

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE  
FOR THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION  
OF THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS**

**Fifteenth session  
Online  
8 – 11 February 2021**

**Item 11 of the provisional agenda:** Collaboration with civil society to implement the Convention and the conclusions of the third Civil Society Forum

In accordance with Decision 9.IGC 9, an item on the role of civil society in the implementation of the Convention is included on the agenda of each session of the Committee. This document provides a brief overview of the collaboration between the Secretariat and the governing bodies of the Convention with civil society and presents an update on the efforts undertaken in 2021 to structure and optimize this collaboration, in accordance with Decision 14.IGC 15.

**Decision required:** paragraph 25

## I. Introduction

1. By ratifying the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (hereinafter “the Convention”), Parties undertake to encourage the active participation of civil society in achieving the objectives of the Convention (Article 11) and to reinforce partnerships with and among civil society, non-governmental organisations and the private sector in fostering and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions (Article 12).
2. UNESCO’s Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (41 C/5), adopted by the General Conference at its 41<sup>st</sup> session, reflects this commitment by placing civil society at the heart of Strategic Objective 3, Output 5.CL5 which calls for strengthening the capacities of Member States and civil society to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions through dynamic and inclusive cultural and creative industries.
3. To recall, the Operational Guidelines on Article 11 of the Convention, on the “Role and Participation of Civil Society,” were approved by the Conference of Parties at its second session ([Resolution 2.CP.7](#)) and define civil society, for the purposes of the Convention, as “**non-governmental organisations, non-profit organisations, professionals in the culture sector and associated sectors, groups that support the work of artists and cultural communities.**”
4. The aforementioned Operational Guidelines also specify the role of civil society in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention: civil society relays the concerns of citizens, associations and enterprises to public authorities, monitors the implementation of policies and programmes, plays a watchdog role, serves as a value-guardian and innovator, as well as contributes to the achievement of greater transparency and accountability in governance.

## II. Participation of civil society in the work of the Convention’s governing bodies

5. Non-governmental organisations having interests and activities in the fields covered by the Convention may be authorized by the Committee or the Conference of Parties **to participate in their work as observers**, without the right to vote, **at several of their sessions, at a single session or at a specific meeting of a session**, upon written request to the Director-General.
6. In recent years, civil society participation in the work of the governing bodies has been strengthened. Increased participation of UNESCO Chairs and Category 2 centres under the auspices of UNESCO has particularly helped to diversify Parties’ interlocutors and reinforced ties with the research community. In addition, the geographical and thematic representation of civil society organisations participating in statutory meetings has improved. However, the restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have slightly slowed this upward trend in 2021; while online meetings involve little or no cost to participants, it appears that limits on the number of participants in virtual meetings and logistical challenges (registration, limited Internet speed) have had an impact on the participation rates of civil society organisations in statutory meetings.

Participation of observers in statutory meetings <sup>1</sup>							
Meeting	6.CP	11.IGC	12.IGC	7.CP	13.IGC	14.IGC	8.CP
<b>Total number</b>	4 INGOs 28 NGOs	7 INGOs 49 NGOs 2 UNESCO Chairs 1 category 2 centre	6 INGOs 62 NGOs 5 UNESCO Chairs 4 category 2 centres	17 INGOs 79 NGOs 6 UNESCO Chairs 3 category 2 centres	12 INGOs 39 NGOs 7 UNESCO Chairs 2 category 2 centres	4 INGOs 38 NGOs 8 UNESCO Chairs 3 category 2 centres	3 INGOs 90 NGOs <sup>2</sup> 3 UNESCO Chairs 3 category 2 centres
<b>TOTAL</b>	32	59	77	105	60	53	99

