



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

17/10/2016

Ref.: CL/4178

Subject: **First draft of a preliminary text of a non-binding declaration on ethical principles in relation to climate change**

Sir/Madam,

As you know, by 38 C/Resolution 42, the General Conference invited me to prepare the preliminary text of a non-binding declaration on ethical principles in relation to climate change.

Pursuant to that Resolution and in line with a subsequent Executive Board decision (EX 199/Decision 5.I.B), I am submitting the first draft of this preliminary text to you for consultations.

As you are aware, this first draft was prepared by the first meeting of an *Ad Hoc* Expert Group (Category VI meeting) that was held in Rabat from 20 to 24 September 2016 thanks to the generous support of the Kingdom of Morocco.

The original vision of a participative process that Member States endorsed now requires consultations with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to be organized at the sub-national, national and regional levels. These consultations might involve, for example, governmental experts, decision-makers, national scientific communities in both the natural and social and human sciences, as well as local communities, environmental and climate change activists, non-governmental organizations and the mass media. I wish to reiterate the need for continued support, financial and in-kind, for the hosting of such meetings. The UNESCO Secretariat remains at your disposal to assist should you so require.

The first draft prepared by the experts offers a solid starting point for the consultations. So as to facilitate its dissemination, it is available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish via the following website: <http://en.unesco.org/climatechange-ethics-consult/>.

By 1 February 2017, Member States should return consolidated comments on the first draft, in French or English, to the Assistant Director-General for the Social and Human Sciences, Ms Nada Al-Nashif, (UNESCO 7 place Fontenoy, 75007 Paris, France; e-mail: adclimate@unesco.org).

There is a tight timetable for the work that follows. The *Ad Hoc* Expert Group will be consulted to help integrate the comments into a second draft that should be circulated by mid-May 2017. This will allow for its consideration by representatives of Member States attending an intergovernmental conference that will be held at UNESCO Headquarters in June or July 2017.

You will soon receive my invitation to appoint a representative to this intergovernmental conference, which should finalize a preliminary text of a Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change. This preliminary text will then be reviewed by the Executive Board at its 202nd session and, thereafter, may be transmitted to the General Conference for its consideration.

Accept, Sir/Madam, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Irina Bokova
Director-General

Enc.

cc: National Commissions for UNESCO
Permanent Delegations to UNESCO



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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FIRST DRAFT OF A PRELIMINARY TEXT OF A DECLARATION ON ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN RELATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

In accordance with the decisions of UNESCO's General Conference at its 38th session and of its Executive Board at its 199th session ([38 C/Resolution 42](#) and [199 EX/Decision 5.I.B](#)), the Director-General of UNESCO constituted an Ad Hoc Expert Group (AHEG) to prepare a first draft of a preliminary text of a non-binding declaration on ethical principles in relation to climate change.

The first meeting of the AHEG was convened by the Director-General in Rabat from 20 to 24 September 2016, at the generous invitation of the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco.

This document contains the first draft of a preliminary text of a non-binding declaration on ethical principles in relation to climate change, which was prepared by the AHEG during this meeting.

In accordance with the process outlined in [199 EX/Decision 5.I.B](#), this first draft will now be transmitted to Member States for consultation. All comments should be submitted to the Secretariat (email: adclimate@unesco.org) no later than 1 February 2017.

FIRST DRAFT OF A PRELIMINARY TEXT OF A DECLARATION ON ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN RELATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The Member States of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, meeting in Paris at the thirty-ninth session of the General Conference, from 7 to 29 November 2017,

Considering the reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other relevant expert organizations on the scientific findings on climate change,

Noting with great concern that human-induced climate change is threatening the sustainability of the Earth's living and non-living systems in an unprecedented way, and is already causing harm and entails potentially irreversible adverse consequences,

Recognizing that inaction to address climate change will have devastating consequences and that there is now an urgent imperative for all to mitigate the causes and adapt to the consequences of climate change,

Convinced that the challenge of climate change cannot be met without the participation of all and at all levels: international organizations, States, subnational entities, cities, administrations, private sector, civil society organizations, and individuals,

