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| C:\Users\comas\AppData\Local\Temp\Rar$DRa0.735\jpg\ITU official logo_blue_RGB.jpg**TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations**  **16 July 2020, Virtual** | | |
|  | | **Document TDAG-WG-Prep/4-E** |
|  | | **22 July 2020** |
|  | | **English only** |
| **Source:** | Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau | |
| **Title:** | Report on TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations | |

1. **Opening of the meeting and welcome remarks**

The Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin, welcomed participants and stated that: “In our journey to achieve a fit-for- purpose BDT and to narrow the gap between the digital haves and have-nots, and to bring connectivity to the 3.6 billion that are still offline, the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) is the most important forum for ICT development as it sets our roadmap to achieve this vision. With the COVID‑19 pandemic having put the spotlight on connectivity, we expect that this WTDC will be seen not only as important for BDT or even for ITU, but as the foremost conference for driving global ICT development to enable the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.”

Recalling the two TDAG-20 Web dialogues held in March and in April 2020, Ms Bogdan-Martin underlined that through these dialogues the membership expressed the clear desire for a more meaningful WTDC. This group, she said, has a clear mandate underpinned by the ideas expressed in the dialogue to make recommendations to TDAG that can be implemented in time for WTDC‑21. TDAG will deliberate on the recommendations at the extraordinary session, scheduled for 23 November 2020. She concluded her remarks with this quote from telecommunication icon, Alexander Graham Bell: "Before anything else, preparation is the key to success."

The Chairman of the TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations (TDAG-WG-Prep), Mr Santiago Reyes-Borda (Canada), introduced the agenda, along with a PowerPoint Presentation on the “WTDC-21 Preparatory Process - Towards an effective WTDC-21”, and Information Document 2 ([**Document TDAG-WG-Prep/2-E**](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG26.WP-C-0002/en)) on “WTDC preparations”, submitted by the secretariat.

The Chairman outlined the relevance of these documents, in particular Information Document 2 and its sections 2.1 to 2.7, calling it “an excellent framework that will provide the group the opportunity to deliver effective and concrete results”.

1. **Approval of the agenda**

The agenda was approved without modification.

1. **Working methods**

**Virtual meetings with or without interpretation?**

The method chosen for the first block of virtual meetings (16-17 July 2020) of the three TDAG working groups was to provide interpretation based on requests from Member States, consistent with Resolution 1 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of WTDC. Based on the requests received, interpretation was provided in English, French and Spanish. A number of participants sought clarification on the criteria for providing interpretation, based on this method.

The secretariat responded that, the process in Resolution 1 is that delegates are invited to indicate what language they require and are given a deadline by which the decision on the languages to be used will be taken. The deadline is usually 45-calendar days prior to the opening of the meeting in order to secure interpretation in the requested languages. For non-statutory meetings, a minimum of five requests must be received to service the meeting in the requested language.

In the circular letter announcing the first block of virtual meetings of the three TDAG working groups, the deadline for making requests for interpretation was 8 July 2020 (this was shorter than normal, considering that these groups were only established on 16 June 2020). Adequate responses were received to justify interpretation in English, French and Spanish.

Participants stressedthat interpretation and translation are essential elements of the work of the Union that enable a common understanding among the entire ITU membership on the important issues under discussion. The secretariat, while recognizing the importance of ensuring the use of the languages of the Union on an equal footing, pointed to the strain the provision of interpretation and translation for so many meetings would put on the budget. Participants expressed the hope that the secretariat could still find a way to provide interpretation in all six languages of the Union (Arabic, Chinese, English French, Russian and Spanish), within the budgetary limitations of the Union, if this is not possible, some participants expressed preference for future meetings of the group to be conducted in English only.

**Recommendation on interpretation:** Interpretation should be provided in the six official languages of the Union within the budgetary limitations of the Union. If funds are not available consideration should be given to conducting the next meetings of the working group in English only.

**Recommendation on document submission and language of documents:** Contributions are to be submitted in English, or in the language of the contributing Member State, provided it is one of the official languages of the Union and that the document is received within a specified deadline. In such a case, the contribution will be translated into English only. [Secretariat notes that the deadline would be at least 45 days before the meeting, which may be difficult in the case of the Working Group Meetings due to the short timeframes involved]

Any reports produced by the working group will be translated into all six languages.

**E-mail correspondence/mailing list/Sharepoint site**

A number of participants sought to know whether they were to choose one or all three options: e-mail correspondence, mailing list or Sharepoint site. Others asked what they would be doing through a mailing list, given that the work of the working group would be based on written contributions to be discussed during meetings.

