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| INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION |  |
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**CONTRIBUTION BY THE SECRETARIAT**

**TIES Email – Current situation and next steps**

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| SummaryITU’s TIES email service was created in the 1990s to facilitate the work of delegates, at a time when alternatives were not available. As various alternative (mostly free) services have been introduced in the market, the number of TIES email users has dropped significantly. If the service is to continue, investments are needed to bring it up to today’s security and user interface standards. This is difficult to justify given the low number of users.Action requiredGiven the analysis below, the CWG-FHR is invited **to consider** recommending to Council that the TIES email service be discontinued. **NOTE:** Discontinuing the TIES email service would not affect TIES account addresses, which are used by Members as a form of identification to access documents and other ITU services. |

1. **Overview**

In its 2016 report on ITU, the Joint Inspection Unit noted (Recommendation 5) that “the Secretary-General should develop a comprehensive plan to improve the stability and the predictability of the financial base of the Union, integrating options for increasing revenues and cost-saving proposals, and present it to the Council for endorsement at its 2017 session.”As part as a broader effort to reduce costs and improve efficiencies, ITU management has reviewed the status of TIES email service. Various statistics (Annex) show that few Members use the service on a regular basis. To provide further verification of the current situation, the Secretariat conducted a survey and interviews get direct feedback from Members. This document presents the outcomes of these consultations, as well as an analysis of TIES email cost/usage and options for the future.

**2. Background of TIES email service**

The first version of TIES email service was introduced in the early 1990s. It was originally introduced to facilitate the work of ITU participants as there were no other email service providers at that time. ITU was an innovator in introducing new electronic means of working for delegates and provided connectivity services to TIES users. However, the situation has evolved over time. Today, there are many alternative (free) services in the market and TIES e-mail has not been sufficiently updated: the interface is dated, and authentication is currently incompatible with ITU’s other IT systems and with modern security frameworks. Notwithstanding these challenges, some ITU Members value using the ‘@ties.itu.int’ email address.

**3. TIES survey**

To better understand the current situation, ITU management decided to consult Members. A survey was sent to all TIES users. The full results are available [here](http://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/2017/TIES-email-survey2016Results.pdf). The objective of the survey was to gather feedback and guidance from ITU TIES email users in order to support the consideration of next steps, including the options of maintaining/evolving or discontinuing TIES email.

**Profile of Survey Respondents**: Sector members (59%), Associates (13%), Member States (8%), Academia (8%), Other – mostly international organizations (8%), Admin Related Entities (1%), Permanent Missions (1%). Of the total, 74% of respondents were from developed countries, 24% from developing countries and 2% from least developed countries.

**Usage:** Almost all respondents knew they have a TIES email (82%) but usage is low: 59% never use, 11% use it yearly, 11% quarterly and 9% monthly. Only 4% of respondents use the service daily and 6% weekly. The main reason for never/rarely using the ITU service is that they have other email services that meet their requirements (89% of respondents). The most common usage of TIES email is to forward emails; 63% of the users rely on TIES email only for ITU-related discussions.

**Opinions -** **Maintain or cancel TIES Email?:** When respondents were asked if ITU should maintain a TIES email service, 40% said that they had no opinion, 38% said yes and 22% said no. However, less than 1% of respondents would be willing to pay for this service. The rest said that they are not willing to pay (even a nominal fee of 10 CHF or less per month) or have no opinion.

**Improvements?:** When asked which features they would like to see improved, respondents replied: User Interface (27%), Storage capacity (14%), Security (10%) and Customer Service (8%). Almost 50% said that ITU does not need to improve TIES email (as they do not use the service).

**4. TIES Email analysis and options**

When the statistics on usage and the results of this survey among users are taken together, it becomes clear that ITU is maintaining TIES email service for the benefit of a very small number of individuals. Most are either not using the service, or they use it infrequently or simply to forward to another email address. And, while more than one third say that ITU should maintain the service, almost no users would be willing to pay even a small amount per month to maintain it. Furthermore, when the Secretariat contacted a number of Geneva-based missions identified in the statistics as regular users. The interviews showed even lower usage than the statistics would imply. In this context, the following options are put forward for consideration:

1. **Maintain and modernize TIES email service:** This approach would allow ITU to continue the service, but the costs would be significant: some CHF 200,000 up front plus CHF 100,000 a year to update the interface and ensure proper data security and support. This would come to about CHF 20 per month/user, over a four year period. The currently outdated platform is a security risk for the Union, and the poor interface and lack of mobile functionality actually hurt ITU’s brand. Given the small number of users, and the current demands from Member States to reduce costs, it is difficult to justify such up front and ongoing investments.
2. **Shift to an externally-hosted service, with ITU branding:** This would allow ITU to maintain a branded service for its members, at a reduced cost (about CHF 10 per month/user), with a modernized interface and security. However, as noted above, the survey showed that users are not willing to pay for such a service and it would be difficult for ITU to justify paying for a service used by a small group of members, which is freely available in the market.
3. **Discontinue TIES email service:** While some members may regret the closing of the service, usage and feedback demonstrate that the group of actual users is a very small proportion of our membership (less than 10% use it monthly/6% weekly). We could allow members to keep their TIES email address to maintain ITU branding and thus a neutral, professional image for their correspondence, but messages would be forwarded to another address of their choosing. For replies from the forwarded service, users would be able to select their TIES address from the dropdown menu in the “from” field. NOTE: Discontinuing TIES email service would not have any impact on TIES account addresses, which are used by Members as a form of identification to access documents and other ITU services.

**5. Recommendation**

Given the low-level of usage among ITU members, the cost of upgrade and maintenance of the current service, and the fact that free/low-cost alternative services are available to members, it is recommended that ITU discontinue its TIES email service and offer any interested Members the opportunity to maintain their existing address for the purpose of forwarding messages to an alternative service (and replying if desired using the TIES address).

ANNEX

**Frequent TIES email users\*:**

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| **PERM MISSION** | **157** | 27% |
| **ADMIN** | **124** | 21% |
| **ADMIN RELATED** | **76** | 13% |
| **SIO** | **46** | 8% |
| **ROA** | **45** | 8% |
| **UNSYSTEM** | **44** | 8% |
| **ITU** | **29** | 5% |
| **OTHER USERS** | **21** | 4% |
| **MINISTRY** | **14** | 2% |
| **UNIVERS,RSRCH** | **8** | 1% |
| **REGINTORG** | **6** | 1% |
| **SATORG** | **5** | 1% |
| **OTHER ENTITY** | **4** | 1% |
| **REGORG** | **1** | 0% |
| **REG OFFICES** | **1** | 0% |
| **Grand Total** | **581** | 100% |

\* Frequent ties email users (at least used once per month)

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