Recognizing the countries taking the lead in sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production, and *recognizing* that sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of production and consumption play an important role in addressing climate change,

Aware of the ethical responsibilities of human beings in this regard,

Conscious of the importance of undertaking climate change actions in accordance with the common but differentiated responsibilities principle as reaffirmed in the Paris Agreement; that significant responses should be pursued by all to limit climate change; and of providing support to countries requiring assistance through both financial and technological means,

Recognizing also that the share of historical, current and future global emissions of greenhouse gases is different among nations and various social groups, and therefore that their responsibilities differ,

Noting with concern that the burdens of climate change are unequally distributed among the Earth's nations and various social groups, with climate change exacerbating other threats to social and natural systems, and placing additional burdens particularly on the poor and vulnerable,

Reflecting on the complexity of the causes and impacts of human-induced climate change, and

Convinced of the need to develop effective and comprehensive cross-cutting policies which address the needs of the most vulnerable and which are gender responsive,

Emphasizing the fundamental importance of science, information and education for responding to the challenge of climate change,

Conscious of the different ethical perspectives in regard to climate change, and

Acknowledging that responses to climate change are likely to have many important and variable ethical implications, and that it has become an imperative to place ethics as a core and necessary element in climate change solutions,

Recalling the work of the United Nations and its Agencies, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Paris Agreement adopted by 195 countries at COP-21 in December 2015, in which it was resolved to keep global warming well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels,

Bearing in mind the UNESCO Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations of 1997, and

Recalling the work carried out by the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) on environmental ethics in general and the ethical issues associated with climate change in particular,

Adopt this Declaration and proclaim the following principles.

General Provisions

Article 1: Scope

1. This Declaration addresses ethical issues in relation to human-induced climate change while considering the development of scientific knowledge and technological innovations.
2. This Declaration is addressed to States, and concerns actions related to climate change taken internationally, regionally, nationally, sub-nationally and locally.
3. This Declaration also provides guidance to decisions and practices of individuals, groups, scientific and other communities, institutions and corporations, public and private at all levels.

Article 2: Aims

The ultimate aim of the ethical principles outlined in this Declaration is to help anticipate, avoid or minimize the adverse effects of climate change and to protect humankind and the Earth's living and non-living systems by:

- a. providing a universal set of relevant ethical principles that should guide States in formulating their policies, legislations, and other instruments in the response to climate change;
- b. guiding the actions of individuals, groups, communities, institutions, and corporations, public and private in their responses to climate change;
- c. promoting respect for life on Earth and protection of the Earth's living and non-living systems as a common responsibility of humankind consistent with international

- agreements on climate change, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other relevant international environmental agreements;
- d. promoting cooperation and solidarity in responses to climate change;
 - e. recognizing the importance of scientifically informed decision-making on climate change while stressing the relevance of appropriate local, traditional and indigenous knowledge, within the framework of the ethical principles set out in this Declaration;
 - f. fostering multidisciplinary, pluralistic, and intercultural dialogue about the ethical implications of climate change within society, between sectors, and at different levels of government;
 - g. promoting equitable access to climate change knowledge and appropriate technological innovations in response to climate change; and promoting the greatest possible flow and rapid sharing of knowledge and benefits in this regard, in particular with the most vulnerable, including vulnerable countries such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS);
 - h. preventing the creation of new, and the deepening of existing vulnerabilities and inequalities by human-induced climate change and associated responses;
 - i. promoting policy responses to climate change that can also contribute to addressing other policy goals that advance the well-being of all peoples, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
 - j. safeguarding the interests of present and future generations.

Principles

Within the scope of this Declaration, in decisions or practices taken or carried out by those to whom it is addressed, the following principles are to be respected:

Article 3: Avoiding Harm

Since climate change not only threatens the sustainability of the Earth's living and non-living systems, the integrity of species, the welfare of nations, peoples, local communities and individuals, but already has been causing harm and negative consequences, some of which are irreversible, States and other social actors should take all measures within their powers to:

- a. formulate and implement policies and actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change;
- b. anticipate, avoid or minimize harm, wherever it might emerge, from climate adaptation and mitigation policies and actions, and any other possible measures aiming at alleviating the impacts of climate change;
- c. seek transnational cooperation before deploying new technologies that may have transnational impacts;
- d. remedy residual harm from climate change, and climate adaptation and mitigation policies and actions.

