



United Nations
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Cultural Organization

DECLARATION OF **ETHICAL PRINCIPLES** IN RELATION TO **CLIMATE CHANGE** (2017)



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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 30 October to 14 November 2017,

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

Taking into account 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,

Referring to the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, reaffirmed in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development “The Future We Want”,

Stressing that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement adopted under the Convention are the primary multilateral fora in the global effort for responding to climate change,

Recognizing that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the leading international body for the assessment of climate change, and *considering* that according to its reports and other relevant expert organizations on the scientific conclusions regarding climate change, warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia,

Noting with great concern that there is an urgent imperative to mitigate the causes of climate change, and to adapt to its consequences,

Noting with concern that climate change exacerbates other threats to social and natural systems, which place additional burdens on the poor and vulnerable,

Recognizing that climate change is a common concern for all humankind, and *convinced* that the global and local challenges of climate change cannot be met without the participation of all people at all levels of society including States, international organizations, sub-national entities, local authorities, indigenous peoples, local communities, the private sector, civil society organizations, and individuals,

Reiterating that significant contributions should be pursued by all to limit climate change and its effects reflecting equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances, with developed countries continuing to take the lead, and developing countries continuing to enhance their mitigation efforts; *recalling* the commitment from the Paris Agreement that “developed country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation in continuation of their existing obligations under the Convention” and “other Parties are encouraged to provide or continue to provide such support voluntarily”,

Recognizing that the increase in the pollution and the acidification of the oceans affects their ecosystems’ capacity as climate regulators and their potential to mitigate the effects of anthropogenic climate change according to the Global Ocean Science Report and the outcomes of the United Nations Conference to Support Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14,

Recognizing the need for a transition as quickly as possible to sustainable lifestyles and sustainable economic development,

Convinced of the need to respond urgently to climate change with effective and comprehensive policies which respect and promote human rights and are informed by ethical principles,

Emphasizing the importance of including a gender perspective within climate change policies, and *recognizing* the different needs and access to resources of men and women, as well as the needs of the most vulnerable that include but are not limited to displaced persons and migrants, indigenous peoples, local communities, persons with disabilities, the elderly, youth, and children, as well as gender equality and empowerment of women,

Recognizing that meaningful participation of all stakeholders, including the most vulnerable, is essential to effective decision-making to address climate change and its adverse effects,

Also emphasizing the fundamental importance of science, technological innovation, relevant knowledge, and education for sustainable development for responding to the challenge of climate change, including appropriate local, traditional and indigenous knowledge,

Recognizing that not only climate change itself, but also the responses to it, may have important and variable ethical implications at different scales of place and time,

Recalling the work of the United Nations and its Agencies on climate change, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), the New Urban Agenda, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (S.A.M.O.A.) Pathway, as well as the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement adopted under the Convention at COP-21 in December 2015,

Adopt this Declaration and proclaim the following principles.



General Provisions

Article 1: Aim and Scope

1. This Declaration proclaims and elaborates ethical principles of decision-making, policy formulation, and other actions related to climate change.
2. This Declaration recommends States to consider these ethical principles in all decisions and actions related to climate change that are taken internationally, regionally, nationally, sub-nationally and locally, as appropriate.
3. This Declaration also calls upon individuals, groups, local and territorial authorities, scientific and other communities, including indigenous communities, as well as international organizations, the United Nations system, institutions and corporations, public and private at all levels and in all sectors to consider these ethical principles, as appropriate, in the decisions and actions that they take in response to climate change.

Principles

Recalling that the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement adopted under the Convention, guide States in the global effort against climate change, the following principles should be considered, respected and promoted within the scope of this Declaration, and in decisions taken or actions carried out in responding to climate change:

Article 2: Prevention of Harm

Considering that climate change not only erodes the sustainability of Earth's ecosystems and the services they provide, as well as threatening the future well-being of people and their livelihoods, local communities, and individuals through harmful and negative consequences, some of which are potentially irreversible, States and all actors should take appropriate measures within their powers to:

- (a) formulate and implement policies and actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change, including through fostering climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production;

- (b) anticipate, avoid or minimize harm, wherever it might emerge, from climate change, as well as from climate mitigation and adaptation policies and actions;
- (c) seek and promote transnational cooperation before deploying new technologies that may have negative transnational impacts.

Article 3: Precautionary Approach

Where there are threats of serious or irreversible harm, a lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to anticipate, prevent or minimize the causes of climate change and mitigate its adverse effects.