7. Civil society representatives authorized to participate as observers in sessions of the Conference of Parties and the Committee may, *inter alia*:
- maintain the dialogue with Parties** in an interactive manner with regard to their contribution to the implementation of the Convention;
  - be given the floor** by the Chairperson of the respective body;
  - submit written contributions** relevant to the work of the respective bodies when authorized by the Chairperson, to be circulated to all delegations and observers by the Secretariat of the Convention as information documents.
8. In line with the decisions and resolutions of the Committee and the Conference of Parties respectively,<sup>3</sup> which have provided further guidance on the participation of civil society in the implementation of the Convention, **collaboration between civil society organisations and the governing bodies of the Convention** has so far been articulated around four main axes:
- Civil Society Forum:** At its tenth session, the Committee invited Parties, the Secretariat and civil society organisations to continue developing mechanisms to strengthen the participation of civil society organisations in the implementation of the Convention, in particular through the organisation of a biennial forum prior to the sessions of the Conference of Parties ([Decision 10.IGC 6](#)). The Civil Society Forum (hereinafter “the Forum”) provides an interactive framework, with an adaptable agenda, to enable coordination amongst various civil society stakeholders and with the Convention’s other stakeholders. The first edition of the Forum was held on 12 June 2017, the second edition was held on 3 June 2019 and the third edition was held on 31 May 2021 (see Section IV below).
  - Oral and written reports:** At its ninth session, the Committee requested the Secretariat to include on the agenda of each of its sessions an item on the role of civil society in the implementation of the Convention, under which it invited civil society organisations to present activity reports (in writing and/or orally) ([Decision 9.IGC 9](#)). At its fourteenth session, the Committee requested civil society organisations wishing to submit written activity reports to it at its fifteenth session

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- Other than Parties to the Convention and UNESCO Member States not Parties to the Convention.
  - Including NGOs that participated in the Civil Society Forum.
  - See mainly Decisions [5.IGC 4](#), [8.IGC 7a](#), [9.IGC 9](#), [10.IGC 6](#), [11.IGC 6](#), [13.IGC 10](#) and [14.IGC 15](#) of the Committee and Resolutions [4.CP 13](#), [6.CP 12](#) and [7.CP 11](#) of the Conference of Parties.

to transmit them to the Secretariat in English and French by 11 January 2022 at the latest ([Decision 14.IGC 15](#), information document DCE/22/15.IGC/INF.11b).

- (c) **Meeting between civil society representatives and the Bureau of the Committee:** At its ninth session, the Committee requested the Secretariat to organise a working meeting between civil society representatives and the Bureau prior to its meetings to address, *inter alia*, specific issues of importance to civil society ([Decisions 9.IGC 9](#) and [10.IGC6](#)). At the request of the Committee members, the time allocated for the meeting was doubled in 2021 from one hour to two hours.
- (d) **Participation of civil society in the preparation of Parties' quadrennial periodic reports:** In revising the Operational Guidelines on "Information Sharing and Transparency" and approving a new framework for quadrennial periodic reports in 2019 ([Resolution 7.CP 12](#)), the Conference of Parties not only decided that Parties' reports should reflect the way in which civil society had participated in their preparation, but also invited Parties to provide information on measures supporting civil society organisations involved in the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. To facilitate Parties' cooperation with civil society in the preparation of their quadrennial periodic reports, the Secretariat developed an electronic form focused on measures implemented by civil society organisations, which Parties may download as they deem appropriate.