The Chairman explained that these were proposed as informal additional tools that would facilitate the exchange of views in a relatively informal manner, and that the official documents remain the contributions submitted to the meetings of the working group within specified deadlines. In the end, preference was expressed for just the mailing list.

**Recommendation:** The mailing list will be the only additional, but informal tool to be used to work constructively. Written contributions are the only formal documents for discussions.

**Recommendation for RTOs to designate focal points for regional coordination**

All participants recognize the benefits of regional coordination for the six[[1]](#footnote-1) regions as already experienced in the preparation of all ITU conferences and assemblies. Participants underlined that regional telecommunication organizations (RTOs[[2]](#footnote-2)) have traditionally been the main bodies preparing regional positions and common proposals for WTDC.

Participants acknowledged that the consolidation of views at regional level, together with the opportunity for interregional discussions prior to the conference, has eased the task of reaching consensus on many issues during WTDCs. The continued success of future conferences will depend on greater efficiency of regional coordination and interaction at interregional level prior to such conferences.

Turning to the question of designating focal points for regional coordination, participants made some observations and comments. For some, it is still early days to ask RTOs to designate their focal points, given that the working group itself is yet to discuss how it can help have better preparations and process for the forthcoming WTDC. Others asked how many focal points are needed from each RTO? What is the time-frame within which RTOs should decide on the focal points?

In the context of focal points, the Chairman specifically referred to the important call in section 2.4 of Information Document 2, which says: “establish, in collaboration with the secretariat, a list of coordinators from each region, for each topic on the conference agenda. He stressed that focal points would be designated for coordination, not for decision-making. It could be one, maybe two individuals for each of the RTOs. The idea behind recommending to RTOs to designate focal points is that RTOs might wish to start the coordination now, rather than later.

Other participants observed that normally, coordination with RTOs is done via regionally appointed vice-chairmen, but considering that this working group does not have vice-chairmen, the recommendation to have designated focal points was a welcome one. It was suggested that this could be done by asking RTOs officially to nominate focal points.

The meeting noted that the TDAG Chairman has the full right to ask the RTOs to nominate their focal points. The request could be done either through a circular letter by the TDAG Chairman, or by the Director of BDT.

Participants noted that the first meeting of APT for Asia and the Pacific region will be held on 24 July 2020. Participants from this region asked for the circular letter to the RTOs to be sent out before this date, if possible. CITEL has its meeting on 11 August 2020; and CEPT has already established a project team for preparations for WTDC and is about to approve a focal point. In the Arab region, the team that will coordinate the preparatory process is yet to be established because the focus now is on preparations for the **World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly** (WTSA). The RTO in this region has to go through a formal process, in which the ministers have to decide the team and the formal structure for the preparatory process.

The Chairman noted that Information Document 2, in particular, sections 2.4 and 2.5, provided a summary of the discussions that led to the formation of the group. The Chairman suggested that this summary should frame the deliberations of the working group, and could be used by members to assist with their contributions. These two sections of Information Document 2 are reproduced here for ease of reference.

“2.4 Before the Conference:

Consideration should be given to the following approaches:

* Implement a comprehensive preparatory process that introduces formal inter-regional coordination meetings (IRMs). These meetings should have a clearly defined format and clear agendas. Outcomes of IRMs would be non-binding as Member States have the sovereign right to submit proposals at the conference.
* Define the number of representatives from each region to attend IRMs and decide on the chairmanship of IRMs.
* Define target lists by constituent group, focus on attracting funding entities and target beneficiaries of ITU-D activities (youth, women, representatives from LDCs, persons from indigenous communities, etc.).
* Ensure proper planning and coordination between RPMs, IRMs and RTO preparatory meetings to safeguard the efficiency of the conference preparatory process.
* Establish, in collaboration with the secretariat, a list of coordinators from each region for each topic on the conference agenda.
* Leverage on a selected basis, other high-profile forums to raise awareness and interest on WTDC.

2.5 During the conference:

Consideration should be given to merging the high-level segment and the side events into thematic events, a “Development Track” as follows:

* Carefully select themes to match the WTDC agenda and establish a clear agenda and value proposition with the intention of addressing development challenges and membership priorities, and obtaining funding/pledges to complement the ITU budget.
* Invite high-level participants to chair and/or deliver keynote speeches on the theme(s) selected.
* Organize thematic tracks to be separate from the “administrative” part of the conference.”

**Recommendation:** The Director of BDT will send a circular letter to all RTOs inviting them to designate focal points for coordination.

