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Report by the Secretary-General

ITU EXPERIENCE WITH REMOTE PARTICIPATION AND PROPOSED ACTION PLAN - RESOLUTION 167 (GUADALAJARA, 2010)

Summary

The Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union, in Resolution 167 (Guadalajara, 2010), "instructs the Secretary-General, in consultation and collaboration with the Directors of the Bureaux to develop an action plan, to be considered by the Council at its 2011 session, for electronic participation in its working groups and related meetings that report to the Council, including the use of tools such as videoconferencing; to build upon trials for electronic meetings, in collaboration with the Directors of the Bureaux, such that their subsequent implementation is technologically neutral, to the greatest extent possible, and cost effective, in order to allow broad participation satisfying the necessary security requirements ...".

Council 2013 agreed that, with respect to "Strengthening ITU capabilities for electronic meetings and means to advance the work of the Union":

1. The remote participation pilot phase should continue; and
2. A report on the financial, legal and technical aspects of remote participation in ITU meetings should be presented to Council 2014, along with case studies of remote participation, in particular involving developing countries.

Action required

The Council is invited to **note** this report.

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References

Resolution 167 (Guadalajara, 2010); Council Documents C11/37(Rev.1), C12/21(Rev.1), C13/INF/8; and C13/20(Rev.1)

Background

1. Resolution 167 (Guadalajara, 2010) instructs the Secretary-General, with the involvement of the advisory groups of the three Sectors, to further expand the electronic working methods to include remote/electronic participation. Electronic participation should be extended to ITU working groups as well as the meetings that report to the Council.

2. The piloting of remote participation as a service in ITU is now in its fourth year.

Electronic meetings helping to advance the work of the Union

3. The pilot on Interactive Remote Participation (IRP) is in line with the recommendation by the United Nations Chief Executives Board to embrace ICT as an investment in new working methods, leading to improved productivity as well as creating a more effective instrument for Member States, by reducing the cost on Member States for participating in the work of the UN. IRP strengthens regional presence (Resolution 25 (Rev. Guadalajara, 2010) to ITU meetings by providing the means to attend ITU meetings virtually without the need to travel to Geneva.

4. Implementation of electronic working methods (e.g. Document Management System, Document Production System, Proposal Management System) and continuous improvements to audio-visual facilities in meeting rooms are the fundamental components for effective and efficient meetings. They also provide the foundation for the implementation of IRP.

5. IRP and improved audio-visual services in the meeting rooms have facilitated inclusion of people with special needs in line with the ITU policy on accessibility adopted in 2013 by providing:

- Captioning for those with hearing impairments
- Audio conferencing for the visually impaired
- Web conferencing for those with mobility challenges

Experience of IRP in ITU meetings

6. The ITU General Secretariat and the three Bureaux all organize meetings with IRP. When registering online, delegates can request to participate remotely. The meeting organizer decides if IRP shall be provided for each meeting. Organizers are requested to provide three weeks' notice to the IRP team to allow the recruitment of moderators (process similar to the recruitment of interpreters).

7. In 2013, ITU provided more than 400 meeting sessions (a meeting of one day has two sessions, a meeting of one week may have up to ten sessions) with IRP services. The Telecommunication Standardization Bureau of ITU has decided that starting December 2013, IRP will be standard for all ITU-T meetings.

8. There were over 3,500 remote participations, from 87 countries, and 354 cities in ITU meetings in 2013. This resulted in significant travel distance and carbon emissions savings (see Appendix 2).

9. Meeting organizers commented that the number of remote participants is not the only factor considered when providing IRP services-the service is often provided when participants, whose presence in the meeting is of particular importance, cannot be physically present.

10. Adoption of IRP for all ITU meetings will require:

a. Adoption of the recommendation in document C13/20(Rev.1) that IRP will take the form of "remote intervention", where remote participants do not have the same legal status nor the full rights granted to onsite delegates (See paragraphs 25 to 28 of document C13/20(Rev.1));

b. Acceptance that, in the case of technical problems (e.g. lost connection), remote participants will be interrupted but the physical meeting will continue, whereas in the case of onsite technical issues (e.g. headphone failure), onsite participants have the right to stop the meeting until the technical fault is repaired;

c. Increasing the budget for meeting organization and operations, which is offset by the direct cost savings for travel avoidance (financial implications);

d. Adopting technological best practices for connecting remote participants (technical implications);

e. Defining and implementing security policies for IRP, matching that of onsite meetings (security implications).

