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STRATEGY, PLANNING AND REFORM

Terms of office of committee chairs and gender equality

Submitted by the Bahamas

SUMMARY

Executive summary: While the Organization has made great strides in its modernization agenda some anachronistic practices remain. This paper addresses the current lack of consistency in the terms of office specified in the Rules of Procedure for the various organs and proposes a harmonized approach. The opportunity is also taken to further the objective of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 5 and adopt gender-neutral language.

Strategic direction: 4

High-level action: 4.0.5

Output: 4.0.5.1

Action to be taken: Paragraph 10

Related documents: None

Introduction

1 The Organization has made significant progress in the modernization of its processes with a view to improving efficiency and enhancing the public acceptance of its work. However, there remain processes which are rooted in past practice that no longer meet contemporary expectations in regard to fairness and openness.

2 One example of anachronistic practice is found in the various permitted terms of office of the chair and vice-chair of committees and sub-committees. The Bahamas takes the view that the time is right for Council to determine an appropriate term of office and instruct all subsidiary organs of the Organization to amend their Rules of Procedure to formalize and harmonize terms of office.

3 In conjunction with these changes, the Bahamas also takes the view that the Organization must now aim to use gender-neutral terminology as the retention of the use of the masculine terminology "chairman" is considered equally anachronistic.

Discussion

4 The Convention on the International Maritime Organization specifies that each Committee must elect its officers on an annual basis (Articles 30, 35, 40, 45 and 50) and the permitted term of office for the chairman of each IMO organ is to be found in its Rules of Procedure. However, examination of the Rules reveals a lack of consistency as follows:

- Maritime Safety Committee – Rule 16 – the Chairman and Vice-chairman, elected annually, may hold office for one calendar year and be eligible for re-election for up to three consecutive terms of office.
- Legal Committee – Rule 17 – the Chairman and up to two Vice-Chairman are elected annually
- Marine Environment Protection Committee – Rule 17 – the Chairman and Vice-chairman are elected annually and are eligible for re-election
- Technical Cooperation Committee – Rule 16 – the Chairman and up to two Vice-Chairmen are elected annually and are eligible for re-election for up to three consecutive terms of office.
- Facilitation Committee – Rule 17 – the Chairman and Vice-Chairman are elected annually and are eligible for re-election.

5 From the above, it may be seen that the Maritime Safety Committee has similarity with the Technical Cooperation Committee and the Facilitation Committee with the Marine Environment Protection Committee, while the Legal Committee has yet another arrangement.

Setting an appropriate term of office

6 It is clear that assuming office for an IMO organ is a significant honour and responsibility. The chair of a committee is responsible for guiding the Membership through sometimes difficult negotiation and deliberation. It would therefore be fair to ensure that a chair has sufficient opportunity for re-election to be able to shepherd issues that stretch over a number of years. However, this must be balanced against the risk that a new approach from a different chair could resolve impasse.

7 In keeping with the revised guidelines and the document on the Application of the Strategic Plan and the High-level Action Plan of the Organization; the International Maritime Organization (IMO), as a specialized Agency of the United Nations (UN), must emphasize the following factors being taken into consideration in the selection of its chair, vice-chair and working group chair, whenever possible and practicable:

- .1 Experience and personal competence;
- .2 Geographical distribution; and
- .3 The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", Target 5.5 "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life."

8 Having reviewed the progress of a number of important instruments from introduction to adoption, the Bahamas is of the view that a period of five years in office is appropriate. That is to say that the chair and vice-chair should be eligible for re-election for up to four consecutive terms of office.

Use of gender-neutral language

9 The current Rules use the masculine terms chairman and vice-chairman. These terms are commonly perceived as being inappropriate in modern society which strives for gender equality. The Bahamas believes that the terms are anachronistic and new terms should be used which accurately reflect the Organization's clear commitment to the promotion of equality. The Bahamas further believes that the most appropriate term to use in the Rules is simply "chair".

Action requested of the Council

10 The Council is requested to consider the issues discussed in this paper and the proposals in paragraphs 8 and 9 and decide accordingly.