### III. Reflection to strengthen collaboration between the Committee and civil society

- 9. At its fourteenth session, the Committee paved **the way to undertake a reflection to clarify the modalities of its collaboration with civil society**, in accordance with its Rules of Procedure and the provisions of the Convention and its Operational Guidelines, with the aim of capitalising on existing cooperation and optimising the contribution of civil society to its work (see document [DCE/21/14.IGC/15 REV](#)).
- 10. Although in recent years an upward trend has been noted in the number and diversity of civil society representatives participating in the work of the governing bodies, the Committee noted that only a minority of civil society organisations actively involved in the implementation of the Convention has completed the official procedures to be admitted as observers to statutory meetings, as provided for in the Rules of Procedure of the governing bodies and the Annex to the Operational Guidelines on the "Role and Participation of Civil Society."
- 11. With a view to building on and sustaining the achievements of recent years with regard to civil society's contribution to the work of the governing bodies of the Convention, the Committee requested the Secretariat to **facilitate the process for the admission of civil society representatives to its meetings**, in accordance with the Operational Guidelines on Article 11, and encouraged representatives of civil society, as defined in the aforementioned Operational Guidelines, who met the criteria set out in the Annex thereto, to apply for admission ([Decision 14.IGC 15](#)). The Committee emphasized that formalising the participation of civil society in statutory meetings would not only **provide the Convention's governing bodies with greater visibility of their interlocutors and their areas of expertise, but also strengthen the Committee's capacity to consult civil society on specific issues**, as provided for in Article 23.7 of the Convention.
- 12. In response to the Committee's request, the Secretariat has taken steps to support and facilitate the process for the admission of civil society representatives to the sessions of the governing bodies. To this end, the Secretariat sent a letter on 2 August 2021 to civil society organisations that had participated in one or more meetings of the governing bodies in the past five years as well as to organisations that had participated in other activities coordinated by the Secretariat, explaining the procedure to follow, and inviting

them to submit a complete application by 2 November 2021. Three reminders were subsequently sent by the Secretariat and the deadline was extended to 1 December 2021 to maximise the response rate.

13. **A total of 281 civil society organisations were contacted. Of these, 48 submitted a complete application to the Secretariat** to be admitted as observers to the fifteenth session of the Committee, including seven that have never participated in the work of the Convention's governing bodies. This relatively low response rate, which does not reflect the high level of involvement of civil society organisations in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention around the world, highlights the need to further support the participation of civil society organisations in statutory meetings.
14. In light of these results, the Committee could consider requesting the Secretariat to continue its efforts to raise civil society awareness of the role of statutory meetings as fora for dialogue and unique platforms for exchange between all of the Convention's stakeholders. It could also consider implementing concrete support measures, including identifying opportunities to provide financial or in-kind resources to facilitate the participation of civil society representatives, particularly those based in developing countries, in the sessions of the governing bodies. To inform its future decisions, the Committee may also wish to request the Secretariat to present to it, at its next session, an analysis of the process for the admission of civil society representatives, including an overview of the challenges and opportunities faced.

#### IV. Third edition of the Civil Society Forum

15. The Civil Society Forum, which has taken place before each session of the Conference of Parties since 2017, is a **unique platform that enables civil society representatives to exchange on the challenges and opportunities they face in the implementation of the Convention** and which may constitute topics of interest for the Convention's governing bodies.
16. The main objectives of the Forum are to:
  - (a) provide a platform for civil society organisations and professionals interested and/or operating in the areas covered by the 2005 Convention to discuss challenges and appropriate solutions for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions;
  - (b) enable civil society representatives to formulate joint recommendations to inform the work of the governing bodies of the Convention and, in particular, the future activities of the Committee;
  - (c) raise awareness of the objectives of the Convention and encourage its implementation amongst a wider community of civil society representatives.
17. In accordance with established practice, a civil society representative who has participated in the Forum presents its conclusions orally to the Conference of Parties under the agenda item dedicated to civil society. A written report prepared by the Forum's participants is then transmitted to the Committee as an information document to feed its discussions, notably with regard to the adoption of its biennial work plan.
18. **The third edition of the Forum was held online on 31 May 2021 and brought together more than 100 participants representing 92 organisations** in two plenary meetings and four working groups, and the topics discussed were determined by an ad hoc committee led by the Bureau elected on the occasion of the second edition of the Forum. For the first time, Forum participants benefitted from simultaneous interpretation in Arabic, English, French and Spanish during the plenary meetings and in English and French during the working groups, which significantly facilitated the participation of a wider range of organisations.

19. The conclusions of the third edition of the Forum, prepared by its participants, are presented in information document DCE/22/15.IGC/INF.11a. In addition to thematic recommendations to Parties, these conclusions contain preliminary suggestions made by civil society organisations to guide the organisation of the next edition of the Forum, which should take place before the ninth Conference of Parties in June 2023. The Committee may wish to take note of these ideas and request the Secretariat to submit to it, at its next session, concrete proposals for the organisation of the fourth Civil Society Forum.

