Ad Hoc Working Group to strengthen the Advisory Commission and revitalize its proceedings

Outcome document

- ADOPTED -

Foreword and rationale

On June 15, 2022, the Advisory Commission adopted the concept note “Strengthening the Advisory Commission”, which established the Ad Hoc Working Group as a subsidiary body of the Advisory Commission as per X.i. of the Rules of Procedure adopted on June 19, 2006. The group was established for interested Advisory Commission members to further revitalize the AdCom’s proceedings and related Rules of Procedure. It needed to report back to the full Advisory Commission.

Lebanon and EU acted as, respectively, Chair and Deputy Chair of this group. Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Germany, Japan, Jordan, Netherlands, Norway, Palestine, Switzerland, Syria, Türkiye, and United States chose to join the group and attended meetings.

In September 2022, the group set up its Terms of Reference and defined its mandate, namely to work to propose options for how the Advisory Commission could operate optimally to fulfill its mandate of advising and assisting the Commissioner-General. To this effect, it was tasked to propose a revision of the Advisory Commission Rules of Procedure where relevant, and recommendations on the practice of the Advisory Commission, through a comparative and historical perspective, which included delegations’ experience in Advisory Commission meetings, in order to enable the Commission to better respond to challenges and enhance strategic planning.

As the only Member State body between UNRWA and the General Assembly which bestows its mandate, the Advisory Commission is responsible to advise and assist the Commissioner-General on UNRWA’s planning, implementation and evaluation of its programs for the benefit of Palestine refugees. Hence, Members’ responsibilities not only entail receiving information on UNRWA’s work, but advising on strategic guidance with regard to important developments affecting Palestine refugees related to the work of the Agency.

The Ad Hoc Working Group’s mission ends in June 2023. The group however advises the Advisory Commission to reconsider and revitalize its proceedings every few years to ensure that the Commission remains as viable and relevant in its functions.

The group has been identifying priorities to strengthen the Advisory Commission and revitalize its proceedings, through working group meetings and consultation processes within the Members of the group and with the Agency. This document outlines the Ad Hoc Working Group’s recommendations on priority areas identified below. While a few priorities require proposed edits in the Advisory Commission Rules of Procedure (UNRWA/CN/ROP/2006/06/Rev.3) and the associated Sub-Committee Terms of Reference, others are characterized by a proposed revitalization of the practice of the Advisory Commission and do not require any text amendment.
The group proposes to revitalize the practice of the Advisory Commission proceedings in the following areas:

I. A revised sustainable regulation of the AdCom Bureau rotation
II. More strategic AdCom discussions
III. An improved process for AdCom recommendations
IV. Invitation of Non-Members in AdCom meetings
V. Increased flexibility for AdCom meeting locations

Annex: Proposed revision of the Rules of Procedure and Sub-Committee Terms of Reference (for adoption by the Advisory Commission)

I. A revised sustainable regulation of the AdCom Bureau rotation

The concept note on strengthening the Advisory Commission adopted in June 2022 states:

“The Advisory Commission continues to strive to undertake its work by consensus and in a transparent manner that promotes the principles of partnership. As such, the capacity of the officers of the Commission – the Bureau –to fulfill its duty of serving as the link between the Advisory Commission and UNRWA to promote dialogue and common understanding of issues facing the Commission must be preserved and sustained. Any vacuum in the Chairmanship of the Commission, which would put in peril its advisory and assisting function to the Agency in challenging times, should be prevented. As the key promoter of dialogue and common understanding between the Commission and the Agency, the Bureau ought to remain a stable and efficient office to ensure the advisory and assisting character of the Commission stands unaffected.”

