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| INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION**TELECOMMUNICATIONSTANDARDIZATION SECTOR**STUDY PERIOD 2009-2012 | **Joint Coordination Activity on Accessibility and human Factors (JCA-AHF)** |
|  | **Doc. 193** |
| **English only****Original: English** |
| **Source:** | JCA-AHF Co-convener |
| **Title:** | **D**raft baseline document “Communication Support for ITU meetings – a procedure” |

Communication Support for ITU meetings – a procedure

When a deaf person is attending a meeting at ITU, Geneva, it is necessary to follow a procedure to ensure that the right communication support is made available.

Deafness is a heterogeneous group and therefore there is a diversity of different communication needs. It is imperative to ensure that the most appropriate communication support is provided.

Broadly, there are three communication supports that are available to deaf people, these are: -

1. Speech to Text Transcription such as Remote Captioning. This is most appropriate for those who use their mother-spoken language.
2. Sign language interpreters. These are usually used by profoundly deaf people whose first language or preferred language is the national sign language.
3. Deaf blind communicators. Deaf blind people use them. They tend to have their own communicator who understands their specific needs.

Quality of communication support is of paramount importance to both the deaf participants as well as the rest of the hearing participants in a meeting.

For remote captioning, it is imperative that one uses high quality service such as Captions First.

For sign language interpreters, one must use fully qualified and accredited interpreters. Proof of their accreditation must be asked for at the time of booking.

It may be advisable to ask the deaf participant for their preferred list of interpreters.

Booking in advance is absolutely imperative especially sign language interpreters, as there is a chronic shortage of them. As a general rule, one should book them 6 weeks in advance where possible. Less than two weeks notice, you are unlikely to get them.

Both remote captioning operators and sign language require background materials for them to prepare themselves when transcribing and interpreting a meeting/meetings. They would need this at least 7 days in advance. Failure to do this will lead to less accuracy and more interventions during meetings.

It will be prudent to assign a staff member at ITU to be responsible for communicating with the deaf participant(s), seeking out their preferred communication support, booking communication support after checking out their accreditations etc. More importantly to communicate with each Chair or Convener of each meeting to collate required background materials at least 7 days in advance. Also to inform the deaf participant(s) who are their communication support provider(s).

This staff member will provide assessment sheets, circulate these to the relevant parties both deaf and hearing and collate them. Provide a short report to someone more senior in ITU.