Article 4: Precautionary Principle

Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures.

Article 5: Justice and Fairness

1. Global justice in relation to climate change requires the participation of all members of society. The common but differentiated responsibilities principle as reaffirmed in the Paris Agreement should be applied not only among nations, but also within nations.
2. It is an imperative for all to take measures to safeguard and protect the Earth's living and non-living systems for present and future generations. These measures should take into account the most vulnerable and should be gender responsive.
3. States, other social actors, and everyone in a position to do so, should take immediate action to contribute through scientific, technical, and financial support, to increase the adaptive and mitigating capacities of the most vulnerable.
4. Each individual or group of individuals should be granted effective and timely access to information on climate change and the means of implementation for mitigation and adaptation. States should facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available and in a timely manner.
5. In order to prevent adverse effects of climate change, and of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and actions, each individual or group of individuals should be granted effective access to justice, including redress and remedy.

Article 6: Sustainability

To sustain the long-term survival of life on Earth, and to ensure that future generations are able to meet their needs, States and other social actors should:

- a. use resources efficiently, adopt green economic systems and support climate-friendly low-carbon technologies;
- b. allow the Earth's living and non-living systems to regenerate themselves by adopting sustainable patterns of consumption and production;
- c. ensure that all people benefit from the opportunities of development so that no one is left behind, especially local communities, indigenous peoples, and others vulnerable to climate change.

Article 7: Solidarity

1. States, other social actors, and those who have the decision-making powers to address climate change should act and cooperate by taking into account:

- a. the importance of protecting and enhancing the world we share in common in such a way that reflects the solidarity and interdependence among peoples of different backgrounds, and the interdependence of humankind with its surroundings;
 - b. the well-being, livelihood and survival of future generations which depend on our current use of resources;
 - c. the interconnectedness of the physical, ecological and social systems of all countries, regions and communities within the biosphere, as well as of the Earth's living and non-living systems and near Earth outer-space.
2. Those who have knowledge related to climate change impacts and solutions have an obligation to share such knowledge in a timely manner and on equitable terms. This obligation, based on intellectual and moral solidarity, includes providing access to essential resources, as well as scientific, technological, and medical knowledge related to climate change, in order to increase adaptive and mitigating capacities, and to increase the resilience of people and of the Earth's living and non-living systems.
 3. Human beings collectively and individually have an obligation to assist the most vulnerable to climate change, especially when catastrophic events occur.
 4. States should cooperate to address climate change challenges by providing transfer of technologies, capacity-building and financial resources, particularly to Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Article 8: Scientific Knowledge and Integrity in Decision-Making

1. Decision-making based on science is critically important for meeting the mitigation and adaptation challenges of a rapidly changing climate. Decisions must be based on and guided by the best available science, particularly the IPCC reports, taking into account appropriate local, traditional and indigenous knowledge at any point in time, with a view to integrating all of them into the innovation process as much as possible.
2. In order to optimally aid in decision-making, science needs to meet the highest standards of research integrity by being impartial, rigorous, and honest. Scientific knowledge should be freely shared, and must give adequate estimates of uncertainty in order to give decision-makers insight into and understanding of the underlying risks, as well as opportunities.
3. States should:
 - a. take measures which help protect and maintain the integrity of the scientific process, including guarding against scientific misconduct. This includes assisting in maintaining strong scientific standards and transparency at all levels with respect to scientific funding, methodologies and research findings;
 - b. raise awareness and promote literacy in science among all sectors of their populations in order to underpin strong action against climate change.
4. Innovative and potentially high-impact solutions and technologies which are safer, cheaper and more accessible, as well as behavioral change towards a low carbon lifestyle, should be

prioritized by States, individuals, groups, communities, institutions and corporations, public and private, and investments should be made to fast track them.

