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| **Council 2021 Virtual consultation of councillors, 8-18 June 2021** |  |
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| **Agenda item: PL 1.6** | **Document C21/12-E** |
| **22 February 2021** |
| **Original: English** |
| Chairman of the Council Working Group on  the use of the six official languages of the Union (CWG-LANG) | |
| REPORT BY THE COUNCIL WORKING GROUP ON LANGUAGES | |

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| Summary  This document contains the annual report of the Chairman of the Council Working Group on Languages (CWG-LANG) to the Council, pursuant to Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) and Council Resolution 1372 (Rev. 2019).  Action required  The Council is invited **to endorse** the report.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  References  [*Report by the Secretary-General*](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-RCLCWGLANG11-C-0002/en)*;* [*Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-154-E.pdf)*;* [*Council Resolution 1372 (Rev. 2019)*](http://web.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0138/en) |

1. **Opening of the meeting and approval of the agenda (Document** [**CWG-LANG/11/1(Rev.1)**](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-RCLCWGLANG11-C-0001/en)**)**

1.1 In the absence of the Chair due to a technical issue, the meeting was opened by the Vice-Chair of CWG-LANG for the Arabic language, Ms Sameera Belal Momen Mohammad (Kuwait). After welcoming the delegates, she submitted the draft agenda for approval. The agenda was approved as submitted. The Chair of CWG-LANG, Ms Monia Jaber Khalfallah (Tunisia), joined the meeting after resolving the technical issue and continued to lead the proceedings.

1.2 The floor was given to the ITU Secretary-General, Mr Houlin Zhao, who highlighted the emergency measures implemented to ensure the safety of personnel and delegates as well as business continuity in view of the COVID-19 situation. He mentioned different platforms used for virtual meetings, including TSB’s MyMeeting platform, and the important ITU web project called MyITU. He reiterated the importance of CWG-LANG for the Union and its membership, and acknowledged the content of the meeting’s agenda, namely the key issue of multilingualism, the review of alternative translation procedures, including Neural Machine Translation (NMT) and Artificial Intelligence, and the reflection on how to improve the efficiency of the governance processes in ITU and better support the Council sessions.

1. **Report by the Secretary-General (Document** [**CWG-LANG/11/2**](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-RCLCWGLANG11-C-0002/en)**)**

2.1 Participants received detailed information related to the evolution of the budget for translation of documents into the six official languages of the Union since 2010. Translation volumes continue to reflect equality of treatment of all 6 ITU official languages. As requested by CWG-LANG, budgetary figures were also submitted for interpretation services.

2.2. One delegation requested to include in the future reports the table of actual expenditures for language services. Another delegation suggested to include the table on dynamics of translation volumes per language.

2.3 CWG-LANG expressed satisfaction at the efforts deployed in search of potential savings, efficiency and innovation in order to respond to PP Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) and Council Resolution 1372.

2.4 CWG-LANG proposes that the Council:

* Request the secretariat to include in future reports the information on the actual expenditures for language services as well as on evolution of translation volumes per language.
* Encourage the secretariat to continue the search for improvements in order to respond to PP Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) and Council Resolution 1372.

2.5 The secretariat reported on the outcome of ITU’s participation on interinstitutional meetings (IAMLADP and JIAMCATT) as regards the procedures adopted by other international organizations inside and outside of the United Nations system. ITU keeps abreast of procedures and IT tools adopted by other international organizations and adapts its business model and procedures to the best practices resulting from such interaction.

2.6 CWG-LANG took note of the information provided and commended the secretariat for its efforts for improving working methods and cost-effectiveness of conference services.

2.7 The secretariat presented the initiatives undertaken by the General Secretariat and the three Bureaux in order to increase efficiencies and cost savings on the implementation of Res.154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) and Council Res. 1372 (Rev. 2019). These include an agreed way forward to review the measures and principles for interpretation and translation in ITU (Document C14/INF/4), in collaboration with the Sector advisory groups, with a view to submit a consolidated proposal to the 2022 meeting of CWG-LANG. Other initiatives include those concerning NMT, computer-assisted translation tools, remote interpretation and cooperation with ITU Coordination Committee for Terminology (ITU CCT). In order to facilitate the translation process, various NMT engines have been integrated in translators’ workstations and are currently being tested in real work conditions.

2.8 One delegation stressed that efficiency should not be achieved at the expense of quality. Another delegation suggested to carry out a risk-benefit analysis on the use of innovations in ITU language services. It also drew attention to the findings of report “Multilingualism in the United Nations system” (JIU/REP/2020/6) prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), which are related to the ITU activities.

