



WORKING PAPER

ASSEMBLY — 40TH SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 18: Multilingualism at ICAO

**MULTILINGUALISM IS ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES FOR ICAO TO
ACHEIVE ITS GOALS AS A UN SPECIALIZED AGENCY**

(Presented by the Russian Federation)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a significant factor in harmonious communication between peoples, multilingualism has a special meaning for the United Nations. By promoting tolerance, multilingualism ensures the effective and more active participation of all people in the Organization, as well as the growth of effectiveness and the strengthening of involvement.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) request that the Council of ICAO ensure on an ongoing basis that ICAO Assembly resolutions are enforced;
- b) assign the Council of ICAO to conduct further analysis and reassessment of human and financial resources necessary for ensuring the timely preparation of ICAO documents, related to the implementation of standards in all ICAO working languages, and also conduct a further reassessment of the amount of outsourced work needed to achieve these goals, mindful meanwhile of best practices of other specialized agencies of the UN;
- c) assign the Council of ICAO to thoroughly observe the implementation of policies and decisions taken by it in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in matters of language services, acknowledging that multilingualism is a fundamental principle in reaching ICAO's objectives;
- d) request that the Secretary General redouble her efforts to ensure the highest quality of interpretation and translation services in all six official languages;
- e) encourage ICAO Member States to actively cooperate with the Secretariat in advancing multilingualism as an integral part of the programmes within the Organization's work.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Objectives and all Supporting Implementation Strategies
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Improve the efficient use of funds from the regular ICAO budget aimed at language services to maintain ICAO's multilingualism

¹ Russian version provided by the Russian Federation.

<i>References:</i>	<i>Convention on International Civil Aviation, Doc 7300/9</i> <i>Budget of the organization 2017-2018-2019, Doc 10074</i> <i>Assembly Resolutions in Force (as of 6 October 2016), Doc 10075</i> A39-WP/43 A39-WP/524 A40-WP/34 A40-WP/62 United Nations A/RES/71/328 United Nations A/RES/73/270
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/270 of the United Nations dated 22 December 2018 noted in particular “the paramount importance of equality of all six official languages of the United Nations,” as well as “the importance of multilingualism in the activities of the United Nations,” in connection with which “requests that the Secretary General to continue his efforts to ensure full parity among the six official languages in accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/328 and to report thereon to the Assembly at its seventy-fourth session”.

1.2 The principle of multilingualism at ICAO plays a fundamental role, enabling States, among other things, to follow the provisions of Article 37 of the Chicago Convention, which says, “Each contracting State undertakes to collaborate in securing the highest practicable degree of uniformity in regulations, standards, procedures...”. In addition, the use of only one language does not allow the Organization to fully take advantage of the best experience of many Member States in the realm of international civil aviation. The preamble to the Chicago Convention says: “...the future development of international civil aviation can greatly help to create and preserve friendship and understanding among the nations and peoples of the world, yet its abuse can become a threat to the general security”.

2. ICAO LANGUAGE SERVICES

2.1 In 2018, Languages and Publications (LP) provided 10.8 million words of translation, compared to the volume called for by the budget (8.6 million words). 56.85% of the translation volume was done in-house, while 43.15% was outsourced. Interpretation was provided at 1033 meetings compared with 1024 meetings held the prior year. Meanwhile, earlier the budgeted capacity of translation was 9.1 million words and for interpretation 1500 meetings. The average annual demand for translation was approximately 11.4 million words. The average actual annual throughput was approximately 11.1 million words for translation and 1585 meetings with interpretation.

2.2 ICAO, which develops standards and recommended practices (SARPs) for the entire international community and helps implement them in states and regions cannot effectively work without adequately staffed interpretation and translation services with highly professional translators/interpreters who are well-versed in the subject of aviation and its terminology and who are fully committed to the goals and objectives of the Organization.

2.3 ICAO at each of the recent Assembly sessions has reduced the number of staff interpreters and currently the Interpretation Section has only 14 staff, including the Chief. This enables them to service only seven meetings per week without hiring temporary interpreters. However, the local

market of professionally trained interpreters is limited and hiring interpreters beyond the ICAO headquarters (Montréal, Canada), is associated with a number of challenges, such as additional expense, external interpreters not knowing aviation terminology well enough, the need to process visas, etc. In addition, ICAO must compete with other employers. Certain risks emerge from all of that.

2.4 The lack of any reserve in the Interpretation Section creates an additional burden for the interpreters themselves. They can only take vacation when there are no meetings with interpretation; meanwhile, during every break between Council and ANC sessions, other meetings are held which also count on interpretation services.