1. **Work plan**

**Deadlines for submission of written contributions**

Participants asked to know the deadlines for submitting member contributions and contributions from the secretariat. The secretariat responded that contributions are subject to deadlines set out in WTDC Resolution 1. Consistent with this resolution, “contributions must be received not later than 45 days before the opening of a meeting if they are to be translated for the meeting. Beyond this 45-day deadline, the contributor may submit the document in the original language and in any official language into which it may have been translated by the author. Contributions that do not meet this 45-day deadline but are received at least 12 days before the opening of the meeting shall be published, but not translated.”

**Date for submission of report to TDAG**

For some participants, it wastoo early to decide on when the report would be submitted to TDAG, considering that it will be based on written contributions for which the submission dates have not been decided.

**Dates of next meetings**

The meeting discussed the proposed work plan in [Document DT/1](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG26.WP-200716-TD-0001/en), which outlines four blocks of meetings for all three TDAG working groups. The first block of meetings being 16 and 17 July 2020, followed by a second block of meetings in September, a third block also in September and a fourth block in October 2020.

Participants noted that the extraordinary meeting of TDAG was tentatively scheduled for 23 November 2020 and asked if this date needs to be approved by the Council. The secretariat clarified that the date does not need to go to the Council and will be published on the official list of meetings as soon as it is confirmed after internal consultations.

### Participants made several observations as follows: that too many meetings are planned with very short intervals between them; that the planning is unrealistic because many participants are also involved in other meetings taking place between July and November 2020, where they have responsibilities; that the third block of meetings would coincide with at least one of the rapporteur group meetings of ITU-D Study Group 1; that the second block of meetings would overlap with a CEPT meeting in September; that all the regions are now mainly preparing for WTSA**;and that**holding two meetings in September is overkill.

Participants stressed the need to avoid overlaps with any planned meetings of RTOs and with the following ITU meetings: [ITU-D Study Group 1 Rapporteur Group e-meetings](https://www.itu.int/net4/ITU-D/CDS/sg/blkmeetings.asp?lg=1&sp=2018&blk=24968), 21 September - 2 October 2020; [ITU-D Study Group 2 Rapporteur Group e-meetings](https://www.itu.int/net4/ITU-D/CDS/sg/blkmeetings.asp?lg=1&sp=2018&blk=24969), 5-16 October 2020; Informal Experts Group on World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2021 **(IEG-WTPF-21), 14-16 September 2020; and the** Expert Group on the International Telecommunication Regulations (EG‑ITRs), 17-18 September 2020.

The meeting schedule should take into account the fact that many of the Member State officials with specific tasks in TDAG are also heavily involved in some of the other meetings listed above. It was agreed to reduce the number of meetings. One suggestion was to delete the third block of meetings. An appropriate number of virtual meetings will be held before the extraordinary meeting of TDAG in November 2020.

**Recommendation:** The secretariat will produce and circulate a revised calendar of TDAG working group meetings taking into account the above observations and suggestions. In particular, overlaps should be avoided and ample time should be given to Member States, Sector Members and other stakeholders to comply with the deadlines for submission of contributions in a manner that will allow the working group to finalize its report ahead of the November TDAG meeting.

Apart from the dates for the next meetings, the calendar shall include the deadlines for submission of written contributions, the date for the draft report for comments, and the date for submitting the report to the November TDAG meeting.

1. **Conclusion**

The group will hold an appropriate number of virtual meetings and will produce reports for each meeting. Each meeting report will include specific recommendations and highlight how the group is achieving concrete results in terms of the whole process (starting from this meeting). Some of the conclusions reached at this meeting are highlighted below:

1. Interpretation should be provided in the six official languages of the Union within the budgetary limitations of the Union.
2. Contributions are to be submitted in English, or in the language of the contributing Member State, provided it is one of the official languages of the Union and that the document is received within a specified deadline. In such a case, the contribution will be translated into English only. Any reports produced by the working group will be translated into all six languages.
3. The mailing list will be the only additional, but informal tool to be used to work constructively. Written contributions are the only formal documents for discussions.
4. The Director of BDT will send a circular letter to all RTOs inviting them to designate focal points for coordination.
5. The secretariat will produce and circulate a revised schedule, taking into account the observations and suggestions made in Section 4 above.

The Chairman expressed sincere thanks to all for their interventions and very valuable support.

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1. Africa, Americas, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT); European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT); Inter-American Telecommunications Commission (CITEL); African Telecommunications Union (ATU); Council of Arab Ministers of Telecommunication and Information represented by the Secretariat-General of the League of Arab States (LAS); and the Regional Commonwealth in the field of Communications (RCC). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)