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| **Council 2017 Geneva, 15-25 May 2017** |  |
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| **Agenda item: ADM 22** | **Document C17/60-E** |
| **21 February 2017** |
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| Report by the Secretary-General | |
| TIES EMAIL – CURRENT SITUATION AND NEXT STEPS | |

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| Summary  ITU’s TIES email service was created in the 1990s to facilitate the work of delegates, at a time when alternatives were not available. As various alternative (mostly free) services have been introduced in the market, the number of TIES email users has dropped significantly. If the service is to continue, investments are needed to bring it up to today’s security and user interface standards. This is difficult to justify given the low number of users.  Action required  The Council is invited **to consider** the analysis below and **to decide** if the TIES email service should be discontinued, as recommended by the secretariat.  **Note:** Discontinuing the TIES email service would not affect TIES account addresses, which are used as a form of identification to access documents and other ITU services. |

1. **Overview**

In its 2016 report on ITU, the Joint Inspection Unit noted (Recommendation 5) that “the Secretary-General should develop a comprehensive plan to improve the stability and the predictability of the financial base of the Union, integrating options for increasing revenues and cost-saving proposals, and present it to the Council for endorsement at its 2017 session”. As part as a broader effort to reduce costs and improve efficiencies, ITU management has reviewed the status of TIES email service. Various statistics (Annex) show that few use the service on a regular basis. To provide further verification of the current situation, the secretariat conducted a survey in September and interviews to get direct feedback from TIES account holders. The survey was resent in January to provide additional time to reply. In total, more than 2,200 users responded. This revised document presents the outcomes of these consultations, as well as an analysis of TIES email cost/usage and options for the future.

**2. Background of TIES email service**

The first version of TIES email service was introduced in the early 1990s. It was originally introduced to facilitate the work of ITU participants as there were no other email service providers at that time. ITU was an innovator in introducing new electronic means of working for delegates and provided connectivity services to TIES users. However, the situation has evolved over time. Today, there are many alternative (free) services in the market and TIES e-mail has not been sufficiently updated: the interface is dated, and authentication is currently incompatible with ITU’s other IT systems and with modern security frameworks. Many security incidents have occurred over the last few years. During the last month, we noticed more than 2650 malicious files coming from TIES email accounts. In the beginning of this year, cyber-attackers successfully built a fake ITU TIES web site with malware to steal the usernames and passwords of all TIES accounts. The site was blocked thanks to the help from CERT-EU. If left unaddressed, the current TIES infrastructure will continue to put the entire ITU digital infrastructure at risk.

Notwithstanding these challenges, some ITU TIES email users value having an ‘@ties.itu.int’ email address.

**3. TIES survey**

To better understand the current situation, ITU management decided to send a survey to all TIES account holders. The full results are available [here](http://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/2017/TIES-email-survey2016Results.pdf). The objective of the survey was to gather feedback and guidance in order to support the consideration of next steps, including the options of maintaining/evolving or discontinuing TIES email.

**Profile of Survey Respondents**: Member State users (44%), Sector Member users (32%), Associate users (7%), Other users – mostly users in international organizations (7%), Academia (5%), Admin Related Entities (2%), Permanent Missions (1%). Of the total, 58% of respondents were from developed countries, 36% from developing countries and 6% from least developed countries.

**Usage:** Almost all respondents knew they have a TIES email (84%) but usage is low: 47% never use, 14% use it yearly, 12% quarterly and 12% monthly. Only 6% of respondents use the service daily and 9% weekly. The main reason for never/rarely using the ITU service is that they have other email services that meet their requirements (86% of respondents). The most common usage of TIES email is to forward emails; 72% of the users rely on TIES email only for ITU-related discussions.

**Opinions -** **Maintain or cancel TIES Email?:** When respondents were asked if ITU should maintain a TIES email service, 33% said that they had no opinion, 51% said yes and 16% said no. However, only 1% of respondents would be willing to pay for this service. The rest said that they are not willing to pay (even a nominal fee of 10 CHF or less per month) or have no opinion.

**Improvements?:** When asked which features they would like to see improved, respondents replied: User Interface (35%), Storage capacity (18%), Security (14%) and Customer Service (11%). Almost 40% said that ITU does not need to improve TIES email (as they do not use the service).

