UN environment programme

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP)

ISP-CWP/ITM/1/INF/4

16 September 2026

Informal technical meeting on the draft rules of procedure of the Plenary of the ISP-CWP
1 to 3 October 2026
Bangkok, Thailand

Background note on credentials

I. Introduction

1. At the first part of its first session, held in Geneva from 2 to 6 February 2026, the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) began its consideration of the draft rules of procedure recommended by the intergovernmental meeting that established the Panel. At the adjournment of the session, paragraph 3 of draft rule 12, concerning the authority to issue or sign credentials, remained unresolved. The interim secretariat has prepared this note as a complement to the Overview of issues outstanding in the draft rules of procedure of the Plenary of the ISP-CWP (ISP-CWP/ITM/1/INF/2) and to support members' further consideration of paragraph 3 of draft rule 12 at the informal technical meeting on the draft rules of procedure, to be held in Bangkok from 1 to 3 October 2026.[1]

II. Text under consideration

2. Paragraph 3 of draft rule 12, as reflected in document ISP-CWP/ITM/1/2, reads as follows:

> *"The credentials of the representatives of any member are to be* ***issued by [the Head of State or Government or by the Minister of Foreign Affairs or] [a national competent authority] [an appropriate government authority]*** *of the member and will be regarded as appropriate credentials for the participation of the individuals named therein in all activities of the session."*[2] (Emphasis added.)

3. There is no definition of "credentials" within the rules and procedures of the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Credentials of a representative to an international organization or process may be understood as "the document attesting that the person or persons named are entitled to represent their State at the seat of or at meetings of the Organization".[3] In the context of the Panel, credentials attest that the persons named are authorized to represent the member at a particular session of the Plenary.

4. The bracketed alternatives **[the Head of State or Government or by the Minister of Foreign Affairs or] [a national competent authority] [an appropriate government authority]** currently in paragraph 3 differ principally in whether the rule specifies particular constitutional offices as the issuing authority or instead leaves it to each member to determine the relevant issuing authority under its national legal and administrative arrangements.

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[2] Rules of procedure [for sessions of the Plenary] of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution, in Annex to ISP-CWP/ITM/1/2, Rule 12, paragraph 3.
[3] United Nations Legal Counsel, "Scope of 'credentials' in rule 27 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly", A/8160, 11 November 1970, paras. 1-3, reproduced in the *United Nations Juridical Yearbook 1970*, pp. 169-171, particularly Note 3.

5. Were the rule to provide that credentials are to be issued either by "the Head of State or Government or by the Minister of Foreign Affairs", it limits the issuing authority to those specified offices.

6. The term "appropriate government authority" is not generally defined in international instruments. In the context of credentials, it has been understood in practice to encompass the governmental authority that is competent under the member's national legal and administrative arrangements to issue or authenticate credentials, which may include relevant ministries or departments, or diplomatic or permanent missions acting with the necessary authority.[4]

7. The term "national competent authority" is commonly used in treaties requiring States to designate, under national law, an authority responsible for performing a specified function. In that context, the authority is legally empowered to exercise the functions assigned under the relevant instrument.[5]

8. The IPBES and IPCC formulations also differ in their use of the expressions "issued by" and "signed by". Neither expression is defined in the relevant rules. "Issued by" generally refers to the governmental authority from which the credentials formally emanate, whereas "signed by" concerns the execution or authentication of the document. The practical significance of the distinction depends on the applicable rules and established practice. Where the rules prescribe both the authority by which credentials are to be issued and separate requirements concerning signature, seal, initials, or digital authentication, the two expressions may perform complementary rather than interchangeable functions.[6]

III. Rules and practice in selected intergovernmental bodies

9. At UNEA, rules 16 and 17 of the UNEA rules of procedure provide that each member is to be represented by an accredited representative, that credentials are to be submitted to the Executive Director and that the Bureau is to examine the credentials and submits its report to the Assembly.[7] The rules do not specify the issuing authority.[8] In practice, following examination by the Bureau, the Assembly has accepted the credentials of Member States.[9] The Bureau report usually distinguishes members that submit formal credentials issued by the Head of State or Government or the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and those that submit information through scanned copies of formal credentials, letters, notes verbales from permanent missions and other forms of official communication.[10]

10. At IPCC, for sessions at which elections are to take place as governed by Appendix C, rule 4 provides that "… The credentials shall be **signed by, or on behalf of, an appropriate government authority** of the Member of the IPCC and shall be regarded as appropriate credentials for the participation of the individuals named therein in all activities of the Session"[11] (emphasis added).

