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**Contribution by Australia, Canada, New Zealand**

USE OF GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE IN ITU TEXTS

**Introduction**

As part of the United Nations’ (UN) system-wide prioritisation of gender equality, the UN has implemented initiatives that seek to mainstream gender into its policies and programs. This includes the implementation of the UN [System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity](https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/gender-parity-in-the-united-nations/system-wide-strategy) and the publication of [Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English](https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml) to assist UN staff in using gender-inclusive language.

As a UN specialised agency, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has been active in contributing to this work by establishing the ITU Network of Women and adopting a Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy. The ITU has also promoted gender mainstreaming initiatives through its different sectors, including the adoption of a Declaration on Promoting Gender Equality, Equity and Parity in the ITU Radiocommunication Sector at WRC‑19, and initiatives to promote gender equality and perspectives as outlined in WTSA Resolution 55, WTDC Resolution 55 and PP Resolution 70.

However, current ITU language practices do not align with these efforts to mainstream gender. In accordance with the Decision 500 undertaken by the ITU Council at its 2000 session, the term "Chairman" (and related terms such as "Vice-chairman", "Chairmanship", etc.) is currently considered gender-neutral and used in all English versions of ITU documents. We recognise that Decision 500 was agreed by the ITU Council over 20 years ago and is outdated based on current ITU and UN system-wide initiatives on gender parity and equality. The use of the gender-neutral terms “Chair” (and, similarly, “Vice-Chair”) [is common and accepted](https://unterm.un.org/unterm/display/record/imo/na?OriginalId=3ba3621ae3be40a7819514ebe633b0ed). As such, the continued use of gendered, masculine terms in ITU texts is at odds with the ITU’s objectives to mainstream a gender and promote gender equality and parity within the Union.

As part of a larger push within the ITU to encourage the active participation and inclusion of all persons, regardless of gender, we strongly believe that the ITU should take the necessary steps to promote gender equality, parity and inclusivity by implementing the use of gender-neutral language in ITU texts.

**Discussion**

The [ITU English Language Style Guide](https://www.itu.int/oth/R0A0E000094) recognises that as an international organisation, the ITU needs to take care to avoid all forms of discrimination in its texts, including that of gender, race, culture, nationality, and religion. Despite the Guidelines recognising gender bias as the most frequent example of discrimination in its texts, it aligns its advice with the assertion outlined in Council Decision 500 that “Chairman” is gender-neutral and consequently that the language used in the basic instruments of the Union, and by extension all ITU texts, be considered gender-neutral by default. This approach is at odds with the ITU’s ongoing initiatives to mainstream gender and promote gender equality and parity.

To avoid gender bias, and encourage diverse participation and engagement in the ITU as a modern and inclusive organisation, we support the incorporation of gender-neutral language in ITU texts.

Communicating with gender-neutral or gender-inclusive avoids discrimination based on gender and perpetuating gender stereotypes. It can be a simple but powerful way of promoting gender equality and parity, and challenging gender biases, by raising awareness of and countering the ways in which gendered language can create prejudicial assumptions or associations.

Additionally, promoting gender-neutral language in the texts and documents of the UN and other international organisations is [becoming more prominent](https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/) in order to promote gender equality, parity and inclusion. At the 27th Universal Postal Congress in 2021, the Universal Postal Union (UPU) instructed its International Bureau to review all Acts of the Union (and other Union documentation) to propose the formal adoption of gender‑neutral language in the official language of the Union and apply gender-neutral language to unofficial language versions of the Acts and Union documents.

At its 45th Session of the Management Committee of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), the APT also instructed the APT Secretariat and APT Work Programmes to review all of their documents and Working Methods to include gender-neutral language.

We strongly believe that the ITU needs to and can take the necessary steps to promote gender equality, parity and inclusion by using gender-neutral language in ITU texts. We believe this can be easily achieved by suppressing Council Decision 500 and adopting a new Council Decision outlining the use of gender‑neutral language in ITU texts. This would be a positive and easily achievable initiative, encouraging the participation and inclusion of all persons regardless of gender, and harnessing the knowledge and expertise that comes from empowering all people within the ITU and broader UN system.

**Proposal**

Based on the points outlined above, we propose:

1. That Member States consider suppressing Council Decision 500 on the use of the term “chairman”.
2. That Member States consider the proposed draft Council Decision on the use of gender-neutral language in ITU texts provided at **Annex A**, and submitting the draft Decision to Council for approval.
3. That Member States consider replacing the footnote to the ITU Constitution and Convention, which currently states “the language used in the basic instruments of the Union (Constitution and Convention) is to be considered as gender neutral”, with the following:

“Some text in the basic instruments of the Union (Constitution and Convention) is not gender neutral. When the instruments are next modified, gender neutral language outlined in Council Decision XXX will be applied.”

ANNEX A

DECISION XXX

**Use of gender-neutral language in ITU texts**

The ITU Council,

*noting*

Resolution 70 of the Plenipotentiary Conference (Rev. Dubai, 2018),

*recognizing*

efforts to mainstream gender and promote gender equality and parity within the ITU and the broader United Nations’ system,

*decides*

1 that gender-neutral language will be applied to all English versions of ITU documents, and where possible, to Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish versions of ITU documents;

2 that the following gender-neutral language practices will be applied to all English versions of ITU documents:

a) “Chair” and “Vice-Chair” to replace “Chairman” and “Vice-Chairman”;

b) “They/their” to replace “he/his” and “she/her”, with the exception of when such terms designate an identifiable individual, then that person’s preferred pronouns should be used;

c) Use of terms such as “spouse” rather than “wife” or “husband”;

d) Use of alternative terms for gendered expressions, such as replacing “mankind” with “people”, and “manpower” with “workforce” or “human resources”.

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