Article 4: Equity and Justice

1. Justice in relation to climate change requires fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people. In addressing climate change, relevant actors at all levels should work together in a spirit of justice, global partnership, inclusion, and in particular in solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable people. Global engagement that mobilizes governments, international organizations, including the United Nations system, private sector, civil society, and other relevant actors may be beneficial.
2. It is important for all to take measures to safeguard and protect Earth's terrestrial and marine ecosystems, for present and future generations. The interaction of people and ecosystems is particularly important given the high dependence of one upon the other.
3. In this context, measures should take into account the contribution of women in decision-making since women are disproportionately affected by climate change while at the same time tending to have lower access to resources and yet play a vital role in achieving inclusive sustainable development. These measures should also take into account the needs of those at greatest risk, particularly the poorest and the most vulnerable.
4. States and other pertinent actors should facilitate and encourage public awareness, and participation in decision-making and actions by making access to information and knowledge on climate change, and on responses that have been made to it, as well as on the means of how to implement mitigation and adaptation actions, widely available in a timely manner taking into account the differentiated needs and access to resources of the most vulnerable.

5. In response to the adverse effects of climate change, and to climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and actions at the national level, effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, should be provided as stipulated in the 1992 Rio Declaration and according to national laws.

Article 5: Sustainable Development

To ensure that present and future generations are able to meet their needs, it is urgent that all States and pertinent actors:

- (a) promote the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, especially by adopting sustainable patterns of consumption, production and waste management; by using resources efficiently; and by fostering climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development;
- (b) work to ensure that each person benefits from the opportunities of development, especially those who are vulnerable (see Article 10), and in this way, contribute to the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty;
- (c) tackle the adverse effects of climate change in areas that deserve special attention due to their humanitarian implications and consequences, including but not limited to: food, energy, and water insecurity, the ocean, desertification, land degradation, natural disasters, displaced populations, as well as the vulnerability of women, children, the elderly, and especially the poor.

Article 6: Solidarity

1. Solidarity implies that human beings collectively and individually should assist people and groups that are most vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters, especially when catastrophic events occur.
2. States and other pertinent actors, and those who have the capacity to address climate change should act and cooperate by taking into account:
 - (a) the importance of protecting and enhancing the world we share in a way that reflects the solidarity and interdependence among peoples of

- different backgrounds, and the interdependence of humankind with other organisms, ecosystems, and the environment;
- (b) the well-being, livelihoods and survival of future generations which depend on our current use of resources and the resulting impacts thereof;
 - (c) the interconnectedness of the physical, ecological, and human systems of all countries, regions and communities across Earth.
3. Knowledge related to the causes, modalities and impacts of climate change and responses to it should be shared equitably and in a timely manner in order to increase the adaptive and mitigating capacities of all, and to increase the resilience of people and ecosystems.
 4. Developed States and other States, on a voluntary basis, as well as relevant actors should strive to strengthen timely cooperative action in the areas of technology development and transfer, support for the synthesis of relevant information and knowledge, capacity-building, and means and financial resources to developing countries, especially those that are most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, particularly to least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS).
 5. States, on a voluntary basis, can also address the challenges of climate change through South-South and triangular cooperation.

Article 7: 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 should be based on, and guided by, the best available knowledge from the natural and social sciences, including interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary science, and by taking into account, as appropriate, local, traditional and indigenous knowledge.
2. In order to optimally aid in decision-making, science needs to meet the highest standards of research integrity by being impartial, rigorous, honest, and transparent, and should give adequate estimates of uncertainty in order to provide decision-makers with insight into, and understanding of, the underlying risks as well as opportunities, and guidance to their formulating long-term strategies.

3. Scientific cooperation and capacity-building should be strengthened in developing countries in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of climate change impacts as well as potential mitigation and adaptation actions.
4. States, according to Article 6 of the UNFCCC and Article 12 of the Paris Agreement adopted under the Convention, and other relevant actors should:
 - (a) take measures which help protect and maintain the independence of science and the integrity of the scientific process. This includes assisting in maintaining strong scientific standards as well as transparency at all levels with respect to scientific funding, methodologies and research conclusions;
 - (b) raise awareness and promote literacy in science in all sectors and amongst their populations in order to underpin strong and collective action and understanding of how to respond to climate change;
 - (c) promote accurate communication on climate change based on peer-reviewed scientific research, including the broadest promulgation of science in the media and other forms of communication;
 - (d) build effective mechanisms to strengthen the interface between science and policy to ensure a strong knowledge-base in decision-making.

