



INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION

**ITU-T**

TELECOMMUNICATION  
STANDARDIZATION SECTOR  
OF ITU

**F.4**

**OPERATIONS AND QUALITY OF SERVICE  
TELEGRAPH SERVICES**

---

**PLAIN AND SECRET LANGUAGE**

**ITU-T Recommendation F.4**

(Extract from the *Blue Book*)

---

## NOTES

1 ITU-T Recommendation F.4 was published in Fascicle II.4 of the *Blue Book*. This file is an extract from the *Blue Book*. While the presentation and layout of the text might be slightly different from the *Blue Book* version, the contents of the file are identical to the *Blue Book* version and copyright conditions remain unchanged (see below).

2 In this Recommendation, the expression “Administration” is used for conciseness to indicate both a telecommunication administration and a recognized operating agency.

## Recommendation F.4

### PLAIN AND SECRET LANGUAGE

The CCITT,

*considering*

(a) Article 27 of the International Telecommunication Convention (Nairobi, 1982) concerning the use of secret language in telegrams;

(b) the general provisions in Recommendation F.1 on the preparation and handing in of telegrams;

(c) the CCITT studies on simplifying the international public telegram service and increasing its cost-effectiveness;

(d) that the provisions governing the international telex, telematic and data transmission services do not restrict the language or content of messages transmitted by these services, nor would it be practicable to apply restrictions in subscriber-operated services without withdrawing automatic operation or otherwise disrupting the quality of service;

(e) that, nonetheless, it may be necessary for an ITU Member to impose restrictions on the content of telegrams transmitted from its territory or received from another country;

(f) that where an ITU Member elects to impose language restrictions on telegrams received from another country, this should not unduly burden the operation of the service in that country,

*declares the view*

that the following procedures shall apply regarding the use of plain and secret language in the international telegram service.

#### 1 Definitions

1.1 **plain language** consists of words that present an intelligible meaning in one or more of the languages admitted for international telegrams, which include at least French, English and Spanish in every relation. Each word and each expression has a meaning normally assigned to it in the language to which it belongs. A text in plain language may contain:

- a) numbers written in letters or figures;
- b) proper names or abbreviated addresses;
- c) groups comprising letters, figures, signs or any combination of them providing that they have no secret meaning.

1.2 **secret language** comprises words in which one or more consist of:

- a) groups of letters, figures, signs or any combination of them that have a secret meaning;
- b) words in plain language that are not used with the meaning normally assigned to them;
- c) any other words not fulfilling the conditions laid down for plain language.

#### 2 General principles

2.1 All ITU Members shall accept in all relations the use of plain language in messages sent or received by any public international telecommunication service.

2.2 At least the three working languages of the Union (French, English and Spanish) shall be admitted as plain language in all relations.

2.3 In order to facilitate efficient working and convenience for the users of telecommunication services, all ITU Members should also normally admit telegrams wholly or partly in secret language. In any case, government telecommunications and service telecommunications may be expressed in secret language in all relations. Except in the case of suspension of services defined in Article 20 of the Convention, any telecommunication containing secret language shall also be allowed to pass in transit from one country to another.

2.4 Exceptionally, where an ITU Member finds it necessary to impose language restrictions on international telecommunications, for example pursuant to Article 19 of the Convention (stoppage of telecommunications):

- a) the Member concerned shall make all necessary arrangements regarding any restrictions on messages originating within its own territory;
- b) except where appropriate bilateral agreements are reached, it shall also accept the final responsibility for stopping any non-compliant messages originating in other countries. although origin Administrations should assist to the extent reasonable and practicable;
- c) the Secretary-General should be advised of the restrictions so that he can then advise all Administrations promptly through the *Operational Bulletin*.

### 3 Telegrams with secret language

3.1 If requested by the origin Administration, the sender of a telegram in secret language must produce the code or identify the dictionary language used in drafting the telegram. Administrations may also require the sender to produce a translation of the telegram into plain language or a language acceptable to the Administration. This provision shall not apply to government telegrams.

3.2 If the origin Administration considers it appropriate, or, in relations where so agreed to meet the requirements of the destination Administration, the office of origin should insert the name of the code and/or language used in such a telegram at the end of the preamble line as a service instruction, which is not chargeable. It may not be convenient for this procedure to be applied with some types of lodgement.

3.3 In cases where a destination Administration receives a telegram (other than a government telegram) wholly or partly in non admissible language, that Administration:

- a) may require the addressee to produce a translation of the telegram; or
- b) shall make every effort to identify the commercial code or language used and check that the translated text is then acceptable; and
- c) shall advise the origin Administration where a) or b) causes late delivery as defined in Recommendation D.42 (which shall nevertheless not be grounds for a refund of charges to the originator); or
- d) shall inform the origin Administration by service advice when either the original telegram cannot be translated or when the translated text contravenes national law (neither case shall be grounds for a refund of charges to the originator).

3.4 Further to point c) of § 2.4 above, any Administrations wishing to impose language restrictions shall advise the Secretary-General of their requirements both for lodgements within their country and for reception from other countries in terms of:

- a) languages other than French, English and Spanish admitted as plain language;
- b) commercial or other standard codes admitted;
- c) whether identification in the preamble line of the code or language used is desired;
- d) whether secret language as defined in § 1.2, other than b) above is not admitted.