**CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE  
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Meeting of the Bureau**

**Online**

**30 October 2020, 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.**

**Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda:  
Meeting modality of the fifteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee**

|  |
| --- |
| **Summary**  Given the unprecedented circumstances linked to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Bureau is invited to reflect on how to organise the fifteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee (14 to 19 December 2020). This document presents three main options, so that the Bureau of the Committee may decide the best possible meeting modality.  **Decision required**: paragraph5 |

1. Since early 2020, the world has been confronted with an unexpected global health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of this unprecedented situation are numerous, touching on everyone’s lives with no exception for the implementation of the 2003 Convention. In this regard, the convening of the eighth session of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the 2003 Convention (8.GA; 8 to 10 September 2020), which was organized in respect of physical distancing and sanitary measures, was a significant achievement. Going forward, with the number of cases accelerating in France and elsewhere in the weeks since the 8.GA, the pandemic is far from over at the time of writing of this document (mid-October 2020). It is therefore important to carefully reflect on how to organize the forthcoming statutory meetings, in particular the fifteenth session of the Committee (15.COM).
2. While the fourteenth session of the Committee had decided to convene the 15.COM in Kingston, Jamaica ([Decision 14.COM 20](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/20)), the national authorities of Jamaica notified the Secretariat in May 2020 that Jamaica could no longer host the session because of the uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the Bureau decided to convene the 15.COM as an in-person meeting at UNESCO Headquarters from 14 to 19 December 2020 ([Decision 15.COM 1.BUR 1](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/download.php?versionID=58498)). Given the ongoing global health crisis, the Secretariat considers that it is no longer possible to plan a fully-fledged physical meeting as organized under normal circumstances.
3. Having studied various scenarios and investigated technical details, the Secretariat wishes to present three alternative options for organizing this meeting, as described in Annex 1. Each of these options takes into consideration: a) modalities of participation, b) advantages and c) challenges and risks. A summary table is provided in Annex 2 in order to visualize the participation possibilities by category of participants.

|  |
| --- |
| **Option 1: Fully online meeting**   * Podium in the room if possible * One session of three hours for up to eight days * Except for voting by secret ballot which would be organised in person at UNESCO Headquarters   **Option 2: Semi-presential meeting with the possibility for online interventions**   * The Committee members and the podium are physically in the room * Observers are to participate online * Two sessions of three hours for four days   **Option 3: Restricted presential meeting without the possibility for online interventions**   * The Committee members and the podium are physically in the room * Observers may be present in the room subject to the availability of space * Two sessions of three hours for four days |

1. Whichever option is selected, there are several factors to consider in view of the specific requirements related to the current situation:

**a. Participation on equal terms**: It is important to ensure that the members of the Committee participate on equal terms in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Committee, avoiding a situation whereby some members of the Committee are in the room while other members participate online. In the same vein, the choice of Interprefy is privileged by the Organization as an online platform with a high-level of security and which is open to all Member States of UNESCO. In addition, a webcast of the session in English and French will be foreseen under all options.

**b. Provisional agenda and timetable**: Irrespective of the meeting modality to be decided by the Bureau, the provisional agenda and timetable for the 15.COM need to be adjusted to include a lower number of items and reduce the overall meeting time. It is proposed not to inscribe five items[[1]](#footnote-1) on the provisional agenda that were either discussed extensively during the 8.GA or can be postponed without statutory consequences. The proposed agenda is listed in Annex 3. As for the provisional timetable, the session may take place three hours per day for eight days (Option 1) or six hours per day for four days (Options 2 and 3). The Bureau will be asked to adopt the provisional timetable for the session through an electronic consultation during the week of 9 November 2020 in accordance with Rules 12.2 and 12.3 of the Rules of the Procedures of the Committee. On 23 November 2020, an information and exchange session will be organised to present the provisional timetable and other details of the 15.COM.

**c. Participation costs**: Under normal circumstances (in accordance with Rule 5.4 of the Rules of Procedure of the Committee), participation costs for one representative per State Member of the Committee from developing countries could be covered by the Fund for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, subject to the availability of resources and provided that such persons are experts in intangible cultural heritage; If the budget allows, developing countries that are parties to the Convention but not members of the Committee may also receive assistance provided that such persons are experts in intangible cultural heritage. However, given the significant uncertainties related to international travel restrictions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not possible to foresee this assistance and the Secretariat plans to communicate this matter as part of the invitation letter to Committee Members.