Proposed revised rotation model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>AdCom Chair</th>
<th>AdCom Vice-Chair (A)</th>
<th>AdCom Vice-Chair (B)</th>
<th>SubCom Chair</th>
<th>SubCom Vice-Chair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2023-2024</td>
<td>Donor</td>
<td>Host</td>
<td>Donor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024-2025</td>
<td>Host A</td>
<td>Donor A</td>
<td>Donor¹</td>
<td>Voluntary Chair</td>
<td>Voluntary Vice-Chair(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025-2026</td>
<td>Donor A</td>
<td>Donor B</td>
<td>Host B</td>
<td>or AdCom Vice-Chair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2026-2027</td>
<td>Donor B</td>
<td>Host B</td>
<td>Donor C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2027-2028</td>
<td>Host B</td>
<td>Donor C</td>
<td>Donor D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Up to two Vice-Chairs up until July 2025. AdCom Members are committed to work in consensus to ensure a third donor country will take the position of Vice-Chair from July 2024 to July 2025.
2028-2029  |  Donor C  |  Donor D  |  Host C  |  (voluntary, or if vacuum)
2029-2030  |  Donor D  |  Host C   |  Donor E

Etc.

The proposed ternary rotation model (one Chair, two Vice-Chairs) aims to favor predictability, stability, and continuity within the AdCom Bureau while ensuring sufficient circumstantial flexibility. One office holder would normally be engaged for three years (two terms as Vice-Chair and one term as Chair), fostering continuity of engagement. Proposed last resort provisions for exceptional turn swap in the AdCom Bureau and fallback procedure for the absence of volunteer in the SubCom Bureau circumvent the risk of vacuum and destabilization of the AdCom in advising and assisting the Commissioner-General.

In the exceptional circumstance that a Member would be unable to assume its responsibilities in the AdCom Bureau, that Member is responsible to swap their turn in this three-year cycle with a following Member in the alphabetical order of rotation. Such swap may only occur ahead of time of a Member’s three-year engagement cycle. The swap could occur with the next Member in alphabetical order, or another following Member if the next is unwilling to swap.

Whilst ensuring at least one host is always represented in both the AdCom Bureau and the SubCom Bureau, this model also aims at better adapting to the past years’ enlargement of the AdCom membership to 25 donor states, by reducing the timespan for occasions to sit in the AdCom Bureau in order to develop engagement of all Members.

**Practice of the model**

After the first ad hoc ternary rotation cycle of the AdCom Bureau (2023-2024), the alphabetical order of rotation would be maintained to ensure predictability.

The SubCom Bureau cycle would thus be synchronized with the current AdCom Bureau rotation cycle (July to July). Canada’s term as SubCom Chair could be exceptionally extended for 0.5 years up until July 2024.

To favor a stronger link between the SubCom and the AdCom, and thus stronger engagement and connection with UNRWA’s subject-matters, the AdCom Vice-Chairs would be encouraged to volunteer for offices of the SubCom Bureau.

In the exceptional case when no AdCom Member would have volunteered to take up the SubCom Chair office by June 15 of a given year, the responsibility for ensuring the SubCom Bureau is not left vacant would rest with the AdCom Vice-Chairs.

The proposed last resort procedure provides that an AdCom Vice-Chair would automatically be designated to chair the Sub-Committee until such vacuum is filled. Should this fallback procedure be needed, proposed practice of the rule could be as follows, depending on the term’s configuration:

- If a host country is holding office as Vice-Chair, it could be the one which is automatically designated in case of vacuum, in order to ensure host representation in the SubCom Bureau.
- If the two Vice-Chairs are donors, Vice-Chair (A) could be designated by default in case of vacuum, unless the Vice-Chairs agrees otherwise. A host would remain as Vice-Chair in the SubCom Bureau to ensure representation.

II. **More strategic AdCom discussions**

The sessions of the Advisory Commission should be concerned with the most strategic subjects and priorities for the Agency looking forward, in order to enhance the potential for key strategic advice and assistance to emerge from Advisory Commission discussions between high-level representatives.

To this end, technical information and presentations by UNRWA management should take place primarily in the Sub-Committee to enable informed discussion at the Advisory Commission meetings. This approach should be supported by an adequate and timely flow of information from the Agency, in particular as relates to strategic issues, challenges, possible reforms and policy decisions, etc. Major technical topics such as UNRWA’s financial situation and resource mobilization and outreach efforts should remain as key AdCom themes to be discussed strategically.

