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| **Council 2020** |  |
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|  | **Document C20/INF/22-E** |
| **13 November 2020** |
| **English only** |
| Report by the Secretary-General | |
| Status of Virtual Meeting platforms and support | |

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| Summary  With the outbreak of Covid-19, introduction of global restrictions on gatherings and travel, a race began in February 2020 to ensure business continuity and support for the Union’s activities by offering fully virtual meetings. Not only ITU, but all UN organizations were racing to get virtual meetings off the ground. The same applies to the private sector.  Today, eight months later, some progress has been made in use of various conferencing platforms to meet the requirements for virtual meetings, conferences and events of the Union.  Action required  This report is transmitted to the Council for information.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  References  [*Document VC-2/6: Improving the organization of virtual meetings*](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/20/clvc2/c/S20-CLVC2-C-0006!!MSW-R.docx)  [*Document VC/13 (Rev.1): Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the functioning and activities of ITU*](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CLVC-C-0013/en)  [*Document C20/53: Business continuity: business case for information management (ADM 33)*](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CL-C-0053/en)  [Document *C20/15* *(Organizational Resilience Management System (ORMS*)](https://www.itu.int/md/S20-CL-C-0015/en) |

**1 Introduction**

1.1 This document provides information on progress on the use of conferencing technology platforms to support the business continuity of the Union.

**2 Technology platform evolution during 2020**

2.1 With the outbreak of Covid-19 and introduction of global restrictions on gatherings and travel, a race began in February 2020 to ensure business continuity and support for the Union’s activities by offering virtual meetings and ITU has now gone fully virtually. Not only ITU, but all UN organizations were racing to get virtual meetings off the ground. The same applies to the private sector. Today, 8 months later, some progress has been made by the following commercial software providers:

* **Zoom** has **included interpretation** enabling interpretation into the six languages of the UN and they have significantly improved security weaknesses identified in the product in the beginning of 2020. Embedded captioning (using ITU’s captioning service provider) has also been made available on the platform. With the multilingual facilities and **improved security** some organizations are now moving towards Zoom (e.g. ILO’s governing body meeting this month). ITU is in contact with Zoom to integrate the Zoom platform with ITU’s authentication and registration system (SAP/CRM). Zoom provides very useful functionality for interactive meetings, and a very intuitive and increasingly well-known interface. A key challenge experienced with use of Zoom for ITU meetings is that meetings held on Zoom cannot be accessed by participants from all ITU member states. This limits the use of Zoom for ITU statutory meetings and events.
* **GoToMeeting/GoToWebinar** is mainly used by BR for its monolingual meetings, and is, for the moment, fulfilling all the requirements of the BR. It requires lower bandwidth comparing with the other platforms and also supports telephone dialup, hence allowing participants with low internet bandwidth connectivity to attend BR meetings, which is very important for the BR. In addition, this platform does not suffer from international embargoes or interdiction of use by Member States of sector members. The number of concurrent users depends on the licence option chosen, up to 1000 in GoToMeeting and up to 3000 in GoToWebinar (BR is using 150 users for GoToMeeting and 500 users for GoToWebinar). The platform allows for 25 simultaneous audio/video streams. This platform is also used by several Member States and regional organisations, e.g. CEPT thus facilitating the participation of delegates and chairmen who are already familiar with the interface.
* **Microsoft added functionality in Teams** expanding the number of virtual users, added facilities such as “raise hand”, AI captioning in multiple languages, increasing number of video windows, etc. Team has been integrated with ITU’s authentication system, hence used heavily for internal meetings and collaboration across all UN organizations. Limitations to the use of Teams for ITU meetings is its requirement for a Microsoft O365 account for full access, and that meetings held on Teams cannot consistently be accessed by participants from all ITU member states.
* **Interprefy** was the only platform that provided multilingual support at the beginning of the lockdown and ITU has gained a lot of experience in supporting virtual events through this platform. Interprefy has continuously improved their product and it is accessible by all ITU member states and regions. During the last 8 months several UN organizations began using Interprefy for meetings with interpretation that require **secure authenticated access control** and showing which delegation the remote participant represents. ITU shared with the whole UN system our experience with multilingual remote participation and with Interprefy – as we were the first to have a contract in place for virtual meetings. Interprefy is the only tool that satisfied the interpreters need for **Relay functionality** (i.e. interpreter listening to an interpreted language to perform the interpretation) **in the Remote Simultaneous Interpretation (RSI) application**. In spite of the complete set of functionalities for supporting statutory meetings, it is not used extensively at ITU due to its longer audio and video streaming initiation time , less intuitive interface for selecting interpretation channels and taking/releasing the floor, and its limits on the number of simultaneous video streams that can be shown. Interprefy also is more prone than other platforms to connectivity challenges for delegates with slower connections.
* **Cisco WebEx** announced new interpretation features for Q1/2021 and briefed all the UN organizations on those new features. It is the only platform today that supports full end-to-end encryption. As a monolingual web-conference platform, the functionalities that it provides are about the same as other platforms. WebEx is currently not on ITU support list but may be an interesting solution for the Union and UN family in the future.

