

United Nations Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

**Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies,
Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic
Qualifications in Higher Education in the African
States**

Adopted at Arusha on 5 December 1981



Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States ¹

Introduction

The preparation of regional conventions on the recognition of studies and diplomas in higher education including the present one has been undertaken by UNESCO as part of a vast campaign designed to organize the co-operation of States in this field. These instruments are intended to provide assessment criteria, units of measurement, methods and techniques whereby the qualifications acquired can be evaluated. Each convention institutes an intergovernmental committee composed of representatives of the Contracting States which is responsible for promoting and extending application of the texts and for receiving and examining periodic reports from States on progress to date and difficulties met with in applying the conventions.

The Convention came into force on 1 January 1983.

1. Adopted at Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, on 5 December 1981 by an International Conference of States, convened by UNESCO

REGIONAL CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF STUDIES, CERTIFICATES
DIPLOMAS, DEGREES AND OTHER ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE AFRICAN STATES
adopted at Arusha on 5 December 1981

The African States, Parties to the present Convention,

Considering the close bonds of solidarity that history and geography have forged between them,

Reaffirming, in accordance with the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, their common resolve to strengthen understanding and co-operation among the African peoples in order to meet their aspirations towards greater brotherhood and increased solidarity in a larger unity transcending ethnic and national diversity,

Noting that the fulfilment of these aspirations, long thwarted by colonial domination and the consequent division of the African continent, calls for intensive co-operation among the African States, which alone is capable of safeguarding their hard-won independence and sovereignty, of preserving and strengthening the cultural identity and diversity of their peoples, of respecting the specific character of their educational systems, of increasing and improving their educational facilities and curricula, and of ensuring effective use in the best interests of the continent as a whole both of the training resources available in their respective territories and of the intellectuals, administrators, technologists, technicians and other high-level personnel which have been trained,

Desirous in particular of strengthening and increasing their co-operation in matters relating to education and the use of human resources with the aim, in particular, of encouraging the advancement of knowledge, of achieving a constant and gradual improvement in the quality of higher education and of promoting economic, social and cultural development in each of the African countries and in the continent as a whole,

Convinced that, as part of this co-operation, the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications in higher education, which would ensure the greater mobility of students and persons engaged in an occupation throughout the African continent, is one of the conditions necessary for accelerating the development of the region, which implies that increasing numbers of scientists, technologists, technicians and specialists will be trained and their services fully utilized,

Convinced that, precisely on account of the diversity and complexity of programmes of study, the system of equivalence of diplomas hitherto in use

does not suffice to allow the best possible use to be made of their educational facilities, and that it is now becoming essential to adopt the concept of recognition of stages of training, taking into account not only the diplomas and degrees obtained but also the courses of study followed and the knowledge and experience acquired,

Desirous of taking the greatest possible account in their future collaboration of the requirements of development and of the need to encourage the democratization of education and the promotion of lifelong education, while at the same time ensuring the continuous improvement of the quality of instruction,

Resolved to organize and strengthen their co-operation in the field of recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications by means of a convention which would be the starting-point for concerted dynamic action carried out, in particular, through national, bilateral, sub-regional and regional bodies already in existence or set up for that purpose,

Expressing the hope that this Convention will be a step towards more wide-ranging action leading to an international convention between all the Member States of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,

HAVE AGREED as follows:

I. DEFINITIONS

Article 1

1. For the purposes of this Convention the "recognition" or a foreign certificate, diploma, degree or other academic qualification of higher education means its acceptance by the competent authorities of a Contracting State and the granting to the holder of the rights enjoyed by persons possessing a national certificate, diploma, degree or academic qualification with which the foreign one is assessed as comparable. Such rights extend to either the pursuit of studies, or the practice of a profession, or both, according to the applicability of the recognition.

(a) Recognition or a foreign certificate, diploma, degree or other academic qualification with a view to undertaking or pursuing studies at the higher level shall entitle the holder to enter the higher educational and research institutions of any Contracting State under the same conditions as those applying to holders of a similar certificate, diploma, degree or other academic qualification issued in the Contracting State concerned.