Legal implications

11. The legal implications were outlined in document C13/20 (Rev.1), paragraphs 25 to 28 and, to date, remain unchanged.

Technical implications

12. Council 2013 information document C13/INF/8 details the components necessary for the provision of remote intervention. Some components can be managed by ITU, while others are managed by the local and remote Internet Service Providers and the remote participants themselves.

13. Increased technical components means that there are more possibilities for technical glitches. This has a direct impact on the meeting process, which is addressed in document C13/20 (Rev.1), paragraphs 25 to 28.

14. When all technical components are implemented correctly, participants listening through headphones and watching the projected image will not be able to tell if the person taking the floor is onsite or participating remotely.

Security implications of electronic meetings

15. While eMeetings and remote intervention enhance effectiveness (e.g. shortening turnaround time for meeting documents, facilitating decision-making) and cost saving (e.g. shortening meeting time, reducing traveling), it is important to effectively manage information security as meeting discussions and documents are being sent across the Internet.

16. The institutionalization of remote intervention would require the allocation of appropriate resources to address the above-mentioned security issues.

17. ITU has installed its own remote intervention service platform (server) to strengthen the privacy issue faced by commercial remote intervention service providers. The connection between the server and the remote participant is encrypted using https. Stronger security can be implemented based on security requirements.

18. While TIES authentication has been implemented and remote participants need to authenticate using their TIES accounts to logon to the session, the accreditation and “badging” procedure need further refinement for remote participants.

Financial implications

19. Costs for infrastructure, equipment, and maintenance are covered by the ITU operational budget. The necessary staff resources are provided by two posts at P1 level and temporary contracts, the costs of which are covered by the IS Department and the Sectors requesting the services, respectively.

Case study of onsite and remote intervention of “developed” vs “other” Member States at ITU meetings

20. The number of meetings and onsite participants over the past three years are given in the table in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Case study of onsite and remote intervention (RI) of "Developed" vs "Other" Member States at ITU meetings

		Developed ITU Member States[1]				Other ITU Member States[1]			
		onsite		remote		onsite		remote	
		no. of countries	no. of participants	no. of countries	no. of participants	no. of countries	no. of participants	no. of countries	no. of participants
2013	number								
meetings	123	35	7069	n/a	n/a	131	5497	n/a	n/a
sessions	411[2]	n/a	n/a	25	2729[3]	n/a	n/a	62	773[5]
% of ITU Member States using RI				**62.5%**[3]				**40.5%**[4]	
2012									
meetings	113	40	7879	n/a	n/a	135	6728	n/a	n/a
sessions	425[2]	n/a	n/a	25	3461[3]	n/a	n/a	82	630[5]
% of ITU Member States using RI				**62.5%**[3]				**53.5%**[4]	
2011									
meetings	119	38	6260	n/a	n/a	130	5082	n/a	n/a
sessions	57[2]	n/a	n/a	24	450[3]	n/a	n/a	41	129[5]
% of ITU Member Sates using RI				**62%**[3]				**27%**[4]	

Note: An onsite meeting may last more than one day and would include several remote intervention sessions.

1 Source: United Nations Statistics Division.

2 The number of remote intervention sessions provided has increased from 57 to 411 in three years.

3 The percentage of countries from "Developed ITU Member States" using remote intervention has barely increased since 2011 while the number of participants from those countries using remote intervention has increased from 450 to 2729 in the same period.

4 The number of countries from "Other ITU Member States" using remote intervention has increased from 27% to 40.5% since 2011.

5 The number of remote participants from 'Other ITU Member States' has been increasing year on year since 2011.

Appendix 2
Statistics on Interactive Remote Participation

Year	2011	2012	2013
Number of sessions with RP	57	425	411
Number of RP in sessions	579	4091	3502
Carbon saved (KG Co2)	449,123	2,813,270	2,374,909
Distance saved (Km)	3,026,117	18,892,553	15,986,765
Estimated Cost saved (USD)	727,906	4,424,826	3,796,548
Number of countries	65	107	87
Number of developing countries	41	83	63
Number of locations	145	440	411

Note: A meeting of one day is broken up into one morning session and one afternoon session. A meeting of one week can have up to 10 sessions.

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