Application of the Principles

In order to disseminate and promote the application of the ethical principles proclaimed in this Declaration, it is recommended that States and pertinent actors:

Article 8: 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 and evidence in decision-making that relates to climate change issues.
3. Develop and scale up carefully assessed technologies, infrastructure and actions that reduce climate change and its associated risks.
4. Increase as far as possible the participation of scientists from all developing countries, LDCs and SIDS in climate-related science.

5. Promote access to information and training opportunities, including open data and Open Educational Resources (OER), relevant to the challenge and solutions associated with climate change, so that they are shared across the entire scientific and other relevant communities internationally.
6. Encourage the development of scientific knowledge that helps transform patterns of production, management and consumption to make them more compatible with environmental sustainability.

Article 9: Risk assessment and management

Promote the development of local risk maps, early warning systems, science-based environmental and technology assessments, and the appropriate management of risks related to climate change and natural disasters.

Article 10: Vulnerable groups

Give priority in responding to climate change to the needs of vulnerable groups that include but are not limited to displaced persons and migrants, indigenous peoples and local communities, persons with disabilities, taking into account gender equality, empowerment of women, and intergenerational equity.

Article 11: Education

1. Advance curricula, as appropriate, taking into account UNESCO's work and initiatives on Education for Sustainable Development and Education for Climate Change, Article 6 of the UNFCCC, and Article 12 of the Paris Agreement adopted under the Convention, so that they build awareness and knowledge about humankind's relation to the Earth's climate system and ecosystems as well as about present generations' responsibilities to future generations, and so that they promote the Principles of this Declaration.
2. Ensure that, in accordance with national laws, all people, irrespective of gender, age, origin, and persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous people, children, and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them to acquire and update the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed to respond to climate change and contribute to sustainable development.



3. Promote formal, non-formal, and informal education with regard to climate change challenges and solutions, and encourage retraining for professionals in line with these objectives.
4. Encourage educational institutions and educators to integrate these principles in their teaching activities from the pre-school to university levels.
5. Promote, in accordance with national laws, at all levels and in all forms of education, that the recognition of cultural, social, and gender diversity is valuable and is an important source of knowledge with which to promote dialogue and the exchange of knowledge indispensable to responding to climate change.
6. Support developing countries through educational and scientific capacity-building, as well as financial means and facilitation of environmentally sound technological development.

Article 12: Public Awareness

Promote awareness regarding climate change and the best practices for responding to it, through strengthening social dialogue, and communication by the media, scientific communities, and civil society organizations, including religious and cultural communities.

Article 13: Responsibility

Ensure effective climate policy and action through appropriate governance measures, by promoting transparency and preventing corruption; and strengthening, at the State level, assessment mechanisms that underpin social, environmental and societal responsibility of all pertinent actors, including corporations and businesses.

Article 14: International Cooperation

1. Facilitate, support and engage in international processes and programmes to communicate these principles, and to promote multidisciplinary, pluralistic, and intercultural dialogue around them.
2. Facilitate, support, and engage in international research collaborations and capacity-building initiatives related to climate change.

3. Promote sharing of the results of science, technological innovations, and best practices in response to climate change in a timely and equitable manner.
4. Act with urgency upon the commitments taken in terms of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement adopted under the Convention, and the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, and of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
5. Respect and promote solidarity between and among States, as well as individuals, families, groups and communities, with special regard to those rendered vulnerable by the impacts of climate change and those who have the most limited capacities.
6. Promote coherence between climate change mechanisms and already existing mechanisms of international cooperation, including cooperation on development, with special regard for climate change responses that can also contribute to addressing other policy goals that advance the well-being of all peoples.

Article 15: Promotion and Dissemination by UNESCO

UNESCO has the vocation to be the principal United Nations agency to promote and disseminate this Declaration, and accordingly should work in collaboration with other United Nations entities, including but not limited to 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 IPCC, the UNFCCC, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and other relevant international bodies working on the issues of climate change, including the International Council for Science, the International Social Science Council, as well as the Future Earth: Research for Global Sustainability programme for which UNESCO is a co-sponsor, as well as any other intergovernmental body working in the field of climate change.

Final provisions

Article 16: 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 17: Denial of acts contrary to human rights, fundamental freedoms, human dignity, and concern for life on Earth

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

Article 18: Denial of reinterpretation of the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement adopted under the Convention

Nothing in this Declaration may be considered as an interpretation of the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement adopted under the Convention.



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