

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

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ASSEMBLY - 32ND SESSION

PLENARY

Agenda Item 7: Annual Reports of the Council to the Assembly for 1995, 1996 and 1997

LEVELS OF SERVICES PROVIDED IN THE WORKING LANGUAGES OF ICAO (RESOLUTION A31-17)

SUMMARY

In this paper, the Council, pursuant to Clause 5 of Assembly Resolution A31-17, presents a report on the level of services provided in the working languages of ICAO.

Action by the Assembly is in paragraph 7.

REFERENCES

Doc 9662, Assembly Resolutions in force as of 4 October 1995 (A31-17)

A32-WP/12

A32-WP/13

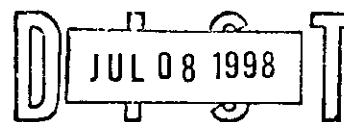
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The 31st Session of the Assembly adopted Resolution A31-17: Level of services provided in the working languages of ICAO, in which the Assembly:

"1. *Reaffirms* its previous resolutions regarding the strengthening of the working languages of ICAO;

2. *Resolves* that parity and quality of service in all working languages of ICAO be the continuous objective of the Organization;

(5 pages)



3. *Resolves* that the introduction of a new language should not affect the quality of service in the other working languages of the Organization;

4. *Resolves* that the Council continue to monitor language services, which will be a subject of review; and

5. *Requests* the Council to present a report to the next ordinary session of the Assembly in 1998."

1.2 It should be recalled that, on several occasions, concern had been voiced in the Council over the fact that the introduction of new languages might be detrimental to the language services already provided at ICAO. Consequently, the Council, in its Budget Message to the 31st session of the Assembly, stated that the subject of language services was highly important to the world-wide distribution of technical aviation material and as such there was a need to provide a balanced approach to the implementation of the relevant Assembly resolutions and to the quality of language services at ICAO in general.

1.3 The Council also approved for attachment to the Council's Budget Message a draft resolution on the level of services provided in the working languages of ICAO. That draft resolution was adopted by the 31st Session of the Assembly and became Resolution A31-17. This paper is presented in response to clause 5 of the Resolution.

1.4 It should also be noted that, following the 31st Session of the ICAO Assembly, the United Nations General Assembly in November 1995 adopted Resolution 50/11 "Multilingualism" aimed at promoting equality among the six official and working UN languages. The Resolution states, *inter alia*, that the translation and interpretation budgets should be commensurate with the needs, and the necessary resources should be available to guarantee the proper and timely translation of documents into the different official languages and their simultaneous distribution.

2. NATURE AND EXTENT OF LANGUAGE SERVICES PROVIDED

2.1 At present, comprehensive interpretation and translation services are provided in English, French, Russian and Spanish, and services in Arabic and Chinese have been progressively expanding to achieve, in due course, their utilization on the same level as the other languages in the Organization. Since the subject of the level of services provided in Arabic and Chinese is dealt with in detail in Assembly working papers A32-WP/13 and A32-WP/12 respectively, this paper, in order to avoid repetition, focuses mainly on the services in the English, French, Russian and Spanish languages.

2.2 The comprehensive interpretation and translation services mentioned in paragraph 2.1 above are provided to the Assembly, the Council and its subsidiary bodies, to programme activities of the Offices of the President and the Secretary General and of the Bureaux of the Secretariat, and to meetings such as Diplomatic Conferences, Legal Committee and Sub-committee meetings, Air Navigation and Air Transport Conferences, Divisional-type meetings and special meetings in the air navigation, air transport, legal and joint financing fields.

2.3 However, for certain meetings or activities, these services are not invariably provided to the fullest extent in all languages but are adjusted to actual requirements and resources. For example, at regional

air navigation meetings and workshops or seminars, the practice has been generally to have two working languages, the selection of those languages depending on the region. For panels, service has been provided in such of the languages as are required by panel members and decided by the Air Navigation Commission. Though for permanent bodies, full service has generally been provided, the translation services for the Air Navigation Commission are limited to draft reports of the ANC to the Council, including proposed amendments to Annexes and PANS documents. The reports of Regional Air Navigation meetings and panels are tabled before the Commission in the languages used at the meeting and any material received in a working language other than English, such as comments by States on proposed amendments to Annexes, is presented to the Commission in the original language version as well as in the English version. Also information papers and papers by observer organizations are no longer translated but reproduced in the available languages.

3. INTERPRETATION

3.1 Interpretation work is counted in sittings¹ and, during a year of normal meeting activity, interpretation services are made available for about 2 000 sittings, which normally includes three sessions of the governing bodies and up to 12 other meetings per year. In view of the reductions in staff that have been made over the last two triennia due to financial constraints, the staff interpreters have to be supplemented by free-lance assistance, particularly for overlapping meetings. In fact, the strength of the interpretation service represents core staff, i.e. 16 Professionals including Chief Interpreter for four languages. It should also be noted that, due to the make-up of the free-lance market in Montreal where some of the ICAO languages or language combinations are not readily available and recruitment of non-local interpreters is costly and cannot often satisfy short-notice demands for services, greater reliance on temporary staff does not seem feasible. When not assigned to interpretation duties, ICAO interpreters translate, which is not the case at the United Nations and most of its agencies.

4. TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATIONS

4.1 Translation work can be subdivided into translation of working papers, State letters, correspondence, meeting reports, etc., that do not require pre-editing and, once translated, are sent directly to printing, and translation of saleable publications (Annexes and amendments thereto, manuals, circulars, etc.) that are pre-edited by the English Editorial Unit and, after being translated, are processed by the respective editorial services of each section. With the present staffing levels, the LPB language sections are able to produce annually on the average a total of 21 000 translation page units (tpu's)² of new material, which includes also Arabic and Chinese, and about 6 000 tpu's are translated externally.

4.2 Owing to reductions in staff through not filling of vacant posts, recourse to external translation has increased significantly and now stands at over 20%. However, due to the nature of translation work at ICAO, when documentation is to be produced on a daily basis for standing bodies and various meetings with firm deadlines to ensure simultaneous and timely distribution, an adequate complement of regular staff is required, since external translators normally accept longer jobs with more flexible deadlines, and not all the languages are available on the local market. In fact, like in interpretation, the regular translation staff (nine

¹ One sitting designates one morning or one afternoon assignment per interpreter.

² One tpu is 400 words.

translator/revisers each in the French, Russian, and Spanish Sections and two in the English Section, including Chiefs) represents now core staff required to provide adequate simultaneous services for on-going activities of the Organization.

4.3 In the field of publications, production of new titles or editions has almost doubled since 1992, from 38 to 61 in 1997. In addition, over 100 non-saleable publications and Amendments are produced annually. The Printing Section has an annual output of about 80 million page impressions which can, however, exceed 100 million in an Assembly year, and the Document Control Unit processes approximately 7 000 new jobs yearly. Receipts from the sales of publications have increased significantly and, in fact, exceeded the projected budgetary figures by almost a million US dollars for the last three years. The proportion of language services by activity illustrated below shows increases in the percentage of services provided for meetings and programme activities. There were 15 meetings held at Headquarters during 1997, compared with 10 in 1996 and 12 in 1995 (an Assembly year).

Activity	1995 ³ (%)	1996 (%)	1997 (%)
Deliberative bodies	30.7	32.4	23.7
Meetings	41.8	26.3	29.1
Programme Activities	27.5	41.3	47.2

(Saleable and non-saleable publications and documents)

5. NEW TECHNOLOGY

5.1 Technological advances in the field of computer-assisted translation and terminology, remote translation and interpretation may offer great advantages and are being closely monitored. Regular contacts and exchange of information with the United Nations and other agencies are being made. Remote translation was successfully carried out in two languages for the AFI/7 Regional Air Navigation meeting which took place in Abuja (Nigeria) and in five languages for the World-wide CNS/ATM Systems Implementation Conference in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). During this exercise, a percentage of translations were provided overnight from Montreal using SITATEX over the aviation SITA Network. It is intended to expand remote translation techniques, which bring considerable savings in providing translation services.

5.2 A few computer-assisted translation and voice recognition software packages have been tested. The latest version of SYSTRAN automatic translation software has been installed and tried but proved to be unacceptable for the kind of material used at ICAO. In fact, similar results have been obtained by other UN agencies as well. However, a "TRADOS" translation workstation has produced very positive results and more copies of this software have been purchased and installed, and training of the staff is in progress. Voice recognition systems that allow a translator to dictate directly into the computer have become more sophisticated of late and merit serious consideration. Consequently, two systems, Via Voice and Dragon Naturally Speaking,

³ Assembly year.

have been procured and are being tested. When all these systems have been implemented and the staff trained, they are bound to produce, in due time, significant productivity gains.

5.3 In the field of terminology, work is in progress to re-engineer the terminology data base with a view to providing direct on-line access and to integrating Arabic and Chinese terminology to the current system as well as to linking ICAO's Regional Offices to the Headquarters' terminology information and providing capacity to publish two saleable publications (ICAO Lexicon and Definitions) in a CD-ROM format.

6. MEASURES REQUIRED TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE LEVEL AND QUALITY OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

6.1 As has been indicated in the preceding paragraphs, in view of financial constraints and the general trend of outsourcing, the strength of the language services had been reduced in the previous triennium but remained stable over the last triennium. Due to new technologies, increases in productivity and greater recourse to external translation, the Language and Publications Branch has managed to maintain and even increase the total output and level of services. The redeployment of vacant posts within LPB to strengthen new languages so far has not affected the actual strength of the other language sections and thus the level of service. However, some language support activities had to be downsized and certain restructuring was also carried out to streamline operations.

6.2 With the present regular staff and by resorting to external translation and temporary assistance, the ICAO Language and Publications Branch is capable of providing adequate levels and quality of service within their capacity which, in principle, should be matched to the demand that has been experienced over the years. Recent figures indicate, however, that the demand and workload have increased by some 14 per cent, which is unprecedented. The number of meetings that require language services has also grown. There is a tendency, which cannot but cause concern, for working papers to become more and more voluminous and numerous, often with very tight deadlines. Such an excessive demand, if not controlled, is bound to compromise the quality and level of services including the principle of simultaneous distribution of documentation.

6.3 In order that the level and quality of language services be maintained with the existing and budgeted resources and without increases in the establishment, it is essential that the demand should match the available capacity and every effort be made to ensure compliance with the relevant decisions and action taken by the Council and the Secretary General aimed at reducing the volume of documentation, achieving a balanced meeting schedule and greater discipline in the timely submission of documentation and improving the effectiveness and efficiency within the resources of the Organization.

7. ACTION BY THE ASSEMBLY

7.1 The Assembly is invited to note this report.

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