



WCIT-12 Frequently Asked Questions

21 June 2012

1. WHO CONVENED WCIT-12?

The World Conference on International Telecommunications 2012 (WCIT-12) has been convened by ITU in accordance with the decision of its governing body, the Plenipotentiary Conference composed of 193 Member States, and under the procedures specified in the ITU Constitution and Convention. The purpose of WCIT-12 is to review a global treaty: the International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs).

2. WHAT IS ITU'S ROLE IN WCIT-12?

ITU is the United Nations specialized agency with leading responsibility for information and communication technologies (ICTs). It is an inter-governmental body that has 193 countries with full membership of the Union as Member States. Unusually for UN agencies, ITU also has more than 750 private-sector companies (including some of the world's largest ICT firms), organizations and academic institutions as members or associates of its three Sectors (Radiocommunication, Telecommunication Standardization, and Telecommunication Development). Lists of these Member States, Sector Members and Associates are at: www.itu.int/en/membership/Pages/default.aspx.

ITU's Secretary-General, the Directors of its three Bureaux, and the ITU Secretariat are responsible for organizing conferences that deal with regional or global matters within its remit. As well as the Plenipotentiary Conference and WCIT, these include the World Radiocommunication Conference, the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly, and the World Telecommunication Development Conference. A central aspect of ITU's mission is to provide an impartial venue where all viewpoints of the membership can be expressed and where positive solutions and strategies can be forged for tackling continuing and emerging challenges.

It is important to distinguish between ITU, which is comprised of its membership, and the ITU Secretariat (mainly located in Geneva). All substantive decisions are taken by the ITU membership, usually by consensus, in a bottom-up process based on members' written contributions and subsequent discussions. The role of the Secretariat is to facilitate that process, in particular by organizing meetings, providing advice as requested, and making documents available to the membership.

3. IS ITU A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ORGANIZATION?

Yes, ITU is a multi-stakeholder organization. Its membership includes governments, regulators, industry, international organizations (intergovernmental and non-governmental), financial institutions and civil society — all participating in different capacities and in a wide range of ITU's activities (see also Question 2).

The membership ranges from mobile and fixed phone operators to satellite companies, and from equipment makers to broadcasters and Internet service providers. There are also organizations focusing on access for people with disabilities, for example, or on emergency communications. And we have Internet-related organizations and academic institutions — both universities and research institutes focusing on ICTs. Non-profit institutions having an international character can request exemption from membership fees. For example, the Internet Society (ISOC) is a member of ITU and has been exempted from payment.

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ITU also promotes activities that are open to a broader range of stakeholders, such as those related to the World Summit on the Information Society, which ITU took the lead in organizing in 2003 and 2005. Following on from the summit, ITU plays a central role in arranging the annual WSIS Forum that invites all stakeholders to contribute to achieving the goal of an inclusive connected society. More than 400 organizations — and 140 countries — took part in the 2012 WSIS Forum, of which over 100 presented events to construct the Forum's programme. Details are available here:

<http://groups.itu.int/Default.aspx?alias=groups.itu.int/wsis-forum2012>.

ITU welcomes participation by any entity concerned with pursuing practical ways to connect the world for the benefit of all.

4. WHAT IS THE PREPARATORY PROCESS FOR WCIT-12?

Thorough preparations for the conference have taken place over a long period and have involved large numbers of organizations. For example, meetings have been held in six continents, attended by a wide range of stakeholders — from Internet-related bodies, to major telecommunication companies and non-governmental entities. The process is led by a working group of the ITU Council, which has already considered more than a hundred input documents submitted by the ITU membership.

ITU Council Working Group

The governing body of ITU is its Plenipotentiary Conference, which normally takes place every four years, with the ITU Council supervising matters in the interval between Plenipotentiary Conferences. The 2010 Plenipotentiary Conference adopted Resolution 171 which confirms that the Council Working Group to Prepare the 2012 World Conference on Telecommunications (CWG-WCIT-12) constitutes the preparatory process for the conference. ***The group is open to all ITU Member States and Sector Members.***

The terms of reference of CWG-WCIT-12 are to consider previous work on the ITRs and inputs from the ITU membership (called contributions), and to discuss proposals relating to review of the ITRs. Conflicts of opinion that cannot be reconciled are recorded.

