

First meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group for the revision of the Rules of procedure of the General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention*

UNESCO Headquarters, Room XI

23 – 24 January 2014

Chairperson Summary

The first meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group for the revision of the Rules of procedure of the General Assembly took place on 23 January (afternoon) and 24 January 2014. The Group elected H. E. Mr Jean-Frédéric Jauslin, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Switzerland as Chairperson of the meeting and Mr Francisco Javier Gutierrez Plata, from the Permanent Delegation of Colombia, as Rapporteur.

The meeting was attended by a high number of States Parties representatives which participated actively in the debate, with more than 50 delegations taking the floor at least on one occasion. The Open-ended group discussed extensively its mandate as defined by **Resolution 19 GA 4**. While some delegations called for the discussion to focus strictly on the Rules of Procedure concerning the election process, other delegations stated that the debate should also include broader measures to ensure equitable representation. Further, the Open-ended group discussed possible options to ensure an equitable representation with a view to amending the Rules of procedure.

Issues discussed: Possible mechanisms to ensure equitable geographical distribution of seats in the World Heritage Committee

A high number of delegations considered the **proposal by the Delegation of Brazil** made during the 19th General Assembly of States Parties as an adequate starting point for revision of the Rules of Procedure. This proposal foresees a distribution of seats at the Committee at each election among the electoral groups of UNESCO, as determined by the General Conference, in proportion to the number of States Parties from each group, with a minimum of three seats attributed to each electoral group. Some delegations expressed a concern that this procedure could lead to a “clean-slate” distribution of seats and thus, compromise the efficiency and expertise of the Committee.

Proposals for two or three reserved seats per electoral group, which would leave a number of “free seats” for candidates from different electoral groups, were also put forward.

In addition or instead of a guaranteed minimum of Committee seats for each electoral group, a number of delegations expressed their support for the “**safety net**” mechanism, suggesting, in case equitable representation may not be achieved through the standard election process, to increase the current number of reserved seats for each electoral group from 1 to 2.

Many delegations further supported the proposal of one **reserved seat for a State Party having never served in the Committee** as means to enhance rotation and membership of a higher

number of States Parties in the Committee. Other delegations pointed that one reserved seat could hardly ensure meeting the requirement for "equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the World" as defined by Art. 8 of the World Heritage Convention.

To the question whether an **increase of the number of Committee members** could be envisaged, the Legal Advisor clarified that this would require a revision of the *World Heritage Convention* - an option which was clearly not favoured by the delegations.

Issues discussed: Other measures

A number of other measures were also proposed by some delegations, with the aim to ensure that Committee decisions are based on sound expertise and to avoid conflict of interests. Those included a possible restriction for submission or examination of nominations **during the mandate as a Committee Member**. However, other delegations found this proposal to be of disadvantage to States Parties that have no World Heritage property inscribed on the World Heritage List and for which, in the current situation, one seat was reserved in the Committee.

It was further proposed to establish a **longer gap for States Parties after each mandate** as a Committee member. Other delegations underlined that such rules would be very disadvantageous for small States parties and developing countries.

Several delegations expressed their support for a **limitation and standardization of the election campaigns** and the establishment of a **standard procedure for the presentation of candidates with a strong focus on their expertise, as indicated in the Convention**, notably via the publication of their CVs, the purpose being to ensure a level-playing ground for all candidates and to minimize the politicization of the Committee. Others stated that the political character of the Committee elections should not be denied.

Follow-up

While no consensus was reached at the end of the meeting as to the choice of option to ensure equitable representation, some delegations stated that it might be worth exploring whether some of the proposed options can be modified and merged, with a view of achieving a reasonable compromise suitable to all States Parties. The Chairperson concluded the meeting by proposing that a second meeting of the Open-ended Working group be convened at the end of March, with tentative dates 20-21 March 2014.

List of proposals presented during the meeting of the open-ended Working Group – 23-24 January 2014

A. Proposals for a new system to ensure equitable geographical distribution of seats on the World Heritage Committee

Proposal A (Brazil) – Amendment of Rule 14.1 of the Rules of Procedures as follows:

14.1 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 members of the 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, of African States and Arab States respectively.

c) Seats on the Committee shall be distributed at each election among the electoral groups in proportion to the number of States Parties from each group, as follows:

Groups II and Vb (who have the smallest number of Member States): 3 seats each;

Groups IV and Va (who have the biggest number of Member States): 4 seats each;

Groups I and III (which have more or less the same number of Member States): 3 seats each plus an alternate seat, for a two-year period.

Proposal B (Norway)

- A minimum of 2 seats per electoral group
- 1 extra seat for group IV and 1 extra seat for group Va on a permanent basis
- 1 floating seat between electoral groups I and III
- 1 seat reserved for a State Party that has not yet served on the Committee
- 5 free seats

Proposal C (United Kingdom) modified

- At each election, one seat shall be reserved for States Parties who have not previously served on the Committee. This rule will cease to apply once the total number of States Parties who have never served on the Committee falls below 20.
- In order to seek more equitable representation of each electoral group on the Committee, in the event that any of the electoral groups ran the risk of falling below at least 2 seats, one seat will be reserved for the group.

Proposal D (Estonia) modified

- To strengthen the existing safety net system from 1 seat to 2 seats per electoral group.

B. Other measures

A number of other proposals and suggestions not directly relating to the distribution of seats were discussed during the meeting. These included:

- i) Adopt the principle EEE (Balance between Expertise-Equity-Efficiency)
- ii) Increase the mandatory gap between mandates on the Committee from 4 to 8 years
- iii) Limit the number of nominations for countries having reached an important number of sites
- iv) Introduce a rule that the Committee shall suspend consideration of proposed new sites in States Parties that are members of the Committee, for the duration of their mandate
- v) Introduce a standard candidatures format for the presentation of experts and organize a general meeting before the elections in which each candidate can briefly present himself
- vi) Ensure that all votes are used, and invalidate ballots where this rule is not respected
- vii) Re-introducing multiple rounds of voting
- viii) Introducing a voluntary limit of expenditure for electoral campaigns
- ix) Ensuring a choice at each stage in the process by avoiding "clean slates"
- x) Reserve a seat for a country that has never served on the Committee
- xi) Reserve a seat for a country that has no sites

- xii) Increase the number of Committee members (N.B. this implies a revision of the Convention)
- xiii) Introduce a new type of non-voting members on the Committee