) to be filled. In case two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes for the seat(s) remaining to be filled, a second round shall be held for those candidates to fill those remaining seat(s).
- b) Ballot for the open (non allocated) seats
- The candidate(s) obtaining in the first round, more than half of the valid votes cast by States Parties present and voting shall be declared elected in the sequential order of the number of votes obtained from the highest to the lowest, up to the number of seat(s) to be filled. If there still remain seat(s) to be filled, there shall be a second round.
- 35.10 In the second round, the candidate(s) obtaining the highest number of votes, up to the number of seat(s) to be filled, shall be declared elected.
- 35.11 If in the second round, two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes, and, as a result, the number of these candidates is greater than the remaining number of seats to be filled, there shall be an additional round of voting restricted to those candidates who obtained the same number of votes. If in this additional round of voting, two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes, the Chairperson shall decide by drawing lots among them in order to allocate the remaining seat(s).
- 35.12 After each round, the Chairperson shall announce the results.

IX. SECRETARIAT OF THE ASSEMBLY

Rule 36 - Secretariat

- 36.1 The Director-General of UNESCO or her or his representative shall participate in the work of the Assembly, its subsidiary bodies and the Bureau without the right to vote. S/he may, at any time, make either oral or written statements to the Assembly on any question under discussion.
- 36.2 The Director-General of UNESCO shall appoint an official of the Secretariat of UNESCO to act as Secretary to the Assembly, as well as other officials who shall together constitute the Secretariat of the Assembly.
- 36.3 The Secretariat shall receive, translate and distribute all documents; arrange for the interpretation of the discussions; prepare summary records; and publish the adopted resolutions and distribute them to the States Parties.
- 36.4 The Secretariat shall also perform all other duties necessary for the proper conduct of the work of the Assembly.

X. AMENDMENT TO AND SUSPENSION OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE

Rule 37 - Amendment

The Assembly may amend the present Rules of Procedure by a decision taken in a plenary meeting by a two-thirds majority of States Parties present and voting, except when they reproduce provisions of the Convention.

Rule 38 - Suspension

The Assembly may suspend the application of any of the present Rules of Procedure, except when they reproduce provisions of the Convention, by a decision taken in a plenary meeting by a two-thirds majority of the States Parties present and voting.