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| **Council 2022 Geneva, 21-31 March 2022** | A picture containing text, clipart  Description automatically generated |
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|  | **Document C22/91-E** |
| **5 April 2022** |
| **Original: English** |
| SUMMARY RECORD  OF THE  SIXTH PLENARY MEETING | |
| Tuesday, 29 March 2022, from 1100 to 1220 hours | |
| **Chairman**: Mr S. BIN GHELAITA (United Arab Emirates) | |

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|  | **Subjects discussed** | **Documents** |
| 1 | Reports by the Chairman of the Council Working Group on languages (CWG-LANG) on the use of the six official languages of the Union | [C22/12](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0012/en), [C22/55](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0055/en) |
| 2 | Draft Policy Framework on multilingualism in ITU | [C22/53](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0053/en) |
| 3 | Statement by an observer | - |

**1 Reports by the Chairman of the Council Working Group on languages (CWG-LANG) on the use of the six official languages of the Union (Documents C22/12 and C22/55)**

1.1 Pursuant to PP Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) and Council Resolution 1372 (Modified 2019), the Chairman of the Council Working Group on languages (CWG-LANG) introduced the annual report of CWG-LANG to the Council contained in Document [C22/12](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0012/en), which included, *inter alia*, updated measures and principles for interpretation and translation in ITU set out in Document [C22/INF/7](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-INF-0007/en) and a proposal that Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) be revised at PP-22; as well as the four-year report contained in Document [C22/55](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0055/en), which summarized the activities and achievements of CWG-LANG in respect of the use of the six official languages of the Union over the period 2019-2022.

1.2 Councillors welcomed the reports contained in Documents C22/12 and C22/55, and expressed support for extending the mandate of CWG-LANG. One councillor suggested that the report in Document C22/55 should be submitted to PP-22. Two others expressed support for the revision of Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018), and Member States were encouraged to contribute to its revision and updating.

1.3 One councillor said that he supported the possibility of using languages other than the six official languages in regional offices, on websites and for other appropriate communications, provided that funding was available.

1.4 One councillor encouraged the secretariat to use technology to ensure the continuity of multilingual coverage.

1.5 One councillor drew attention to the fact that, in certain regions, indigenous languages were widely spoken; he urged ITU to promote connectivity in languages relevant to the communities in question through the regional offices.

1.6 Several councillors highlighted the need to ensure that the ITU website was available in all six languages, on an equal footing. One pointed out in that connection that many of the images on the main page of the site had text available only in English, and that the use of so many images on the website increased download and access times for many users. Moreover, the ITU Cybersecurity Activities webpage was only available in English, the ITU Coordination Committee for Terminology (ITU CCT) had no webpage, and the documents on the site of the Inter-Sector Coordination Group were difficult to download. He requested follow-up action on the above-mentioned issues.

1.7 One councillor said that while he appreciated the translation of meeting documents into Arabic, they were often distributed late, not allowing sufficient time for consultation prior to meetings. Expressing support for measures to translate ITU website content and ensure that regional offices’ websites and documents relating to their work were translated into languages used in the respective regions, he said that candidates for posts at the various regional offices should be offered the choice of being interviewed in one of the languages spoken in that region.

1.8 The Chairman of CWG-LANG thanked councillors for their proposals and stressed that the group would continue its efforts to guarantee equal treatment of all six official languages of the Union.

1.9 The representative of the General Secretariat took note of comments regarding the use of regional languages in the regional offices and the suggestion that regional offices could consider promoting and using local languages; the respective offices would examine such matters. Regarding the support expressed by councillors for using technology to ensure an equal footing for all six official languages, as well as comments and suggestions with a view to making the website accessible in all official languages, the secretariat was well aware of those imperatives; indeed, measures had been and would continue to be taken to those ends, as reported to CWG-LANG.

1.10 The lack of a website for ITU CCT had been raised at the meeting of the committee in February. The secretariats of the Coordination Committee for Vocabulary (CCV) in ITU-R and the Standardization Committee for Vocabulary (SCV) in ITU-T were working on the design and implementation of a site. Comments relating to translation of meeting documents into Arabic would be conveyed to the Arabic Language Section.

1.11 Regarding the structure and architecture of the ITU website, another representative of the General Secretariat said that the new One ITU website was the product of collaborative efforts, linking existing microsites across the new ITU platform. Issues relating to search and navigation functions, and the use of images, had yet to be addressed. As outlined in the information session organized for councillors the previous week, there were plans to involve ITU users in developing a new architecture, geared towards meeting the needs of ITU staff and Member States, one example being a recent survey on the prioritization of tasks on the ITU website, in which ITU staff and Member States had also participated. The survey had revealed that the top tasks for the different Sectors were very similar. Progress had also been made to promote multilingualism. For example, the Plenipotentiary Conference site was now available on the new ITU platform in all six languages. Web issues would be included in the operational guidelines being developed by an intersectoral working group on multilingualism to support the proposed policy framework, and the concept of multilingualism had been incorporated in the new One ITU web guidelines. There were plans to test online instant machine translation tools on the new microsites on the ITU platform. The General Secretariat had submitted a time-frame to the Council in 2021 for that work, subject to funding of CHF 2 million. The proposed budget had been included under unfunded mandatory activities in the draft ITU strategic and financial plan for 2024-2027. Lack of funding prevented progress and the scaling up of technology relating to the ITU corporate and Sector webpages. There was a need for donations and sponsorship to scale up and roll out the ITU platform and information architecture across the entire website.