## V. Next Steps

20. At its eighth session, the Conference of Parties recalled the need to ensure the continued participation of civil society in the implementation of the Convention and in the work of its governing bodies, and stressed that its contribution ensured greater transparency and accountability in governance, while offering new perspectives and approaches in the formulation of cultural policies and the development of innovative cultural processes, practices, and programmes.
21. At this same session, several Parties also stressed that civil society organisations will be particularly valuable allies in the coming years in designing inclusive and effective post-pandemic recovery plans for the creative sector, as many of them are in direct contact with artists and cultural professionals.
22. To optimise collaboration and communication between civil society organisations and the governing bodies of the Convention during this pivotal period and to inform the decisions and resolutions of the governing bodies, the Committee may **wish to further elaborate on the specific mechanisms it intends to establish to strengthen the contributions of civil society organisations at its annual sessions.**
23. To date, there are four well-established mechanisms through which the Committee is **informed on a regular basis of the achievements and challenges faced by civil society organisations** (see paragraph 8 above). In addition, the Committee sporadically issues more formal invitations to civil society organisations to submit to it written activity reports in English and French, if they wish. At its tenth session, for instance, the Committee invited civil society organisations to present a report on activities carried out in 2017 and to submit it to the Secretariat by 30 September 2017 ([Decision 10.IGC 6](#)). At its eleventh session, the Committee also examined four reports submitted by groups representing more than 100 civil society organisations (document [DCE/17/11.IGC/6REV](#)). At its fourteenth session, the Committee requested civil society organisations wishing to submit written activity reports to the Committee at its fifteenth session, to transmit them to the Secretariat in English and French on or before 11 January 2022 (see document DCE/22/15.IGC/INF.11b).
24. While the increased opportunities for dialogue between the Committee and civil society organisations have strengthened the bonds of trust between them, the numerous monitoring mechanisms (Civil Society Forum report, sporadic oral and written reports, and so forth) have tended to fragment or duplicate the information gathered. In order to capitalise on the achievements of recent years and to continue to foster an effective and productive working relationship, **the Committee may wish to consider how to further streamline these communication opportunities.** It could, for example, decide to examine in even-numbered years the reports of the Civil Society Forum that has taken place in the previous year, in accordance with established practice, and to examine in odd-numbered years the activity reports submitted by organisations that wish to do so.

25. The Committee may wish to adopt the following decision:

**DRAFT DECISION 14.IGC 11**

*The Committee,*

1. *Having examined document DCE/22/15.IGC/11 and information documents DCE/22/15.IGC/INF.11a and DCE/22/15.IGC/INF.11b,*
2. *Recalling its Decisions 1.IGC 5c, 1.EXT.IGC 5, 5.IGC 4, 8.IGC 7a, 9.IGC 9, 10.IGC 6, 11.IGC 6, 11.IGC 10, 13.IGC 10 and 14.IGC 15, and the Resolutions of the Conference of Parties 2.CP 7, 4.CP 13, 6.CP 12 and 7.CP 14,*
3. *Further recalling the fundamental role of civil society in the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions and its contribution to the efforts of Parties to achieve the objectives of the Convention,*
4. *Takes note of the conclusions of the third edition of the Civil Society Forum;*
5. *Also takes note of the reports submitted by civil society organisations on their activities;*
6. *Requests the Secretariat to continue its efforts to facilitate the process for the admission of civil society representatives to its meetings, in accordance with the Operational Guidelines on the “Role and Participation of Civil Society”, and encourages civil society representatives who meet the criteria defined in the aforementioned Operational Guidelines, and which have not yet done so, to submit an admission request;*
7. *Also requests the Secretariat to present to it, at its sixteenth session, an update on the process for the admission of civil society organisations to its sessions, together with an analysis and preliminary proposals to optimize the process;*
8. *Further requests the Secretariat to submit to it, at its sixteenth session, preliminary proposals for the organisation of the fourth Civil Society Forum;*
9. *Also encourages Parties to provide financial or in-kind resources to support and facilitate the participation of civil society representatives in its sessions.*