2.2 **MyMeetings** is a platform developed in-house by TSB to host electronic meetings. It comprises a front-end portal and a back-end web-conference platform based on an open source solution (BigBlueButton). MyMeetings **supports multilingual interpretation** and is **accessible by all countries and regions**. As the platform runs on dedicated servers at ITU, it guarantees **data protection and privacy**. Furthermore, the platform is **fully** **integrated with ITU backend systems** (e.g. CRM registration) allowing better access control management. As MyMeetings is hosted at ITU, its capacity is restricted by the performance of ITU’s physical infrastructure (server and internet bandwidth). Currently, the web-based client can support up to 200 remote participants with 5 concurrent video streams per session. TSB is in collaboration with ISD to support virtual meetings using the MyMeetings platform, which has been extended to support GS, ITU-R and ITU-D meetings since 1st November 2020.

2.3 In summary, there is currently no one-size-fits-all web-conference platform. With the six abovementioned platforms, ITU can support most of its e-meeting demands.

**3 Supporting the new normal**

3.1 In March 2020, the demand for support of hybrid/virtual meetings exploded and required roles changing overnight. C&P and ISD joined effort to support logistics, registration, interpretation, captioning, CRM integration, accreditation, focal point clearance, meeting room coordination and allocation, authentication, access and control, security. Discussion with AIIC took place to ensure collaboration from the interpreters.

3.2 In April 2020, a new group was established under the Inter-Sector Coordination Task Force (ISC-TF) to develop best practices and guidelines on organizing and managing virtual/hybrid events and remote participation. Today the group has around 40 members from General Secretariat, Telecom and the three bureaux. The output of the group has been shared with the CEB/HCLM.

3.3 With the pandemic continuing, the CEB/HCLM began in June to harmonize e.g. teleworking policies within the UN system and introduce a global Identity management solution, whether for physical access to premises, ICT services, meetings, conferences, and events. It may also be advantageous to use the same conference/meeting platforms as other UN and International organizations do.

3.4 In May 2020, the Events Overview Page on the ITU website was revised to facilitate delegates to participate in the virtual sessions of various group and the VCC-1. In parallel, TSB enhanced MyWorkspace and its applications, including MyMeetings, to support ITU-T events. The ITU will introduce a new Events Overview Page which provides access to all ITU events and integrate with MyITU. A preliminary design is been finalized and will be released to membership once implemented.

3.5 In early November ITU started providing support for regional virtual events with remote interpretation. The ITU-D Regional Development Forum for Asia-Pacific (RDF-ASP) used Zoom with Chinese/English interpretation by interpreters working from home in China, using the Zoom RSI interface. With the pandemic continuing into 2021 there is an increasing demand for such regional support services and ISD and BDT are working together to provide regional ICT support functions in the Asia, Americas and other regions for virtual meetings and events, which will be extended to include regional IT support in the future

3.6 The Secretariat is working on simplifying and standardizing the support to member states with respect to virtual and hybrid meetings.