2.5 Only highly professional language personnel who have many years of experience with aviation, technical, and legal translation at the level of state and international organizations can ensure the quality of the translation of extremely complex ICAO aviation/engineering materials.

2.6 To increase the efficiency of translation, there is a focus on innovative technologies; for example, a spoken word recognition system. However, this system is directly tied to groups of languages and each of them requires their own such system.

2.7 Following the 39th Assembly, many important meetings have been held, including various committees/groups of experts, and symposia. Some of them were conducted without interpretation or timely translation; for example, the final report of the 11th meeting of the Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection (CAEP/11) (4-15 February 2019) was translated from English to Russian and other languages only two months later. And that, undoubtedly, affected both Member-State participation and the results.

2.8 The Draft budget of the Organization for 2020, 2021 and 2022 (A40-WP/34) shows that budget estimations for ensuring multilingualism “can provide the same language services as in the current triennium, provided that established capacity is respected...”. The draft also notes, unfortunately, that “Council information papers will be presented in English only” and “Informal Council briefings will be held in English only”.

3. IMPLEMENTING A TRAINING PROJECT FOR YOUNG TRANSLATORS/ INTERPRETERS AND FREELANCE PROFESSIONALS

3.1 ICAO should strive to retain staff interpreters and translators who are valued and in demand throughout the entire UN system. To that end, they must be promoted in a timely manner in accordance with UN best practices, facilitate their boosting qualifications and mastering aviation terminology. These efforts will also help while seeking and hiring highly qualified employees. Over the next three years, a significant number of interpreters will reach retirement age (right now, 65% of translators and 21% of interpreters); therefore, they need to train in advance a replacement based on a clear plan and schedule in order to have the opportunity to transfer institutional knowledge to young specialists.

3.2 In addition, ICAO language services have created and are supporting a so-called “roster of external translators” consisting of former ICAO staff (retirees) and experienced translators with at least 10 years of experience in various areas of expertise but who have never worked at ICAO. They are chosen by application and based on the results of completing test assignments. It would be logical to boost the effectiveness and work quality of the “roster” if we gave freelancers a chance to complete a short practicum at ICAO so that they may better understand the essence of the work of a UN specialized

agency in civil aviation, which ICAO is, and in thereby reduce time spent on editing the work they submit. In addition, it's desirable that they be recruited for a short job at ICAO to create a pool of potential candidates to cover vacancies that will be created in the future by staff translators retiring or being terminated.

4. **OUTSOURCING**

4.1 In the period from 2017-2019, in order to address the problem of increased demand for translation services, additional funds were provided from other ICAO sources or through efficiencies achieved within Language and Publications (LP). While the translation of additional communications with States were handled by internal resources, most of the other excess requirements were outsourced.

4.2 When outsourcing work, a customer, as represented by ICAO, has difficulty controlling the quality of contractors' work, because a contractor could, for example, conclude subcontractor agreements with a third party and then not edit the work. Further editing of this work by ICAO staff translators leads to what is in fact duplication of efforts and expense for language services.

4.3 There is a likelihood that a contract worker could, in a certain situation, simply decline to fulfil a job, which could result in document preparation deadlines not being met. In addition, there could be a threat to the confidentiality of documents sent for translation. We also cannot guarantee accuracy and consistency of ICAO terminology, which is particularly important when translating regulatory materials. All of these factors call into question the authenticity of translations done by contractors.

5. **MULTILINGUALISM AND THE USE OF A SINGLE TERMINOLOGY BASE**

5.1 When national experts don't use the terminology base prepared by the ICAO Secretariat when preparing draft documents, it introduces additional confusion at the level of national aviation enterprises understanding aviation-engineering terminology.

6. **CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 The 37-th Session of the Assembly of ICAO unanimously adopted Resolution A37-25: ICAO Policy on the language services, "*Reaffirms* that multilingualism is one of the fundamental principles to achieve goals of ICAO as the specialized UN agency" that "... parity and quality of service in all working languages of ICAO be the continuous objective of the Organization".

6.2 Language services are an integral part of every ICAO programme. They are essential to the fulfilment of all Strategic Objectives of the Organization and to the implementation of SARPs and PANS at the global level. Furthermore, language services are a key requirement of the No Country Left Behind (NCLB) initiative and ICAO's communications with Member States.

6.3 Multilingualism should be viewed not just as an expense but also as investments in the development of a secure, reliable global civil aviation system.