Regional meetings

Regional preparatory meetings for WCIT-12 were held in coordination with regional telecommunication organizations, as follows:

- Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (Australia, 19-24 March 2012)
- Regional Commonwealth in the Field of Communications (Uzbekistan, 2-6 April 2012)
- Arab States (Egypt, 28 April-1 May 2012)
- Americas (Argentina, 14-15 May 2012)
- Africa (South Africa, 21-24 May 2012).

All these meetings were open to ITU Member States, Sector Members, Associates and Academia.

In addition, meetings were held in 2011 and 2012 in partnership with other organizations. For example, in Europe, the Committee for ITU Policy of the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT) organized several preparatory meetings for WCIT-12. A list of all meetings can be found here: www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/wtsa-12/prepmeet/Pages/calendar.aspx.

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5. WHO CAN TAKE PART IN WCIT-12?

The conditions for taking part in WCIT are specified in the ITU Convention. Full participation is permitted for the delegations of ITU Member States. In addition, the following may also participate as observers:

- Palestine
- The United Nations and specialized agencies; intergovernmental organizations operating satellite systems, and regional telecommunication organizations
- Regional and international organizations that deal with matters of interest to the conference
- Sector Members of ITU, as referred to in Question 2 (this does not include Associates or Academia).

There is no limit on the number of representatives per national delegation, organization or entity. Member States and observer organizations or entities may register as many representatives as they deem necessary.

6. ARE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED?

An entity that is not a Sector Member of ITU can contact its government (or any organization admitted to participate in the conference) and ask it, in its contribution to WCIT-12, to take into account the entity's views. Also, a request could be made to join a Member State's delegation at WCIT-12, as Member States are free to compose their delegations as they wish.

Additionally, ITU invited all participants in the WSIS Forum in May 2012 to take part in a session on WCIT (see also Question 3). Further consultations are planned during the year.

7. CAN MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTEND WCIT-12?

At the opening of WCIT-12 the Secretary-General of ITU will propose that the public be allowed to be present at the conference venue, in line with the practical arrangements adopted at similar ITU conferences. A formal decision on admitting the public will be taken at a meeting of the heads of delegations on the first day of the conference. This would permit the public to attend plenary sessions and certain committee meetings. Webcasts of plenary sessions are also planned.

Details of arrangements for members of the press will be provided via the WCIT-12 website.

8. HOW CAN I SEE MY COUNTRY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROCESS, OR OTHER DOCUMENTS?

The ITU Secretariat does not have the authority to make public the contributions it has received. However, each ITU Member State or Sector Member has access to all documents and is free to distribute them in any preparatory process for WCIT-12 that it wishes to adopt. Thus you can, if you wish, address to your national government, or to a Sector Member of ITU, any requests you might have for access to documents.

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9. CAN I ADDRESS THE CONFERENCE OR SUBMIT A PROPOSAL?

The delegates of ITU Member States have the right to submit proposals and to address WCIT-12. Organizations and entities that are attending as observers may be invited to contribute, in accordance with the conference's Rules of Procedure and with Resolution 145 of the Plenipotentiary Conference relating to participation by observers at ITU conferences.

10. DO SECTOR MEMBERS HAVE TO PAY TO ATTEND THE CONFERENCE?

Yes. Non-exempted international organizations and Sector Members must contribute towards defraying the expenses of the conference, in accordance with provisions in the ITU Convention and ITU Financial Regulations. The fee is expected to be approximately CHF 5500 per entity or organization.

11. HOW WILL THE OUTCOME OF WCIT-12 BE IMPLEMENTED? WILL ITU BE GIVEN MORE POWERS?

While we cannot pre-judge what will be decided at WCIT-12, it is important to note that the International Telecommunication Regulations is an international treaty implemented by Member States through national legislation, without surrendering any sovereign rights to ITU or any other UN body. There are no proposals to date calling for the creation of a supra-national body that would perform functions currently carried out by national regulators.

12. HAS ITU POSTED MORE INFORMATION ON ISSUES TO BE DEBATED AT WCIT-12?

A presentation giving an overview of the conference and the ITRs can be seen here: www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-t/oth/06/5B/T065B0000160011PDFE.pdf

Some background information on the issues can be found in presentations that are available through links here: www.itu.int/oth/T065B000010/en

13. HOW DOES MY ORGANIZATION JOIN ITU?

Information about becoming a Sector Member, Associate or Academic member of ITU, and the benefits of membership, can be found at: www.itu.int/en/membership/Pages/default.aspx.