(b) Recognition of a foreign certificate, diploma, degree or other academic qualification with a view to the practice of a profession is the recognition of the holder's technical capacity, and confers on him the rights and obligations of holders of the national certificate, diploma, degree or other academic qualification required for the practice of the profession concerned. Such recognition does not exempt the holder of the foreign certificate, diploma, degree or other academic qualification from complying with the legal requirements or the conditions for the practice of the profession concerned which may be laid down by the competent governmental or professional authorities in the Contracting State concerned.

2. For the purposes of this Convention:

(a) "secondary education" means that stage of studies of any kind which follows primary or elementary and preparatory education and the aims of which include preparing pupils for admission to higher education;

(b) "higher education" means all types of education and research at post-secondary level. Such education is open to all persons who are properly qualified, either because they have obtained a secondary-school leaving diploma or certificate or because they have received appropriate training or acquired appropriate knowledge according to the conditions laid down for that purpose by the State concerned.

3. For the purposes of this Convention, "partial studies" means any education whose duration or content is partial by comparison with the norms prevailing in the institution in which it was acquired. Recognition by a Contracting State of partial studies pursued in an institution situated in the territory of another Contracting State and recognized by that State may be granted in accordance with the level of achievements reached by the student in the opinion of the State granting recognition.

4. For the purposes of this Convention, "stage of training" means a sum of academic and practical studies, or personal experience and achievements leading to the requisite point of maturity and skill in order - with regard to continuation of studies - to undertake the subsequent stage and - with regard to the practice of a profession - to assume the responsibilities and perform the duties corresponding to the stage concerned.

II. AIMS

Article 2

1. The Contracting States intend, through joint action concerning the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees or other academic qualifications, to contribute to: (a) strengthening African unity and solidarity; (b) removing the constraints based on different past colonial experience which cut across the region's traditional historical and cultural links; and (c) promoting and strengthening the cultural identity of Africa and of its various countries.

2. The Contracting States solemnly declare their firm resolve to co-operate closely with a view to:
 - (a) enabling the educational resources available to them to be used as effectively as possible in the interests of all the Contracting States and, for this purpose:
 - (i) to make their higher educational institutions as widely accessible as possible to students from any of the Contracting States;
 - (ii) to recognize the studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications of such persons, and to encourage exchanges and the greatest possible freedom of movement of teachers, students and researchers in the region;
 - (iii) to co-ordinate the entrance requirements of the educational institutions of each country;
 - (iv) to alleviate the difficulties encountered by those returning home after completing their education abroad, so that their reintegration into the life of the country may be achieved in the manner most beneficial both to the community and to the development of their own personality;
 - (v) to adopt terminology and evaluation criteria as similar as possible in order to facilitate the application of a system which will ensure the comparability of credits, subjects of study and certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications of higher education;
 - (vi) to take account, in the conception and revision of their educational systems and programmes, and of their methods

of evaluation, of African realities and to provide for gradual adoption of the African languages as languages of instruction;

- (vii) to adopt a dynamic approach in matters of admission to further stages of study, bearing in mind not only knowledge attested by academic qualifications, but also personal experience and achievements;
 - (viii) to adopt methods of evaluation based solely on knowledge and skills acquired;
 - (ix) to adopt flexible criteria for the evaluation of partial studies, based on the educational level reached and on the content of the courses taken, bearing in mind the interdisciplinary character of knowledge at the higher educational level;
 - (x) to improve the system for the exchange of information regarding the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications;
- (b) constantly reviewing and harmonizing curricula and planning of higher education in the Contracting States so as to take account of development requirements, of the African aspirations towards a new economic order, and of the recommendations made by the competent organs of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization concerning the continuous improvement of the quality of education, the promotion of lifelong education and the democratization of education;
 - (c) promoting the widest and most effective use of human resources so as to contribute to the acceleration of the development of the countries concerned, while at the same time avoiding the "brain drain";
 - (d) promoting interregional co-operation in the matter of the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications.

3. The Contracting States agree to take all necessary steps at the national, bilateral and multilateral levels, in particular by means of bilateral, subregional, regional or other agreements, agreements between universities or other higher educational institutions and arrangements with the competent national or international organizations and other bodies, with a view to the progressive attainment of the goals defined in the present Article.

III. UNDERTAKINGS FOR IMMEDIATE APPLICATION

Article 3

For the purposes of the continuation of studies and immediate admission to the subsequent stages of training in higher educational institutions situated in their respective territories, the Contracting States recognize, under the same conditions as those applicable to local academic qualifications, secondary-school leaving certificates issued in the other Contracting States, the possession of which qualifies the holders for admission to the subsequent stages of training in higher educational institutions situated in the territories of those Contracting States, provided the applicant satisfies or is given the opportunity to meet the requirements pertaining to the academic level prescribed for admission into those subsequent stages of training in higher education.

Article 4

The Contracting States agree to take all necessary steps at the national level with a view to:

- (a) recognizing, for the purpose of the pursuit of studies and immediate admission to the subsequent stages or training in higher educational institutions situated in their respective territories and under conditions applicable locally, academic qualifications obtained in a higher educational institution situated in the territory or another Contracting State and recognized by it, denoting that a full course of studies at the higher level has been completed to the satisfaction of the competent authorities;
- (b) defining, so far as possible, the procedure applicable to the recognition, for the purpose of the pursuit of studies, of the partial studies pursued in higher educational institutions situated in the other Contracting States.

Article 5

The Contracting States agree to take the necessary steps to ensure that certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications issued by the competent authorities of the other Contracting States are effectively recognized so far as possible for the purpose of practising a profession within the meaning of Article 1, paragraph 1 (b).

Article 6

1. Considering that recognition refers to the studies followed and the certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications obtained in the recognized institutions of a given Contracting State, any

person of whatever nationality or political or legal status, who has followed such studies and obtained such certificates, diplomas, degrees or other academic qualifications shall be entitled to benefit from the provisions of Articles 3, 4 and 5.

2. Any national of a Contracting State who has obtained in the territory of a non-Contracting State one or more certificates, diplomas, degrees or other qualifications similar to those defined in Articles 3, 4 and 5 may avail himself of those provisions which are applicable, on condition that his certificates diplomas, degrees or qualifications have been recognized in his home country and in the country in which he wishes to continue his studies, without prejudice to the provisions of Article 20 of this Convention.

IV. MACHINERY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Article 7

The Contracting States shall endeavour to attain the goals defined in Article 2 and shall ensure that the undertakings set forth in Articles 3, 4 and 5 above are put into effect by means of:

- (a) national bodies;
- (b) the regional committee defined in Article 9 below;
- (c) bilateral or subregional bodies.

Article 8

1. The Contracting States recognize that the attainment of the goals and the execution of the undertakings defined in this Convention will require, at the national level, close co-operation and co-ordination of the efforts of a great variety of national authorities, whether governmental or non-governmental, particularly universities and other higher education institutions. They therefore agree to entrust the study of the problems involved in the application of this Convention to appropriate national bodies, with which all the sectors concerned will be associated and which will be empowered to propose appropriate solutions. The Contracting States will furthermore take all the administrative measures required to speed up the effective functioning of these national bodies.

2. Every national body shall have at its disposal the necessary means to enable it either to collect, process and file all information or use to it in its activities relating to studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education, or to obtain the information it requires in this connection at short notice from a separate national documentation centre.

Article 9

1. A regional committee composed of representatives of all the Contracting States is hereby set up and its secretariat entrusted to the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
2. The function of the regional committee shall be to promote the application of this Convention. It shall receive and examine the periodic reports which the Contracting States shall communicate to it on the progress made and the obstacles encountered by them in the application of the Convention and also the studies carried out by its secretariat on the said Convention. The Contracting States undertake to submit a report to the committee at least once every two years.
3. The regional committee shall, where appropriate, address to the Contracting States recommendations of a general or individual character concerning the application of this Convention.

Article 10

1. The regional committee shall elect its chairman and adopt its Rules of Procedure. It shall meet in ordinary session every two years. The committee shall meet for the first time three months after the sixth instrument of ratification or accession has been deposited.
2. The secretariat of the regional committee shall prepare the agenda for the meetings of the committee, in accordance with the instructions it receives from the committee and the provisions of the Rules of Procedure. It may formulate proposals with a view to measures to be taken by the committee. It shall help national bodies to obtain the information needed by them in their activities.

Article 11

1. The Contracting States may entrust existing bilateral or subregional bodies or bodies set up for the purpose with the task of studying the problems involved at the bilateral or regional levels in the application of this Convention and contributing to their solution.
2. The regional committee may likewise entrust appropriate African bodies with the task of studying and seeking solutions to the difficulties that present differences between the education systems and evaluation methods in use in the various subregions of the African continent entail for the harmonious and widespread application of the Convention.

V. DOCUMENTATION

Article 12

1. The Contracting States shall periodically engage in wide exchanges of information and documentation pertaining to studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications in higher education.
2. They shall endeavour to promote the development of methods and machinery for collecting, processing, classifying and disseminating all the necessary information pertaining to the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications in higher education, taking into account existing methods and machinery as well as information collected by national, regional and international bodies, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

VI. CO-OPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Article 13

The regional committee shall make all the appropriate arrangements for associating the competent international governmental and non-governmental organizations with its efforts to ensure that this Convention is applied as fully as possible.

VII. INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF
A CONTRACTING STATE BUT SITUATED OUTSIDE ITS TERRITORYArticle 14

The provisions of this Convention apply to studies pursued at, and to certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications obtained from, any institution of higher education under the authority of a Contracting State, even when this institution is situated outside its territory, or is under the joint authority of more than one Contracting State.

VIII. RATIFICATION, ACCESSION AND ENTRY INTO FORCE

Article 15

This Convention shall be open for signature and ratification by the African States which have been invited to take part in the diplomatic conference entrusted with the adoption of this Convention.

Article 16

1. Other States which are members of the United Nations, of one of the Specialized Agencies or of the International Atomic Energy Agency or

which are Parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice may be authorized to accede to this Convention.

2. Any request to this effect shall be communicated to the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization who shall transmit it to the Contracting States at least three months before the meeting of the ad hoc committee referred to in paragraph 3 of this Article.

3. The Contracting States shall meet as an ad hoc committee comprising one representative for each Contracting State, with an express mandate from his government to consider such a request. In such cases, the decision of the committee shall require a two-thirds majority of the Contracting States.

4. This procedure shall apply only when the Convention has been ratified by at least fifteen of the States referred to in Article 15.

Article 17

Ratification of this Convention or accession to it shall be effected by depositing an instrument of ratification or accession with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational; Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Article 18

This Convention shall come into effect one month after the second instrument of ratification has been deposited, but solely with respect to the States which have deposited their instruments of ratification. For every other State which shall subsequently deposit its instrument of ratification or accession, the Convention shall come into effect one month thereafter.

Article 19

1. The present Convention may be amended in accordance with the principles and procedures set out in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

2. The Contracting States shall have the right to denounce this Convention.

3. The denunciation shall be signified by an instrument in writing deposited with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

4. The denunciation shall take effect 12 months after the instrument of denunciation has been received. It shall have no retroactive effects, nor shall it affect the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications, which has taken place in accordance with the provisions of the Convention when the State denouncing the Convention

was still bound thereby. Such recognition shall continue to have its full effect after the denunciation has become effective.

Article 20

This Convention shall not affect in any way the treaties and conventions already in force between the Contracting States or the national legislation adopted by them in so far as such treaties, conventions and legislation offer greater advantages than those provided for in the Convention.

Article 21

The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization shall inform the Contracting States and the other States mentioned in Articles 15 and 16 and also the United Nations of the deposit of all the instruments of ratification or accession referred to in Article 17 and the denunciations provided for in Article 19 of this Convention.

Article 22

In conformity with Article 102 of the United Nations Charter, this Convention shall be registered with the Secretariat of the United Nations at the request of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

IN FAITH WHEREOF the undersigned representatives being duly authorized thereto, have signed this Convention.

Done at Arusha, this fifth day of December 1981, in the Arabic, English, French and Spanish languages, the four texts being equally authoritative, in a single copy which shall be deposited -in the archives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. A certified copy shall be sent to all the States referred to in Articles 15 and 16 and to the United Nations.