**d.** **Elections**: The election of new members of the Evaluation Body requires voting by secret ballot. Rather than undertaking a roll call, the Secretariat plans, under all options, to arrange for a voting booth at UNESCO headquarter. To ensure physical distancing, voting will take place with a specific voting time. If a motion is moved for voting by secret ballot on any other items, a similar arrangement may be made.

**e**. **Podium**: Under all options, the Secretariat intends to work together in one physical location (rather than connecting online individually), to the extent possible, to facilitate the work of the Committee. It would be strongly desirable (Option 1) or necessary (Options 2 and 3) that the Chairperson of the Committee be physically together with the Secretariat in order to ensure the smooth conduct of the session; the same goes for the Chairperson of the Evaluation Body and, if possible, its Vice-Chairperson and Rapporteur.

**f.** **Physical distancing and sanitary measures**: For options that include in-person participation in the meeting room (Options 2 and 3), physical distancing and sanitary measures would be necessary, including wearing a mask at all times, enforcing a distance of 1.5 m between each seat, and implementing a double badge system (each delegation may receive two badges which allows entrance to the meeting room). Those who wish to travel from outside France to participate in the meeting may be asked to comply with medical requirements (i.e. the presentation of a negative PCR test result).

**g.** **Additional costs**: The use of Interprefy incurs unforeseen or higher expenses, related to training for the Committee members, Secretariat and interpreters, outsourced online management of the meeting and the streaming of the session. The Secretariat is waiting to receive an exact cost estimate from Interprefy and the internal services/the Culture Sector in charge of online meetings coordination as well as interpretation. These additional costs will be covered by the Regular Programme budget of the 2003 Convention.

1. The Bureau of the Intergovernmental Committee may wish to adopt the following decision:

**DRAFT DECISION 15.COM 3.BUR 4**

The Bureau,

1. Having examined document LHE/20/15.COM 3.BUR/4 and its annexes,
2. Recalling [Decision 14.COM 20](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/20) and Decision [15.COM 1.BUR 1](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/download.php?versionID=58498),
3. Decides that the fifteenth session of the Committee take place, given the impracticability of an in-person meeting due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, exceptionally as

[Option 1: a fully online meeting;]

[Option 2: a semi-presential meeting with the possibility for online interventions;]

[Option 3: a restricted presential meeting without the possibility for online interventions;]

1. Takes note that financial assistance to cover the participation costs for States members of the Committee from developing countries, normally provided by the Fund for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, cannot be foreseen for the fifteenth session of the Committee;
2. Recommends that the Committee adopt a provisional agenda for the fifteenth session of the Committee, as contained in Annex 3;
3. Requests that the Secretariat propose a provisional timetable for the fifteenth session of the Committee that is suitable for the meeting modality selected for examination by the Bureau (electronic consultation).

**Annex 1: Options for the 15.COM meeting modality**

|  |
| --- |
| **Option 1: Fully online meeting** |

Methods of participation

* All categories of stakeholders (Committee members, States Parties non-member of the Committee, observers and audience as well as the Secretariat and the Evaluation Body representatives) are to participate online through a platform (such as Interprefy – to be confirmed);
* The maximum number of online ‘active’ participants who may take the floor is 300. Given that there are 180 States Parties to the Convention, each delegation may receive one active connection to the meeting (and other members of the delegation would follow the webcast).
* Other observers may receive active connections to the meeting upon request and within the limit of availability.

Advantages

* The meeting can be held regardless of any last-minute meeting restrictions put in place as a result of the evolving situation with the pandemic.
* The meeting will not risk contributing to the spread of the COVID-19 virus since no physical contact among participants will take place.

Challenges and Risks

* Technology related problems, including connectivity to the online platform, could easily disrupt the smooth running of the session.
* Interactions amongst the participants would be less dynamic with limited means for informal communications, which might impact the quality of the discussions and decision-making processes.
* Voting by secret ballot will take place in person and the Committee members should plan accordingly (for example by designating a Paris-based delegation member or a representative empowered to vote).

|  |
| --- |
| **Option 2: Semi-presential meeting with the possibility for online interventions** |

Methods of participation

* All members of the Committee would need to be physically present in the meeting room (otherwise they may not be considered ‘present’ for the purpose of establishing a quorum and for voting), for which Room I, UNESCO Headquarters has been reserved.
* The physical presence will be limited to two persons per delegation for the Committee members. The meeting room will not be accessible to observers.
* Each delegation, regardless of whether they are Committee members or not, may receive one active online connection to participate virtually to the meeting; a similar arrangement may be made for other observers within the limit of available connections.