1.12 The Council **approved** the report of CWG-LANG contained in Document C22/12.

1.13 The Council **noted** the four-year report in Document C22/55 and **agreed** to transmit it to the Plenipotentiary Conference, along with the summary record of the meeting.

**2 Draft Policy Framework on multilingualism in ITU (Document C22/53)**

2.1 The representative of the General Secretariat introduced the draft Policy Framework on multilingualism in ITU, contained in Document [C22/53](https://www.itu.int/md/S22-CL-C-0053/en), developed in accordance with recommendation 1 of the 2020 Report on multilingualism in the United Nations system of the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/2020/6), and incorporating the amendments proposed during the CWG-LANG’s discussion of the Secretary-General’s report on PP Resolution 154 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) on the use of the six official languages of the Union on an equal footing.

2.2 Councillors took to the floor to emphasize the importance of multilingualism and to express support for the draft policy framework. One councillor noted that the framework would enable the Union to align with the rest of the United Nations family and improve access to ITU information.

2.3 The councillor from Switzerland stressed that, in the important area of multilingualism, quality should not be sacrificed to financial considerations. To that end, he proposed that in paragraph d) of section III (Principles), the sentence should be redrafted to the effect that “ITU takes all necessary measures to guarantee the use of the six official languages of the Union on an equal footing”. Several councillors supported that proposal, one observing in particular that respect for multilingualism was a statutory obligation within the United Nations system.

2.4 One councillor said that it was vital to ensure that all six official languages were used on an equal footing and, noting that an effective policy on multilingualism would remove barriers and improve access to information, stressed the need to expand and update ITU website content in all languages. The secretariat’s work on the use of new technology could further enhance ITU translation services. It was important to mainstream multilingualism, and the development of the ITU platform was a significant step in that direction. Referring to the JIU recommendations relating to the strategic basis for multilingualism, he said there was a need to prepare administrative and operational guidelines for the implementation of the policy framework including, for example, a roadmap and an implementation time-frame, as well as a rough estimate of the resources needed. He requested the General Secretariat to prepare such operational guidelines, to be submitted for consideration and approval by CWG-LANG and the Council in 2023; and that the request be reflected in the Council’s decision.

2.5 Another councillor expressed similar concerns. With regard to the use of languages in study groups, the lack of appropriate linguistic support discouraged people when it came to participating in important meetings addressing study group Questions in Geneva, although in some cases as little as one hour of interpreting support would facilitate discussions. He called for flexibility and asked the secretariat to propose a way forward, in particular for ITU-T study group work. Another councillor supported that request.

2.6 The Chairman noted that if the secretariat received timely requests from the study groups, language support needs could be taken into account when planning meetings.

2.7 The Director of TSB confirmed that, when organizing meetings, requests submitted by regional groups were considered and efforts were made to identify and accommodate interpretation needs in the required languages. That approach would continue. The secretariat was also looking into using local interpreters, as a way to save money while continuing to provide language services. He drew attention to the tools available via the MyWorkspace platform, including captioning and online machine translation, which, while not a panacea, could help delegates to participate in meetings. TSB would continue its efforts to take interpretation requirements into account when planning meeting services, within the available budget.

2.8 One councillor expressed the hope that the CWG-LANG could enhance implementation of the policy framework.

2.9 Noting that the proposed policy framework would improve access to information, one councillor stressed the importance of taking into account the needs of persons with disabilities, particularly those with visual and hearing impairments, when considering issues relating to the use of languages and access to the ITU website.

2.10 Another councillor noted that while he supported the report, it was not possible to ignore budgetary considerations, as financial restrictions had an impact on ITU activities. In that regard, ITU’s mandatory activities had to take priority.

2.11 One councillor asked, with regard to career development prospects and job opportunities, how many official languages an employee or job applicant would need to know. It could be useful to provide specific information, particularly to young people, on the minimum language requirements for a career at ITU.

2.12 A councillor noted that UNESCO had designated 2020-2030 the Decade of Indigenous Languages. Noting that almost 50 million people in the world spoke an indigenous language, and given ITU’s principle of inclusiveness, he encouraged the Union to take action, including in coordination with UNESCO and other stakeholders, to foster connectivity in those languages.

2-13 Replying to a councillor who called for additional human and financial resources to support multilingualism in ITU and requested further information on plans to make effective use of new translation technologies, the Director of TSB said that efforts were being made to develop technologies such as machine translation, which was currently capable of handling ITU-T documents with a significant degree of accuracy. Real-time interpretation based on artificial intelligence would not be a viable option for some time. Opportunities were required for testing AI-based language support tools, perhaps for example in the work of the regional groups.

2.14 One councillor said that it was important to introduce a stable and ambitious policy framework. The policy document should include references to the basic instruments of ITU, the use of language technologies while ensuring quality, and gender-neutral language. He would also welcome the inclusion, in the section on objectives, of measures to improve web accessibility.

2.15 The Chairman said that, rather than entering into detailed drafting in the Council session, all comments would be duly noted. He invited the Council to endorse the draft policy framework on multilingualism, taking into account the amendment proposed by the councillor from Switzerland paragraph d) of section III (Principles), and to request the Secretary-General to develop administrative and operational guidelines for the implementation of the policy framework on multilingualism, with a view to presenting those guidelines at the forthcoming Council session.

2.16 It was so **agreed.**

**3 Statement by an observer**

3.1 The observer for Bahrain (Ms Aysha Binsanad, Director of Telecommunications, Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications of Bahrain) announced her country’s candidature for election to the Council.

The Secretary-General: The Chairman:

H. ZHAO S. BIN GHELAITA

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