Ideally, Advisory Commission sessions shall be complemented by indicative conclusions stemming from the discussions within the meeting. Such conclusions could be identified by the Bureau and UNRWA Secretariat to be reflected in the meeting summary records, and to further identify action points and follow-up for Members and the Agency on strategic issues to best respond to the objectives outlined in the Advisory Commission meeting agenda, and may feed follow-up technical discussions at the Sub-Committee or in subsequent Advisory Commission meetings. A recalling of these action points by the AdCom Bureau at each subsequent AdCom and an update would be advisable.

III. **An improved process for AdCom recommendations**

Recommendations are the main means for the Advisory Commission to provide advice and assistance to the Commissioner-General. Members have identified the following areas for improvement for AdCom recommendations to better help the Agency in addressing key challenges.

A) **Recommendations should be more focused on the most strategic priorities.**

AdCom recommendations should not only address technical and programmatic priorities for Members, but identify ways to respond to core strategic challenges the Agency is facing.

To this end, UNRWA should identify what priority topics recommendations are particularly sought upon for Members - in due time ahead of AdCom meetings or annually in line with the Agency’s annual strategic goals for any given year - to provide a focused response on such topics and fulfill their advisory role in an informed and independent manner. Such consultations with the Agency can take place through the Sub-Committee Chair, in the presence of the AdCom bureau, prior to the drafting process.

When drafting and formatting, Members should sequence the recommendations into a strategic section and a technical section and seek to limit their number and avoid to the extent possible repetition of past recommendations in order to facilitate a more focused and dynamic follow-up.

B) **The follow-up on recommendations should be more dynamic.**
Currently, the process of following-up on AdCom recommendations consists of the dissemination of a written response to recommendations of the previous Advisory Commission session through an aide-mémoire prepared by the Executive Office. To enhance the potential of AdCom recommendations feeding into the Agency’s strategic directions, follow-up should be discussed and incorporated through other ways in the Advisory Commission and its subsidiary bodies.

Such ways could include briefings in the SubCom on specific recommendations; ad hoc meetings to follow-up on certain recommendations; and including follow-up of specific recommendations in related AdCom sessions. Evidence that recommendations have been followed up on (if at all) could then be clearly communicated, highlighted and referenced.

IV. Invitation of Non-Members in AdCom meetings

Non-Members of the Advisory Commission such as Palestine refugees, Think-Tanks, Non-Governmental organizations, International Financial Institutions, individuals, private sector entities and others could be invited to participate in relevant sessions of the Advisory Commission and/or its Sub Committee. This should enhance the AdCom’s ability to provide strategic advice and assistance to the Commissioner-General by taking on board various perspectives with added value to the discussions on a particular part of the Advisory Commission meeting.

Such invitations should be useful to enhance the way AdCom Member States think outside the box and support UNRWA in the face of tremendous political challenges, thanks to guests’ relevant expertise, experiences or perspectives. In particular, the Advisory Commission should seek more ways to include Palestine refugees and their voices in their discussions in a meaningful manner, in the framework of improved accountability to affected populations.

Specific presentations or discussions with these guests could be organized in the framework of AdCom sessions. Invitees, in presence or online, should be informed of the timing of their involvement in the AdCom discussion, if appropriate.

Non-Member States and regional and international organizations can be invited by the AdCom Chair to observe a given meeting of the Advisory Commission.

Proposed invitations and the objective of Non-Members presence should be communicated to AdCom members for consultation in advance with a silence period for any objection so that AdCom members are prepared to engage.

V. Flexibility for AdCom/SubCom meeting locations

There is an assumption that flexibility will remain with regard to the location of the AdCom meeting, as foreseen in the present language of the RoP “Annual and Regular Sessions of the Commission will ordinarily take place in Jordan. With the approval of the Advisory Commission, sessions may be convened under exceptional circumstances in other locations”.

When relevant, technical ad hoc, working group or Sub-Committee meetings can take place on a virtual basis.