Advantages

* Members of the Committee, despite the restricted number of persons per delegation, would be able to interact directly with each other and with the Chairperson and the Secretariat.
* Under this option, interventions from Committee members could be made both by delegates physically present in Room I and by members of their delegations based in their capital. The meeting would also benefit from interventions from observer States and other stakeholders who will not be able to access the physical venue.

Challenges and Risks

* At the time of writing of this document, the Secretariat has not been able to test the functionalities for a semi-presential meeting. Managing both physical and online participation will be challenging and this option increases the probability of technical problems.
* The Committee members would need to ensure complex coordination between the physical participant and delegation members based in their capitals.
* Additional expenses are to be expected (currently under study) since physical (security, room setting, clerks) and online (costs related to the use of an online platform including online technicians) arrangements must be organized simultaneously.
* Increases in restrictive measures by the host country of UNESCO shortly before the opening of the session could lead to a last-minute cancellation of the meeting with financial implications.

|  |
| --- |
| **Option 3: Restricted presential meeting without the possibility for online interventions** |

Methods of participation

* All members of the Committee are required to be physically present in the meeting room (otherwise they may not be considered ‘present’ for the purpose of establishing a quorum and for voting), for which Room I, UNESCO Headquarters has been reserved.
* The participation of States Parties non-member of the Committee and observers and audience who are Paris-based may be facilitated, to the limitation of available space.
* While the meeting would be audio/video cast to those who wish to listen-in to the meeting online, it would be necessary to be physically present in Room I to take the floor.

Advantages

* The members of the Committee, despite the restricted number of persons per delegation, would be able to interact directly with each other and with the Chairperson and the Secretariat.
* The Secretariat has a relevant experience with this modality which was used for the eighth session of the General Assembly of the 2003 Convention.
* No unforeseen additional expenses are identified in terms of organizing the online access since the webcasting of the session will not depend on the Interprefy platform.

Challenges and Risks

* The Committee would not benefit from the direct participation of non-Paris based experts who would have normally participated in the meeting.
* Increases in restrictive measures by the host country of UNESCO shortly before the opening of the session could lead to a last-minute cancellation of the meeting with financial implications.

**Annex 2: Summary of options for the 15.COM meeting modality**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Option 1**  Fully online meeting | **Option 2**  Semi-presential meeting with the possibility for online interventions | **Option 3**  Restricted presential meeting without the possibility for online interventions |
| Sessions per day | One session of three hours for up to eight days | Two sessions of three hours for four days | Two sessions of three hours for four days |
| Chairperson | Preferably in the room | In the room | In the room |
| Secretariat | In the room | In the room | In the room |
| Evaluation Body | Preferably in the room | In the room | In the room |
| Committee Members | One active online connection per delegation | Up to two persons per delegation can be in the room  One active online connection per delegation | Up to two persons per delegation can be in the room |
| Voting | In-person voting in a booth at UNESCO Headquarters | | |
| States non-Committee members | One active online connection per delegation | One active online connection per delegation | Need to be in the room to intervene |
| Other observers | Active online connections upon request and within the limit of availability | Active online connections upon request and within the limit of availability | Need to be in the room to intervene |
| Webcast | Available | Available | Available |

**Annex 3: Proposed agenda**

1. Opening
2. Adoption of the agenda
3. Replacement of the Rapporteur
4. Observers
5. Adoption of the summary records of the fourteenth session of the Committee
6. Report of the Non-Governmental Organizations Forum
7. Examination of the reports of States Parties on the current status of elements inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding
8. Report of the Evaluation Body on its work in 2020
9. Examination of nominations for inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding
10. Examination of nominations for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity
11. Examination of proposals to the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices
12. Examination of requests for International Assistance
13. Number of files submitted for the 2020 and 2021 cycles and number of files that can be treated in the 2022 and 2023 cycles
14. Establishment of the Evaluation Body for the 2021 cycle
15. Date and venue of the sixteenth session of the Committee
16. Election of the members of the Bureau of the sixteenth session of the Committee
17. Other business
18. Adoption of the list of decisions
19. Closure

1. . Report of the Secretariat on its activities (January to June 2020); Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund: voluntary supplementary contributions; Reports of States Parties on the use of International Assistance from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund; Follow up on elements inscribed on the Lists of the Convention; Reflection on the listing mechanisms of the Convention. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)