

Letter to ISC management, signed by Unions

Dear Julie, chair of the ISC Working Group on Constitutional Revision,  
CC Governing Board of the ISC

We write to convey our comments on the proposed constitutional changes and discussion paper that you have sent us entitled Zero-draft-revision\_ISC-Statutes-Rules-of-Procedure\_August-2023 and Discussion-paper\_Revision-of-ISC-statutes\_August-2023 respectively. We refer to the circulated documents in abbreviated form as "zero-draft-revision" and "discussion paper" below.

We would like to start by thanking you for the clarity of the exposition. In particular, the format of the zero-draft-revision document is very helpful in comparing the proposed statutes with the current statutes, and the accompanying discussion paper explains the objectives behind the proposed changes much better than the first documents that we have seen in May during our Mid-Term meeting in Paris. The timeline is also very clear and we welcome being asked for comments.

We understood from the online meeting that Membership issues will be included in the revised statutes and not just outlined in a separate paper and that we will only vote on the revised statutes document, apart from being asked separately on the transition options for moving to a staggered Board. The statutes must be clear and the criteria for membership crystal clear, so that the membership decisions can be taken following them.

Regarding Membership, we would like to recall one of the guiding principles of the current statutes: members are International Scientific Unions and national Academies of Sciences, with collectively equal voting rights, and other bodies, whose activities are in a field cognate to those of the Council, with no voting rights. The rationale behind collectively equal voting rights is simple. Unions and Academies represent the same scientists, either as members of an international disciplinary body or a country.

The discussion paper introduces several changes to these guiding principles. While we fully understand the need to recognize emerging scientific disciplines and to address the problem of "disciplinary gaps" in ISC membership, we believe that some of the proposed changes would fragment science rather than address the issues raised. Scientists could at the same time be represented as a member of a category 3 and a category 1 body, or only as a member of a category 3 body, whereas for us they would more naturally be part of a category 1 body, maybe yet to be formed, with the help of the ISC, for emerging scientific disciplines or disciplines that are not yet sufficiently represented. As currently formulated in the discussion paper, the proposed changes could lead to some confusion among members and even to an undesirable unequal treatment of scientific disciplines within the ISC.

We believe in the original idea of the two-dimensional, geographical and disciplinary, representation of scientists, and would prefer to return to a situation where this is seen as the norm and intention of the membership structure.

More precisely, regarding the discussion paper, here are some more specific comments:

— Becoming an ISC member is an important scientific recognition by peers for the applying body and an important scientific decision of the ISC. It should be carefully considered and

endorsed by all ISC members and not delegated to the Governing Board as suggested in 12.f) of the zero-draft-revision.

— Item 4(d) suggests that "functionally international bodies which are nationally constituted" should be considered for membership in Category 3. We are opposed to separate membership of such bodies if they are already represented in the ISC by an International disciplinary body in Category 1. Furthermore, regarding Question 3.1 (p.2) and the problem of "disciplinary gaps" in ISC's membership, would it not be a better way to address this issue by encouraging new disciplinary fields to form appropriate international unions? This was a key function of the International Research Council and the ICSU, the historical predecessors of ISC.

— The case of regional disciplinary bodies, as opposed to regional sciences bodies as in item 4(c), has not been formulated in the discussion paper. We suggest that a good way to address the issue of regional disciplinary bodies would be to have them represented through ISC's regional focus groups. This could also apply to bodies such as those in item 4(c).

Regarding the zero-draft revision of the statutes,

— we are particularly concerned about the proposed paragraphs on voting (Item 17 of the zero-draft-revision). We understand from the documents, that voting on financial matters is unchanged and that voting on constitutional and elections matters introduces a 40-40-20 rule among categories 1, 2, and 3. While the latter rule seems to be a good compromise for voting on constitutional and elections matters, we strongly disagree with the proposed "one member — one vote" system for voting on scientific matters. This would mean that an international union, representing scientific communities around the world with thousands of members would have the same voting power on scientific matters as a small local category 2 or 3 body, sometimes representing only a few individuals. This substantial change from the current weighted voting system makes no sense to our eyes. We request that concerning votes on scientific strategy the current 50-50-00 rule be reinstated or at least that a 40-40-20 rule be adopted for categories 1, 2, and 3, as has been proposed for voting on constitutional and elections matters, which would indeed allow bodies such as 'Young' academies and young disciplinary bodies to be better represented.

— Regarding the election of officers in section 5 of the Rules of Procedure, we believe that members should have a choice of candidates and not just one per position as stated in 5.4. Given the way the NEC is set up, having only one choice of candidate could lead to the unwanted effect that members are not sufficiently involved in the election process. Having a choice of candidates would also clarify the question of what happens if a candidate does not achieve the required two-thirds majority, a point for which the proposed statutes are not precise enough.

— Furthermore in section 5 of the Rules of Procedure, we do not see the need for 5.5: "exceptional reasons" should not be part of the Rules of Procedure and we propose to simply delete this item 5.5.

In addition to this letter, which contains comments shared by all of us, we will of course individually submit our comments, together with those that are more specific to some of us, via the online system that has been set up.

We would like to conclude with a general comment on one of the objectives of the ISC, namely to promote scientific interaction and solidarity towards scientific developments between the members of the ISC. These emerged, among others, through calls for joint interdisciplinary projects organized by the ISC, and enabled the promotion of science with and for its members, geared towards finding adequate responses to complex challenges facing humanity, among them an inclusive, balanced, respectful and sustainable development of the planet, leading to an evidence-informed decision making.

Significant contributions to these challenges require synergies of all sciences - basic and applied - as well as the social sciences and humanities. A less technical proposal for the revision of the statutes could be to include the promotion of such multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary projects, as well as solidarity towards scientific developments between its members, in the missions of the ISC.

Best regards

— End of Letter.