5. States should:
 - a. build, maintain and enhance science capacity through education, training and establishing relevant scientific infrastructure;
 - b. act with priority on climate change knowledge and its implications in an ethical manner as outlined in this Declaration;
 - c. help protect the independence of scientific activity from the pressure of vested interests;
 - d. promote accurate communication on climate change based on peer-reviewed scientific research.

Implementation of the Principles

The following actions by States and other social actors will promote effective implementation of the ethical principles in relation to climate change:

Article 9: Science, Technologies and Innovations

1. Develop strategies to uphold the integrity of scientific research in addressing climate change issues.
2. Use the best available scientific knowledge in decision-making that directly or indirectly relate to climate change issues.
3. Give preference to the development and up-scaling of technologies, infrastructure and behaviors that reduce climate risks.
4. Increase the participation of scientists from developing countries in climate-related science.
5. Develop appropriate training programmes to help apply these principles to build capacity within public administration, civil society organizations, media and the private sector.

Article 10: Risk assessment and management

Undertake and institutionalize evidence-based assessment and the appropriate management of risks related to climate change.

Article 11: Vulnerable groups

Give priority in climate change responses to the needs of vulnerable groups, in particular those affected by climate change, so that benefits are widely shared, as are the success stories of different communities in relation to climate change.

Article 12: Education

1. Advance curricula that build awareness and knowledge about humankind's relation to the Earth's living and non-living systems.
2. Promote formal and non-formal education with regard to climate change challenges, and ways to address them.
3. Encourage educational institutions and educators to integrate these principles in their teaching activities aimed at a full range of ages beginning at the pre-school level.
4. Ensure that governments, formal and non-formal educational institutions, and others involved in education, contribute actively to awareness-raising regarding these principles.

Article 13: Public Awareness

Promote awareness regarding climate change and responses to it, through communication by the media, civil society organizations, scientific communities, as well as religious, cultural and other communities.

Article 14: Accountability, review and evaluation

1. Ensure that policy goals, commitments and agreements are acted upon, and that the actions taken are regularly evaluated, including against the ethical principles evoked in this Declaration.
2. Ensure the integrity of climate policy and action through governance measures preventing corruption, misuse of power, and fraud, and promoting transparency.
3. Ensure that gender is given due consideration in all climate change policies and actions.
4. Empower citizens to hold their governments accountable to act on international and national climate goals, commitments and agreements, including those made in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement.

Article 15: National policy and International cooperation

1. Take appropriate measures to ensure that decision-makers use these principles as a guideline for policy-making.
2. Share with developing countries the results of science and technological innovations in a timely manner and on equitable terms.
3. Act urgently upon the commitments taken in the Paris Agreement regarding international climate finance and capacity-building.
4. Invest in multilateral processes and programmes to communicate these principles and to promote multidisciplinary, pluralistic and intercultural dialogue around them.
5. Facilitate, support and invest as States in international cooperation promoting these principles within their competence.

6. In engaging and developing international research collaborations related to climate change, the scientific community should follow and promote these principles.

Article 16: Follow up by UNESCO

UNESCO shall reaffirm its commitment to dealing with the ethical principles in relation climate change. In doing so, UNESCO shall promote and disseminate this Declaration, in collaboration with the World Commission on Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST), the International Bioethics Committee (IBC), the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC), the International Hydrological Programme (IHP), the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), the International Geosciences Programme (IGCP), the International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), the Management of Social Transformation Programme (MOST), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and other relevant international bodies working on the issues of climate change.

Final provisions

Article 17: Interrelation and complementarity of the principles

The Declaration needs to be understood as a whole and principles are to be understood as complementary and interrelated. Each principle is to be considered in the context of the other principles, as appropriate and relevant in the circumstances.

Article 18: Denial of acts contrary to human rights, fundamental freedoms, human dignity, and respect for life on Earth

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, other social actor, group, or person any claim to engage in any activity or perform any act contrary to human rights, fundamental freedoms, human dignity, and respect for life on Earth.