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| **Council 2022 Geneva, 21-31 March 2022** |  |
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| **Agenda item:** **ADM 3** | **Document C22/68-E** |
| **4 March2022** |
| **Original: English** |
| Contribution by Australia and Canada | |
| Proposal for implementation analysis on the use of gender-neutral language in ITU texts | |

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| Summary  This contribution recommends that Council request the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Secretariat to examine the implementation of the use of gender-neutral language in future ITU texts, for Council’s full consideration. No amendments to the ITU Constitution and Convention are proposed.  Action required  The Council is invited to **agree** to request the ITU Secretariat to examine the implementation of the use of gender-neutral language in ITU texts, and that the ITU Secretariat present their findings to Council 2023 for further consideration and appropriate action.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  References  *Council* [*Decision 500*](https://www.itu.int/itudoc/gs/council/c00/docs/resdec/77.html) *(C-2000)* |

**Introduction**

As part of the United Nations’ (UN) system-wide prioritisation of gender equality, the UN has implemented initiatives 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.

The ITU has actively contributed to prioritising gender equality 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 sectors, including adopting a Declaration on Promoting Gender Equality, Equity and Parity in the ITU Radiocommunication Sector at World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC) 2019, and initiatives to promote gender equality and perspectives as outlined in World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly Resolution 55, World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) Resolution 55 and Plenipotentiary Conference (PP) Resolution 70. However, current ITU language practices do not align with these efforts to mainstream gender equality.

**Discussion**

In accordance with Decision 500 taken by the ITU Council at its 2000 session, the term "Chairman" (and related terms such as "Vice-chairman", "Chairmanship", etc.) is considered gender-neutral and used in all English versions of ITU documents. Decision 500, agreed by the ITU Council over 20 years ago, is outdated and does not recognise current ITU and UN system-wide initiatives on gender parity and equality.

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, as part of a package of amendments to enhance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the postal sector, member countries of the Universal Postal Union agreed by consensus that gender‑neutral language be applied to all Union documents.

Similarly, at the 45th Session of the Management Committee (MC-45) of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), the APT instructed the APT Secretariat and APT Work Programmes to review their documents and Working Methods to include gender-neutral language. Since this decision, Australia is pleased that the APT has actively implemented gender-neutral language in drafting work during preparations for WTDC-21 and PP-22 in 2022.

The continued use of gendered, masculine terms in ITU texts is at odds with the ITU’s objectives to mainstream 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.

The [ITU English Language Style Guide](https://www.itu.int/en/language-tools/Documents/styleguide.docx) 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 that the language used in the basic instruments of the Union, and by extension all ITU texts, be considered gender-neutral by default.

The incorporation of gender-neutral language in ITU texts would help avoid gender bias and discrimination, and encourage diverse participation and engagement in the ITU as a modern and inclusive organisation.

At the Council Working Group on Financial and Human Resources (CWG-FHR) in January 2022, Australia, Canada and New Zealand presented a contribution on the ‘Use of gender-neutral language in ITU texts’[(CWG-FHR-15/17-E).](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CWGFHR15-C-0017/en) While there was general support from Members and no disagreement on the proposed terminology, it was suggested that further analysis on the implementation process would be required to enable full consideration of the matter by Council.

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. Australia anticipates implementing gender-neutral language will 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**

As a first step to effecting this change, we request that the ITU Secretariat examine the implementation of the use of gender-neutral language in future ITU texts, and that the ITU Secretariat present their findings to Council 2023 for further consideration and appropriate action. This will enable full consideration of the matter by Council, including potential next steps. No amendments to the ITU Constitution and Convention are proposed at this time.

We propose that the examination should consider the practical implementation of applying:

* gender-neutral language to all English versions of ITU documents, and where possible, to Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish versions of ITU documents; and
* the following gender-neutral language practices to all English versions of ITU documents:
  + “Chair” and “Vice-Chair” to replace “Chairman” and “Vice-Chairman”;
  + “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;
  + “Spouse” rather than “wife” or “husband”;
  + The use of alternative terms for gendered expressions, such as replacing “mankind” with “people”, and “manpower” with “workforce” or “human resources”.

We also propose that the examination should consider possible implications of supressing Council Decision 500, and assess options for replacing the footnote to the ITU Constitution and Convention, which states, “the language used in the basic instruments of the Union (Constitution and Convention) is to be considered as gender neutral”.

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