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| **Ad Hoc Group of the CWG-FHR on the ITU Regional Presence Review**  **Second meeting - Virtual, 20 April 2021** |  |
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|  | **Document CWG-FHR-AH-RegPres-2/6-E** |
| **13 April 2021** |
| **English only** |

Contribution by Egypt, Kuwait, South Africa

PWC’s REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF REGIONAL PRESENCE

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| Summary  This contribution presents the views of Egypt, Kuwait and South Africa with regards to PWC’s report on the review of regional presence. The authors are of the view that keeping the current situation of having both regional and area offices will be most suitable to the membership. Moreover, there are several of PWC recommendations on the strategic positioning of ITU regional presence that can be very helpful. It is important to deal with the report as 15 separate recommendations and not one whole package solution.  Action required  For consideration and discussion.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  References  [CWG-FHR-12/9](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CWGFHR12-C-0009/en); [CWG-FHR-AH-RegPres-2/2](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-AHGFHR2-C-0002/en); JIU Report on the «Effectiveness of ITU Regional Presence» |

During the first meeting of the CWG-FHR Ad Hoc Group on Regional Presence on 23 March 2021 we noticed that there was more preference for Option 1 (Regional and area offices) and Option 2 (area offices only), with more preference towards Option 1.

Egypt is of the view that Option 1 (keeping both Regional and area offices), which is the current situation in the Union, is the most suitable option for the needs of ITU and its Membership.

It is of utmost importance to keep regional offices and not replace them by area offices. Area offices will not serve the same weight as regional offices.

In their Contribution CWG-FHR-12/9 on the review of ITU Regional presence, the ITU secretariat identified several valid concerns on the delivery methods recommended by PWC:

“In relation to the closure/consolidation of ITU Offices and reduction of the overall number of offices:

* The proposed closure or consolidation of existing offices may adversely impact ITU’s regional presence in some sub-regions, and may not have carefully considered the cultural and socioeconomic reasons for the existence of those offices. While the report seeks to strengthen the regional presence, this recommendation could have the effect of weakening ITU’s presence in particular regions or sub-regions.
* The proposal impacts existing member agreements with ITU, and based on its overall impact on ITU’s footprint globally may require decisions by ITU membership at Plenipotentiary level prior to implementation.”

«In relation to the proposed removal of the RO level and resulting downgrade of RDs to P5 level:

* The approach would compromise many of the high-level representative functions currently carried out by the RDs, including meetings with Ministers, other UN Agencies, Embassies etc, potentially creating representation bottleneck at HQ.
* In comparison with other UN Agencies, the downgrade of RDs to P5 Area Office Coordinators would diminish greatly the strategic position and visibility of the ITU within the UN system, in view of the facts that many UNRCs are at D1 level, while DCO regional directors are at D2 level. Participation in many UN coordination functions, including the performance appraisals of UNRCs requires D1 level representatives.
* Some Regional Telecommunications Organisation (RTO) heads are at D2 level, and a P5 representative may be limited in ability to negotiate and strategically position ITU's work in the discussion with RTOs.
* Due to time differences, regional RTO and UN coordination meetings often take place outside CET working hours and it is not practical for the Regional Desk (or Deputy to the Director) to cover all these meetings from ITU HQ.
* The recently published CEB report (CEB/2020/HLCM/13) on the future of UN workforce emphasized the need for increasing field presence and accountability, as "This strong field capacity is one of the UN system's greatest strengths and added value in the international system and they are functions that cannot easily be performed remotely."
* It would be impractical to manage an increasing number of staff and UN coordination work centrally outside the respective time zones. The recommendation appears to contradict other recommendations of the PwC report related to strengthening the regional presence.
* The recommendation would undermine many of the efforts regarding strengthening internal controls and accountability in the regional presence, removing onsite oversight and management.”

We can also see some conflicting ideas in the PWC report. The report emphasizes the importance of being “**'Part and parcel' of the UN family**: proactive alignment and coordination with like-minded UN Agencies to promote collaboration and deliver meaningful change in selected countries”. This will be compromised by downgrading regional directors (D1-Level) to coordinators (P5 level). Most UN agencies are represented by either country or regional offices, but not area offices. Having area offices only will create a void and will make it more difficult for effective cooperation and proactive alignment.

It is also important to note that Regional Directors report to the BDT Deputy Director, with easy access to the Director. They are members of the Development Management Group (DMG) and therefore participate directly in the discussions on key strategy and policy issues affecting BDT operations, including budget preparation and resource allocation. Downgrading the post to a P5 level will have the regional presence left out of an important decision making body at BDT.

Document CWG-FHR-12/9 also highlights that «In relation to the creation of a Regional Desk, concerns were noted that the creation of a Regional desk might, due to a single-entry point between AOs and HQ, create bottleneck in coordination, particularly considering the different time zones the ROs operate in. It is noted that although PwC notes the removal of a layer in their report, it would in fact simply remove a layer since the Regional Desk would create a centralised team to replace the RDs.”