[4] *Yearbook of the International Law Commission*, 1967, Vol. II pp. 194. WHO: "In accordance with rule 22 (b), credentials must be issued by the Head of State, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, or by the Minister of Health or by any other appropriate authority. In practice the term "appropriate authority" has been considered to include government departments responsible for dealing with public health, ministries of health, heads of diplomatic missions and permanent missions."

[5] Article 2 of the Basel Convention: "competent authority" is defined as "one governmental authority designated by a Party to be responsible, within such geographical areas as the Party may think fit, for receiving the notification of a transboundary movement of hazardous wastes or other wastes, and any information related to it, and for responding to such a notification"; Article 2 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties: "full powers", required under the Convention for a representative to adopt a treaty text or express a State's consent to be bound by a treaty, "means a document emanating from the competent authority of a State designating a person or persons to represent the State for negotiating, adopting or authenticating the text of a treaty, for expressing the consent of the State to be bound by a treaty, or for accomplishing any other act with respect to a treaty".

[6] See, for example, rules 18.3 and 18.4 of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat.

[7] Rules of Procedure of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP/EA.3/3, rules 16-17.

[8] Comparable provisions requiring the submission of credentials without specifying the issuing authority are found in rule 17 of the Rules of Procedure of the Economic and Social Council and rule 17 of the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations Habitat Assembly.

[9] See, for example, UNEA Decision 7/4 on "Credentials of representatives": At the 4th plenary meeting, in the afternoon of Thursday, 11 December, the United Nations Environment Assembly approved the report of the Bureau on credentials and accepted the credentials of Member States.

[10] See, for example, the Proceedings of UNEA at its seventh session, UNEP/EA.7/21, paras. 42-44.

[11] IPCC, Appendix C to the Principles Governing IPCC Work.

Similar provisions are found at the World Meteorological Organization ("…signed by, or on behalf of, an appropriate governmental authority…"); the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control ("…or any other competent government authority…"); and the International Civil Aviation Organization ("…by a person duly authorized to…").[12]

11. At IPBES, rule 12(2) of the rules of procedure for the sessions of the Plenary of the Platform provides that "The credentials of the representatives of any member of the Platform need to be **issued by or on behalf of the member's Head of State or Government or minister for foreign affairs consistent with each country's policies and law**"[13] (emphasis added). This framing identifies the specified constitutional offices, and retains flexibility by permitting credentials to also be issued on their behalf, consistent with each member's specific context. Comparable provisions specifying the Head of State or Government or the Minister for Foreign Affairs as the issuing authority are found in the respective rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions, Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and Minamata Convention on Mercury.[14]

12. In conclusion, the rules and practice examined demonstrate that there is no uniform approach in intergovernmental processes with respect to credentials. On one hand, at the General Assembly, selected MEAs administered by UNEP, and IPBES, credentials must be issued by the Head of State or Government or Minister for Foreign Affairs, with the IPBES example including that the issuance can be on their behalf, consistent with each country's policies and law. On the other hand, at IPCC, and selected United Nations Specialised agencies, and agreements operating under their respective institutional frameworks there are more general formulations referring to competent or appropriate governmental authorities. At UNEA, the rules of procedure do not specify an issuing authority at all. The choice of formulation therefore reflects a policy decision regarding the degree of flexibility to be afforded to members, rather than a requirement of general international law.

IV. Considerations for paragraph 3 of draft rule 12

13. In the light of the bracketed text, members may wish to consider whether draft rule 12 should:

a. specify that credentials are to be issued by the Head of State or Government or the Minister for Foreign Affairs; or

b. combine specific constitutional offices with a reference to any other competent or appropriate government authority acting under national law;[15] or

c. indicate that credentials are to be signed by a national competent authority; or an appropriate government authority; or

d. not specify the issuing authority, leaving the matter to the practice of members, which would entail deletion of paragraph 3.

[12] Provisions likewise providing for the issuance of credentials by authorities other than the Head of State or Government or the Minister for Foreign Affairs are found in regulation 20 of the General Regulations of the World Meteorological Organization ("…signed by, or on behalf of, an appropriate governmental authority…"); rule 18 of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control ("…or any other competent government authority…"); and rule 6(a) of the Standing Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization ("…by a person duly authorized [to sign credentials]…").

[13] Rules of procedure for sessions of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, as adopted by the Plenary in decisions IPBES-1/1 and IPBES-2/1.

[14] Rule 27 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly; Rule 18 of the Rules of Procedure for the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal; Rule 19 of the Rules of Procedure for the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention on the prior informed consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade; Rule 19 of the Rules of procedure for the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants; rule 18 of the Rules of Procedure for meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity; rule 19 of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification; and rule 19 of the Rules of Procedure for the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

[15] See, for example, rule 22 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly, under which credentials are to be issued by the Head of State, the Head of Government, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Health or any other appropriate authority. A comparable formulation is found in rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean.