DECISION MAKING IN SUBUD (Consensus)

A. Background

2010 WORLD CONGRESS

- **Subud Germany submitted the following proposal at the 2010 World Congress in Christchurch:**

  "We believe that the members of WSA should agree on what is meant by 'consensus in decision making'.
  Our understanding is that during decision making processes in Subud the majorities as well as the minorities must have a fair chance to express their views and proposals. It is of particular importance to respect minority views.
  However, the aim is to come to a decision. This requires from everybody, including minorities, to contribute to a process of finding the compromise, of finding solutions acceptable to all. This process needs appropriate time and attention.
  This process may lead to a unanimous resolution. Failing that, we suggest that the decision is put to the vote. In our view it would be undemocratic to allow a (tiny) minority to block decisions, which a vast majority wants.
  We suggest that decisions by voting require a majority of at least two-third".

- **The following draft resolution was proposed by a working party during the 2010 World Congress**

  Preamble: Decision-making through consensus has been a fundamental aim at Subud meetings not only because our association strives for harmony among its brothers and sisters but also because we are blessed with the Latihan Kejiwaan, knowing that we can arrive at a satisfactory resolution to an issue with guidance from Almighty God.

  Whereas: The most important decision an association can make is to agree on how it makes decisions.

  Whereas: The WSA bylaws state that "consultative and deliberative procedures shall be guided by democratic principles and shall seek consensus in decision making through guidance received in the Latihan Kejiwaan."

  Whereas: Since the inception of the bylaws at the Sydney World Congress 20 years ago, WSA has been unable to operationalize how decision-making through consensus might work on a function level like a delegate assembly.

  Whereas: Decision-making through consensus need only be necessary when the most fundamental organizational changes at an international level are being proposed and that in most cases (e.g., approving a budget, selecting an officer, or passing a motion) a voting majority is sufficient.

  Therefore be it resolved: That at assembly meetings during a Subud World Congress delegates use decision-making through consensus only for the most sensitive issues that might impact the world-wide Subud community.

  Be it further resolved: That decision-making through consensus be defined as a process in which all delegates contribute their thoughts and feelings and all share in a final decision. That is: no decision becomes final that is not understood by nearly all the delegates. Furthermore, that consensus does NOT mean that everyone agrees but that:
  - Delegates have been provided the opportunity to participate in the discussion to show that they understand it;
  - Delegates have been provided a chance to describe their feelings about the issue; and
  - Delegates who continue to disagree will nevertheless indicate that they are willing to give the decision a try for a prescribed period of time.

  In other words, decision-making through consensus means that a sufficient number of delegates are in favor of a decision to move it forward, while others understand the decision and will not obstruct or disrupt its occurrence.

  Be it further resolved: That when decision-making through consensus is necessary at a delegate assembly that the chair will proceed with a initial vote to identify the level of agreement, will recognize and provide the minority an opportunity to express opposing arguments and upon completion will take a final vote to see if a sufficient number concurs. If eighty percent of the voting delegates cannot concur, the issue is automatically tabled for one business day.

Neither **resolution was approved, but the Congress minutes indicated that:**

Congress agreed that the Organizational Task Force would take on the definition of consensus into their brief and send it to all the zones and countries to give them the time and the responsibility to look at it well before the next World Congress.

WSA BYLAWS

The **Bylaws of the World Subud Association** refer to consensus in a number of sections:

- **PREAMBLE - DECISION MAKING:** The members of the World Subud Association, in all their consultative and deliberative procedures, shall be guided by democratic principles and shall seek consensus in decision making through guidance received in the Latihan Kejiwaan.
- **THE ASSOCIATION -** 2.8 **Decision Making**: After deliberation by the Member Delegations, decisions are made by consensus.
- **THE WORLD SUBUD CONGRESS - 3.20 Procedures to Resolve Deadlock**: In the event of differences of view arising between Member Delegations, the Chairperson may establish Zone Council meetings or such other groupings of the Member Delegations as the Member Delegations may agree to. If differences persist, decisions are made through guidance received in the Latihan Kejiwaan. If consensus cannot be reached, no decision is made; however, a resolution defeated at a previous Congress, which the Zonal Representatives unanimously agree to reintroduce unchanged at a subsequent Congress, is approved by Congress when supported by more than two-thirds of the Member Delegations.
- **BOARD OF DIRECTORS** - **6.6 Decisions:** Decisions of the Board of Directors shall be by consensus.
  6.8 Appointment of Committees: The Board may appoint by consensus, committees to exercise the authority of the Board in the management of the Association.

DEFINITIONS

- Consensus is not defined in the **WSA Bylaws**.

- The term consensus has **different meanings** for different people, from different organizations, in different cultures, with different backgrounds. It is important that we agree on one meaning that is most appropriate for decision-making in Subud.

- Many definitions suggest that consensus is **a process, a convergence, a coming together.**

- **Consensus decision-making** is a group decision making process that seeks the consent (not necessarily the agreement), of participants, and the resolution of objections.

- There are many different **dictionary definitions** of consensus.

  Consensus is defined by **Merriam-Webster** as, first, general agreement, and second, group solidarity of belief or sentiment. It has its origin in a Latin word meaning literally *feel together*.[1] It is used to describe both the decision and the process of reaching a decision. Consensus decision-making is thus concerned with the process of reaching a consensus decision, and the social and political effects of using this process.

  Consensus is not unanimity

  Consensus seeks to improve solidarity in the long run. Accordingly it should not be confused with unanimity in the immediate situation, which is often a symptom of groupthink. Studies of effective consensus process usually indicate a shunning of unanimity or "illusion of unanimity"[2] that does not hold up as a group comes under real world pressure (when dissent reappears). Cory Doctorow, Ralph Nader and other proponents of deliberative democracy or judicial-like methods view the explicit dissent as a symbol of strength. Lawrence Lessig considers it a major strength of working projects like public wikis[3]. Schutt[4], Starhawk[5] and other practitioners of direct action focus on the hazards of apparent agreement followed by action in which group splits become dangerously obvious.

  Most robust models of consensus exclude uniformly unanimous decisions and require at least documentation of minority concerns. Some state clearly that unanimity is not consensus but rather evidence of intimidation, lack of imagination, lack of courage, failure to include all voices, or deliberate exclusion of the contrary views.

As a decision-making process, consensus decision-making aims to be:[7]

- **Agreement Seeking:** A consensus decision making process attempts to help everyone get what they need.[7]
- **Collaborative**: Participants contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets the concerns of all group members as much as possible.[8]
- **Cooperative**: Participants in an effective consensus process should strive to reach the best possible decision for the group and all of its members, rather than competing for personal preferences.
- **Egalitarian**: All members of a consensus decision-making body should be afforded, as much as possible, equal input into the process. All members have the opportunity to present, and amend proposals.
- **Inclusive**: As many stakeholders as possible should be involved in the consensus decision-making process.
- **Participatory**: The consensus process should actively solicit the input and participation of all decision-makers.[9]

Wiktionary.org
Etymology
From Latin cōnsēnsus ("agreement, accordance, unanimity"), from cōnsentiō ("feel together; agree");
Noun
consensus
1. A process of decision-making that seeks widespread agreement among group members.
2. General agreement among the members of a given group or community, each of which exercises some discretion in decision-making and follow-up action.

Wikipedia - **Consensus decision-making** is a group decision-making process that seeks the consent of all participants. Consensus may be defined professionally as an acceptable resolution, one that can be supported, even if not the "favourite" of each individual.

2012 WORLD SUBUD COUNCIL

A discussion group at the 2012 World Subud Council meeting agreed that a written definition of **consensus in Subud** was needed, so that it could be understood by all WSA members in implementing consensus decision-making. A 9-step decision process was proposed.

The **Organization Working Group** (based on input from its Advisory Groups) has subsequently enhanced and adjusted this process to suit delegate decision-making at a World Congress.

PROPOSED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS (CONSENSUS) AT WORLD CONGRESS

(1) The resolution/proposal is presented to the World Congress (with a proposer and seconder).

(2) Discussion occurs, which may or may not result in an amended resolution/proposal. It may be more acceptable if implementation is for a "trial period", and its effectiveness evaluated at the end of the period. Or it may be decided to "phase in" the implementation of the resolution/proposal.

(3) The final form and wording of the resolution/proposal is presented to the Delegates.

(4) A vote is taken.

(5) If less than 2/3rds are in favour of the resolution/proposal, it is not approved.

(6) If the vote is unanimous in favour of the resolution/proposal, it is approved.

(7) If the vote is not unanimous, but there are 2/3rds or more in favour, the other 1/3rd, or less, are invited to voice why they disagree with the resolution/proposal. They are carefully listened to, so that their views can be taken into consideration by the Delegates. These are recorded. This discussion might result in the resolution/proposal being amended in order to accommodate the dissenting Delegates.

(8) Following these exchanges a new vote is taken.

(9) If 75% or more are in favour of the resolution/proposal, those still not in agreement are asked whether they will accept the majority view. If the minority still does not accept the majority view, then the views of the minority having been noted, the resolution/proposal will be considered to be approved.

(The reason that the percentage in favour in Step (9) has been increased to 75% is that a 2/3rds majority

leaves too many in disagreement with the resolution/proposal. It is anticipated that in many cases there would be an increase of those in favour between Steps (7) and (9). One suggestion was that the following requirement be added: "If there is not at least a 10% change in the vote in favour of the resolution/proposal between Steps (7) & (9), then the resolution/proposal is delayed for at least a year and further compromise sought." However, the Organization Working Group does not recommend this requirement, as it makes the process overly complicated.)

The Organization Working Group emphasizes that consensus is reached through a process, it is a convergence, a coming together.

It should be remembered that we have an additional "tool" to help us with decision-making in Subud - testing. Reference to Bapak's 1967 talk in Tokyo. (67TJK5)

The WSA Bylaws specifically refer to decision-making by consensus. However, the Organization Working Group recommends that no change be made to the Bylaws, but that information on consensus and the proposed 9-step decision-making process be included in our Policies & Procedures.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Lucian Parshall (Committee Councillor for Subud USA) recently wrote the following article - further food for thought!

Levels of decision making at the Delegate Assembly of a World Congress

The most important decision that a group makes is how to make a decision. Arriving at a decision in a formal assembly is a process of escalation – depending upon the impact that the outcome has on the founding purpose of the association and how much the decision impacts the degree of variance from its stated mission. In the case of the WSA delegate assembly there need only be three levels of decision-making (prior to testing, when necessary.)

1. Congress minutes, treasurer reports, wing reports and other routine reports by the outgoing WSA Chair, Zones or Affiliates can simply be accepted by the Chair of the Delegate Assembly and entered into the minutes 'without objection' (i.e., when the Congress Chair does not sense any objection by the delegates.)

2. Most decisions relating to motions/resolutions made during the delegate assembly are approved either by a majority vote of the delegates or by the Congress Chair accepting them with 'unanimous consent.' Unanimous consent does not mean there is 100% agreement; only that there is no major objection (i.e., usually a minority of the delegates see no reason to oppose the motion and acquiesces.)

3. In exceptional cases a resolution proposed by the delegate assembly may affect a fundamental structure, aim or belief of our association. In these cases the delegate assembly invokes what is called: **Consensus decision-making.** This is a process in which all delegates contribute their thoughts and feelings and all share in the final decision (i.e., no decision becomes final which is not understood by nearly all the delegates.) However, consensus does NOT mean that all the delegates totally agree, only that:
   - Delegates have been provided the opportunity to participate in the discussion to show that they understand it;
   - Delegates have been provided a chance to describe their feelings about the issue; and
   - Delegates who continue to disagree will nevertheless indicate that they are willing to give the decision a try for a prescribed period of time.

In other words, arriving at consensus means that a sufficient number of delegates are in favor of a decision to move it forward, while others understand the decision and will not obstruct or disrupt its occurrence.

4. Testing: "although we make rules in our organization, we still need the assurance and certainty that come from the power of God through our receiving in the latihan - in testing. Therefore, in all things, the decision rests with the power of God." Second World Congress, Briarcliff, NY. 16 July 1963.

Marcus Mackay (from Australia) provided the following insight:

As a preliminary, I note the wide spread use of consensus decision-making in traditional communities throughout the world, especially in SE Asia (India, Indonesia, etc.) and in the historic Iroquois Confederation Grand Council in NE USA a thousand years ago. Modern Indonesia is adapting their traditional *musyawarah-mufakat* consensus style decision-making to include voting in their national parliament. This has been judged successful although the downside is increased time needed to to pass legislation. My own experience of consultation and consensus style decision-making in modern organisations in programs of employee participation and industrial democracy is that the longer time and effort taken to achieve consensus (or to consult widely) is balanced by the greater ease, efficiency and effectiveness of implementation.

So what we are trying to do in Subud with consensus decision-making is not unique. But Subud does have a special grace, the latihan kejiwaan, and we mostly refer to it in all our formal establishing documents. This is usually in reference to acknowledging its prime role and being guided by it. However, our process for the outer world in various meetings may use testing as in the appointment of office bearers, followed by a formal vote (usually recorded without reference to the testing), but usually we do not use testing and Bapak discouraged us from doing so for material matters. Instead, I suspect our challenge is to learn to work together in these decision-making forums with all our individual and cultural diversity, bring our inner capacities to the process in an organic way and avoid the risk of meetings that become 'battlefields' for our respective hearts and minds.

This highlights for me the importance of the process in consensus decision-making that occurs before a final vote. I broadly agree with the outcomes of the WSC recommendation from August 2012, but in practice it may prove inadequate and inflexible. While going in the right direction is feels somewhat 'mechanical', possibly due to it having been reduced to such a summary form. There are many examples around us and in history where a minority view has proved the 'correct one' over time, so it is important to explore the minority views and learn from them. So my comments and suggestions are:

1. I assume the aim of consensus decision-making in our situation is to achieve the best possible decision we can and one that has widespread agreement, even if some of us personally preferred other outcomes. This means that the group makes an appropriate and sound decision, and that the group's cohesion and felt unity is maintained.

2. A sound decision usually requires a good understanding of the issue to be considered and this requires appropriate preparation and information gathering, as a number of decisions may require specific knowledge (e.g. a policy involving legal matters). So there should be a preliminary stage of information gathering and preparation, including consultation with 'stakeholders'.

3. The whole process, particularly discussion and sharing processes, should be characterised by principles designed to create the space needed for productive, open and effective communication. For example, the Quaker process, widely used in secular situations (see Wikipedia) involve the following:

- *Multiple concerns and information are shared until **the sense of the group** is clear.*
- *Discussion involves **active listening** and sharing information.*
- *Norms limit number of times one asks to speak to ensure that each speaker is fully heard.*
- *Ideas and solutions belong to the group; no names are recorded.*
- *The 'facilitator' identifies areas of agreement and names disagreements to push discussion deeper.*
- *The facilitator articulates the sense of the discussion, asks if there are other concerns, and proposes a "minute" of the decision.*
- *The group as a whole is responsible for the decision and the decision belongs to the group.*
- *The facilitator can discern if one who is not uniting with the decision is acting without concern for the group or in selfish interest.*
- *Dissenters' perspectives are embraced.*

The essence here is allowing sufficient time, moderating/facilitating discussion, being patient and respectful with each other and their views, being honest and naming differences for further work/discussion and maintaining focus on the group's need.

Being Subud, I would add the use of testing, not to decide the issue, but to explore our attitudes to each other and the issue under discussion for further understanding.

4. Flexibility is important, for example, being able to change or adapt an original proposal to something more appropriate. This may be in a situation in which it becomes clear that the information needed to make a good decision is not present and more research or consultation needs to take place before a final decision, or a new possible direction emerges. This applies particularly to new areas for decision-making or in complex situations.

5. Our widespread use of electronic decision-making in Subud, as a result of our disparate locations, presents particular challenges. I believe this places a huge responsibility on us to make those times when we do meet face-to-face truly effective for getting to know each other and for building the basis of our group decision-processes to draw on later.

Given this, I would emphasise the value of good preparation and explanation of the issue for decision and add that the use of a facilitator/moderator on more complex decisions be used. This does not need to be the respective chair, but could be an independent person with the skills to finesse the process. For example, to tease out what is involved in a particular area of disagreement

6. If all the above steps and processes are used well, I would expect a high level of common agreement (near unanimous decision), however, there will be occasions when this is not achieved and I would agree with a 75% or higher percent being applied to formal votes in face to face decisions

Finally, I recall one Bapak talk in which he was referring to Subud as a 'social democracy' while at the same time point upwards with his index finger (to God) – our particular grace and challenge.

Maxwell Fraval (WSA Executive Chair) cautioned of the dangers with attempting to equate consensus with 100% agreement:

- In communist countries there is always 100% agreement on a formal vote.
- In most human activities there are a range of views about how to do things.
- Where 100% agreement becomes the norm, the possibility of undue influence becomes almost inevitable.
- The existence of a healthy, democratic debate ensure that alternative views are listened to respectfully and recorded so that an independent review will show what elements were not accepted. They are on the public record.
- Minority views may be right (e.g. the abolition of slavery) and over time, the majority may come to recognise the minority view as valid.
- However, an **insistence** on 100% gives a veto to one individual. Hence, the very important inclusion in the Quaker methodology "
  The facilitator can discern if one who is not uniting with the decision is acting without concern for the group or in selfish interest."
- I would suggest that in contentious issues, the insistence on 100% agreement will simply result in gridlock.
- I feel an aim of 100% agreement may encourage dissent for spurious reasons.
- I see the <u>aim</u> of our process as being one which is robust and fair; one that involves listening, recording alternative views and, in recognising human frailties, one that allows for less than 100% where it is clear that 100% will not be achievable.
- Whilst the point that minorities may be right is a valid one, it is also true that for example, for hundreds of years, ideas about human physiology were 100% wrong even though everyone believed them to be true! So 100% is no guarantee of being right. Minorities too may be wrong.

B. What are we asking the WSA Members (National Committees) to do?

Please:

- Review and discuss the preceding information and opinions about decision-making and consensus in Subud.

- Do you agree with the 9 step **PROPOSED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS (CONSENSUS) AT WORLD CONGRESS**, shown in red on the previous pages?

- If not, what changes or enhancements do you suggest and why?
  Please include consideration of:
  (a) the percentage or majority vote that should be used for passing resolutions/proposals
  (b) under which circumstances/situations should consensus be used (or not used) for decision making in Subud.
  (c) Do you have any other comments or suggestions about decision-making in Subud?

- Come to the World Congress prepared to vote on the proposed decision-making process recommended by the Organization Working Group

If you have any questions or comments at this time, please contact one of the undersigned.

Thank you for taking time to consider this topic.

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Organization (Coordinating) Working Group

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