In this regard, we would also like to add that in the practice of having a Regional Desk at headquarters has been tried before, and was cancelled due to the reasons explained above. At a time where we have discovered how important it is to work in an agile way, with the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot add a layer that would create more bureaucracy.

Financial implications:

In addition to the above, Document CWG-FHR-AH-RegPres-2/2-E, compares the different financial implications between both Option 1 and Option 2.

“In Option 1, the only significant impact will come from the transition costs which amount to 2.8 million Swiss francs. The annual operating costs for the Regional Presence, with the changes proposed by PwC, would increase by an estimated 149,732 CHF per year.

As far as the option 2 is concerned, again the key impact compared to the current model would come from the transition costs which amount to 3.6 million Swiss francs, but also the staff costs for the newly created Geneva Desk, where the post adjustment is very high. The annual operating costs for the Regional Presence, with the changes proposed by PwC, would increase by an estimated 756,459 CHF per year.”

This clearly shows that Option 2 would create a bigger financial burden on ITU, at a time where we are trying hard to reduce costs, in addition to the strategic concerns mentioned above.

We can see that Option 2, while trying to solve problems of coordination at the level of impact, it creates disruptions. These problems of coordination can be resolved within the current structure as it is.

Egypt’s proposal:

Egypt proposes to keep the current situation, which is what PWC refers to as Option 1 (both regional and area offices).

At the same time, the PWC report makes some excellent suggestions on methods to improve and develop regional presence. These include:

In terms of coherence, there is a need to align the WTDC Action Plan, and the ITU Strategic Plan and the role of the regional presence needs to be highlighted in the ITU Strategic Plan.

In addition, the global targets in the ITU Strategic Plan should be explicitly broken down and be related to performance indicators in the Operational Plan and Regional Initiatives.

In terms of representing a “One ITU”, PWC recommends enhancing the regional presence through greater involvement of the Radiocommunications Bureau (BR) and the Telecommunication Standardisation Bureau (TSB), and by increasing the Regional Offices’ (RO) support to ITU-R and ITU-T.

We believe that this is a critical point for developing and improving the ITU regional presence.

Moreover, regional offices need more human resources and technical specialists to be able to transmit their technical expertise to Member states.

The report also suggests conducting mid-term review of the implementation of regional initiatives, which is critical for assessing their effectiveness.

Fostering collaboration with other UN agencies and making partnerships is also highlighted as important in the report and will help improve the effectiveness of regional presence.

JIU report

It is also important to draw attention to the recommendations made by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in its report on the “Effectiveness of ITU Regional Presence”. The report concluded that there was a need to streamline and strengthen the network of existing area offices by merging some of them or providing more human resources, giving due attention to the needs of each of the regions.

It also recommended to review the internal working and operational procedures with a view to streamlining and simplifying them; and ensuring the involvement of heads of regional offices in the review process and inform the Council of the outcome

The report also suggested fostering cooperation between the regional offices and United Nations development organizations in the field to elaborate and implement action plans to incorporate information and communication technologies into development programmes with a view to enhancing development cooperation and coordination

Regional offices should elaborate and implement strategic action plans to strengthen partnerships with the private sector.

With regards to the strategic positioning of ITU regional presence, PWC makes the following recommendations

1. **Bringing the technical expertise of ITU as a whole closer to its membership**, thus helping to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the activities of the three Sectors through joint planning and collaboration.

2. **Supporting the preparation and participation of representatives from different regions** in the regional and global ICT forums to ensure 1) a diversity of views and 2) the *effective* contribution of all Members to advance the ITU agenda.

3. **Facilitating and organising transfers of technical knowledge** across countries and regions, beyond geopolitical and cultural barriers.

4. **Actively fostering cross-country and cross-regional collaboration and dialogue,** engaging with key stakeholders such as Regional Telecom Organisations and the regional offices or hubs of other UN Agencies on the basis of common assessments, joint strategic planning and coordinated support for the countries in the region.

5. **Designing and delivering technical assistance** for developing countries in close collaboration with other UN Agencies and other relevant partners.

We would like to thank the BDT for already working towards achieving these proposals.

Conclusion:

Egypt appreciates the work done by PWC and the comprehensive and extensive report. At the same time, we believe that we should deal with the report as 15 separate recommendations and not one whole package solution. Many of the recommendations proposed can be helpful and effective to improve regional presence, and we thank ITU secretariat for their efforts in working on and applying these recommendations. With regards to the delivery method, Egypt supports Option 1 (both regional and area offices). Moreover, Egypt proposes to make some improvements to the current functioning of regional offices so that they can better serve the membership and have more effective and efficient impact.

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