2.9 CWG-LANG proposes that the Council:

* request the secretariat to follow-up on JIU’s recommendations on supporting the implementation of multilingualism in communications and knowledge-sharing, focusing on the multilingual content of the official websites and social media accounts globally.

2.10 Information was also provided on the progress made on the implementation of measures and principles for translation and interpretation adopted by the Council in its 2014 session; these are systematically implemented by the secretariat and are used as a benchmark in the delivery of translation and interpretation services for ITU conferences, meetings, documents, and publications. Furthermore, TSB continues to translate Recommendations approved under the Alternative Approval Process (AAP) within the limits of available translation budget, and in accordance with requests received from the linguistic groups and the ITU-T study groups.

2.11 The secretariat reported on the areas of interest for the implementation of Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) over the period 2019-2022, as identified by the CWG-LANG, concerning the review of ITU documentation and publication services with a view to eliminating any duplication and to creating synergies; possible measures to reduce the size and volume of documents and achieve greener meetings; the implementation in ITU of the United Nations system objective of multilingualism; necessary measures for use of the six languages on the ITU website on equal footing in terms of multilingual content and functionality; review, in collaboration with the Sector advisory groups, of the types of material to be included in output documents and translated; possible measures to reduce, without sacrificing quality, the cost and volume of documentation; statistics on use, download and purchase of the different language versions of ITU documents and publications.

2.12 Regarding the respect of deadlines for the submission of contributions that require translation to conferences, assemblies and meetings of the Union, it was mentioned that more contributions tend to arrive during last few days before the 21 calendar days deadline in Resolution 165 (Rev. Dubai, 2018).; this practice has significant financial implications as most of the staff in the document production chain were required to work overtime to process and prepare all documents in a timely fashion.

2.13 Participants were informed about the establishment of the Intersectoral Group on Multilingualism, reporting to the Inter-Sectoral Coordination Task Force (ISC-TF), with the mandate of promoting, inspiring and facilitating a coordinated, consistent, and coherent approach to multilingualism across ITU.

* CWG-LANG took note of the information provided in relation with the areas of interest for the implementation of Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) over the period 2019-2022, as identified by the CWG-LANG.
* CWG-LANG recommends that the Council ask BDT to consider the possible use of languages other than the 6 ITU Official languages in regional offices websites and communications.

2.14 The secretariat reported on the work of the Group on Study and Evaluation of the Translation Procedures, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, contained in Annex II of the Report of the Secretary-General. Members received updated information on the different pilot projects conducted in 2020. These included:

a) **Automatic translation**: A pilot project using NMT with human post-editing to translate ITU web pages is currently taking place. Translation engines have been tested and translators have been trained in the use of SharePoint and informed on post-editing principles. NMT translation tool, called ITU Translate, has been developed and was trained with ITU documents. The workflow of the web page translation has been streamlined and is contributing to a speedier overall process.

b) **Web content management**: Currently, ITU is developing business requirements of machine learning and human translations to cover all of MyITU content, including ITU daily blogs and articles, publications and events and the members area.

c) **Remote interpretation**: C&P, in collaboration with ISD, organized trainings by Interprefy of ITU’s regular interpreters on using the remote simultaneous interpreting platform. Moreover, on occasion of the ITU-D Regional Development Forum for Asia-Pacific, a full remote interpretation on the ZOOM platform was conducted in English and Chinese.

2.15 In view of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemics emergency measures have been implemented in ITU to ensure the safety of personnel and business continuity, and an effective transition from physical to virtual operations had been achieved for the most critical functions.

2.16 The secretariat then reported on the practice of other UN organizations, that acknowledge an urgent need to switch to fully remote operations and organize virtual meetings in response to the physical-distancing measures and travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020, which has highlighted the crucial role that language and conference services play in the work of intergovernmental and international organizations.

* CWG-LANG took note of the information provided and commended the secretariat for its efforts on the study and evaluation of alternative translation and interpretation procedures.

1. **Contribution from the Russian Federation – Harmonization of the ITU Sectors’ websites in all six languages (Document** [**CWG-LANG/11/3**](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-RCLCWGLANG11-C-0003/en)**)**

3.1 The representative of the Russian Federation submitted the following proposals:

1. to draw the attention of the Coordination Committee and ISC-TF, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, to the continued failure to comply with the instructions of PP-18 and the Council on the harmonization of the ITU Sectors' websites in all six languages of the Union,
2. to require the secretariat to take all necessary measures to ensure the unconditional implementation of work on the harmonization of the ITU Sectors' websites to ensure clarity, ease of navigation and an image of One ITU, using the six official languages of the Union on an equal footing,
3. to submit a detailed analysis of work carried out to the 2021 session of the Council.