**4. TIES Email analysis and options**

When the statistics on usage and the results of this survey among users are taken together, it becomes clear that ITU is maintaining TIES email service for the benefit of a very small number of individuals. Most are either not using the service, or they use it infrequently or simply to forward to another email address. And, while half say that ITU should maintain the service, almost no users would be willing to pay even a small amount per month to maintain it. Furthermore, when the secretariat contacted a number of Geneva-based missions identified in the statistics as regular users, the interviews showed even lower usage than the statistics would imply. In this context, the following options are put forward for consideration:

1. **Maintain and modernize TIES email service:** This approach would allow ITU to continue the service (without functional improvements), but the costs would be significant: some CHF 200,000 up front plus CHF 100,000 a year to update the interface to ensure proper data security (encryption, authentication) and support (including spam detection). This would come to about CHF 20 per month/user, over a four-year period. The currently outdated platform is a security risk for the Union, and the poor interface and lack of mobile functionality actually hurts ITU’s brand. Given the small number of users, and the current demands from Member States to reduce costs, it is difficult to justify such up front and ongoing investments. It would be technically possible to offer this service on a cost recovery basis by charging interested members. However, 0% of respondents to the user survey say that they would be willing to pay up to CHF 20/month for the service, meaning that there is no practical business case to cover the costs in this way.
2. **Shift to an externally-hosted service, with ITU branding:** This would allow ITU to maintain a branded service (but a commercial product) with a modernized interface and security. This could be provide at a reduced cost of approximately 50% of Option 1 above, i.e. about CHF 10 per month/user. However, as noted above, the survey showed that users are not willing to pay for such a service, and it would be difficult for ITU to justify paying for a service used by a small group of users, which is freely available in the market. Only 1% of those surveyed say that they would be willing to pay up to CHF 10/month for the service. Since at least several hundred paying users would be needed, it would appear that there is no practical business case to cover the costs in this way.
3. **Discontinue TIES email service and assist users with transition:** While some TIES email users may regret the closing of the service, usage and feedback demonstrate that the group of actual users is very small (less than 10% of survey respondents use it weekly and only 6% daily). It is highly unlikely that any user would not have access to an alternative service as such services are now widely available. That said, the secretariat would assist users in identifying alternatives, where required. In addition, users could, if they wish to keep their TIES email address to maintain ITU branding, arrange for their emails to be forwarded (at no cost to ITU or users) to another email address of their choosing. The Secretariat would provide TIES email users on a case-by-case basis with technical or other assistance as required for this transition so as to avoid any disruption in their service. NOTE: Discontinuing TIES email service would not have any impact on TIES account addresses, which are used as a form of identification to access documents and other ITU services.

**5. Recommendation**

Given the low-level of usage of the TIES email service, the cost of upgrade and maintenance, the lack of potential to maintain the service on a cost recovery basis, the fact that free/low-cost alternative services are available, and that the current TIES email service puts the entire ITU digital infrastructure at risk, it is recommended that ITU discontinue its TIES email service and that the secretariat offers any interested users assistance, if required, in identifying alternatives, including having their TIES emails forwarded to another email address, or any other assistance so as to avoid any disruption to their email service during a transition period of say 8-12 months.

ANNEX

Frequent TIES email users\*:

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| **PERM MISSION** | **157** | 27% |
| **ADMIN** | **124** | 21% |
| **ADMIN RELATED** | **76** | 13% |
| **SIO** | **46** | 8% |
| **ROA** | **45** | 8% |
| **UNSYSTEM** | **44** | 8% |
| **ITU** | **29** | 5% |
| **OTHER USERS** | **21** | 4% |
| **MINISTRY** | **14** | 2% |
| **UNIVERS,RSRCH** | **8** | 1% |
| **REGINTORG** | **6** | 1% |
| **SATORG** | **5** | 1% |
| **OTHER ENTITY** | **4** | 1% |
| **REGORG** | **1** | 0% |
| **REG OFFICES** | **1** | 0% |
| **Grand Total** | **581** | 100% |

\* Frequent Ties email users (at least used once per month)

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