3.2 The secretariat provided detailed information related to the harmonization of Sector websites in the six languages of the Union. The Coordination Committee and ISC-TF are already following up closely on developments related with this issue; for instance, the recently created Intersectoral Group on Multilingualism reports directly to ISC-TF. The secretariat is deploying important efforts in order to fulfil the requirements of PP-18 and the Council. Such efforts are two-fold: investments on infrastructure and tools, and review of processes related to multilingual web content. The Coordination Committee reiterated its commitment to harmonizing sectoral homepages. A prototype of the new ‘OneITU’ webpages will be submitted to Council 2021 for information; in a second step, from 2022 to 2025, the remaining sectoral pages are to be migrated to the new web infrastructure, subject to availability of dedicated resources.

3.3 The Deputy Secretary-General, Mr Malcolm Johnson, apologized for the sequencing of secretariat interventions and responding to comments and requests by participants, reiterated the commitment of ITU management to treating all six languages on equal footing. The harmonization of the sector webpages is promoted by ISC-TF which however acts by persuasion and not enforcement. The issue has been brought to the attention of the Coordination Committee which has agreed to ensure that at least the home page of each Sector is harmonized and in six languages. This will ensure more progress will be made. The proposal by the Russian Federation will further reinforce this commitment. In response to a question from one delegation he recalled that some years previously the Council had been advised that the approximate cost of translation of one page into the other five languages is CHF 1000. He agreed that to reduce the length of documents would help and that this had previously been accepted by the Council. He also confirmed ITU’s commitment to comply with JIU recommendations, noting that JIU often referred to ITU as its “Model Agency”.

* CWG-LANG supported the proposals contained in the Contribution from the Russian Federation, took note of the information provided by the secretariat on its efforts for the harmonization of Sector websites in the six languages of the Union, and requested that the information provided verbally be submitted in a CWG-LANG document[[1]](#footnote-1).

1. **Contribution from Australia – Consideration of the extension of contribution submission deadlines, taking into account the report by the Secretary-General pursuant to Resolution 154 and Resolution 1372 (Document** [**CWG-LANG/11/4**](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-RCLCWGLANG11-C-0004/en)**)**

4.1 The representative from Australia submitted a proposal to draw the attention of Member States to the significant financial impact created by the current contribution submission deadlines to ITU conferences and assemblies and to consider extending the current contribution submission deadline outlined in Resolution 165 to 35 calendar days before the opening of conferences and assemblies in the lead-up to the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022.

4.2 The secretariat delivered the opinion by the ITU Legal adviser. It was clarified the Resolution 165 only prohibits a delegation or a Sector Member, as the case may be, from availing itself of an absolute right to the translation and distribution at any time of their contribution and therefore the conference/assembly in question may decide not to proceed with the consideration of the contribution on the grounds, in particular, that the non-availability of the contribution in sufficient time in the working languages of the conference/assembly would not allow for its thorough consideration. Indeed, pursuant to No. 87 of the General Rules of conferences, assemblies and meetings of the Union, the texts of all major proposals to be put to the vote (by extension, to be decided on) shall be distributed in good time in the working languages of the conference, in order that they may be studied before discussion. On the other hand, this does not call into question the principle laid down in Section 17 of the General Rules, according to which proposals may be presented after the opening of the conference/assembly, a principle recognized by Resolution 165 in *recognizing also b)*.

4.3 Participants highlighted the need for the Member States to respect the deadlines established in Resolution 165 for the submission of contributions so as to ensure their timely translation. One delegation suggested to collect further data on the upcoming conferences (WTDC-21, WTSA-20) in order to take a sound decision at PP-22.

* CWG-LANG took note of the proposal contained in the Contribution from Australia (Document CWG-LANG/11/4) and the reply provided by the secretariat, but indicated that the issue of the deadlines was in PP’s realm, and that more factual information was required for the PP to properly examine the issue before considering a decision, therefore requesting the secretariat to provide factual information on the consequences of the implementation of Resolution 165 deadlines in forthcoming major meetings (WTSA-20, WTDC, WTPF, etc.).

1. **Any other business**

No other business was brought to the attention of the meeting.

1. **Closure of the meeting**

The Chair thanked the participants for their valuable contributions and their support, the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the Chief of C&P and his team, the technical support team and the ITU secretariat as a whole, for the excellent work accomplished and the support provided to herself and to the meeting.

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1. See Document [CWG-LANG/11/INF/1](https://www.itu.int/md/meetingdoc.asp?lang=en&parent=S21-RCLCWGLANG11-INF-0001) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)