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ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON AGENDA ITEM 19

(Presented by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee)

The attached report on Agenda Item 19 has been approved by the Executive Committee.

Note.— After removal of this covering sheet, this paper should be inserted in the appropriate place in the report folder.

(3 pages)

Agenda Item 19: Multilingualism at ICAO

19.1 The Committee reviewed A42-WP/36, presented by the Council of ICAO, which stressed multilingualism as a fundamental principle at ICAO. It reported on progress in implementing the Multilingualism Strategy, endorsed at the 41st Session of the Assembly. This included the development of an Action Plan translating the Strategy into comprehensive and concrete actions. It highlighted the rollout of the Language Services Management System (LSMS), surveys on service quality and language proficiency among staff, and training on report and policy writing. Other achievements included the integration of artificial intelligence in language services, collaboration with United Nations entities, and the phased publication of Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and Procedures for Air Navigation Services (PANS) in all languages. The paper also addressed challenges in implementing the Strategy, specifically with respect to financial resources and the perception of language services as low priority. Resources should be identified in the regular budget and through voluntary contributions, including secondment of language specialists from Member States.

19.2 The Committee reviewed A42-WP/222, presented by China, which highlighted the importance of multilingualism in the achievement of ICAO's Strategic Objectives and the implementation of SARPs, PANS and the No Country Left Behind initiative. The paper urged States to avoid treating language services as reducible costs and to recognize multilingualism as a long-term investment. To respond to challenges in integrating artificial intelligence, it was necessary to review cybersecurity and other regulatory parameters, treat all AI tools and software equally and impartially, and to streamline internal processes. ICAO should enhance multilingualism awareness and culture, integrating it as a core element of the Organization's work.

19.3 The Committee reviewed A42-WP/422, presented by the Russian Federation, which reaffirmed support for multilingualism and parity of service in all six working languages. Concern was raised over the predominant use of English across the Organization, shortcomings in the implementation of the Multilingualism Strategy Action Plan, the lack of a comprehensive and systematic review on multilingualism and the necessary consolidated statistics, challenges in outsourcing, the quality of interpretation and translation, the exclusion of language services from the High Priority Enablers, and failure to ensure simultaneous distribution of documents in all working languages.

19.4 The Committee expressed overall support for the three working papers, recognizing multilingualism as a fundamental principle to achieve the goals of ICAO and underscoring the importance of language services in the implementation of SARPs, PANS and the No Country Left Behind Initiative. Parity of all six working languages was crucial to ensure equal participation by all Member States in ICAO's activities. The Committee also stressed the importance of ensuring the timely issuance of high-quality publications in all working languages.

19.5 The Committee requested the ICAO Secretariat to continue to leverage new technologies including artificial intelligence to further enhance efficiency and quality of language services, noting that artificial intelligence and digitalization should not take precedence over human language professionals and their training, which were paramount.

19.6 A Member State urged the Secretariat to maximize the impact of funds allocated in the budget or received through voluntary contributions. It did not support initiatives under the Multilingualism Strategy or Action Plan that had new financial implications, would likely increase future Member State contributions or cause reductions in other ICAO work. Noting that artificial intelligence tools reflected a broad range of training data, training methods and cybersecurity guardrails, it would only support the use of artificial

intelligence tools that enabled and aligned with certain minimum standards. It did not support A42-WP/222 or A42-WP/422 as they contained extensive proposals that would require thorough consideration of the cost implications and resulting impact on Member States.

19.7 The Secretariat informed the Committee that, although it had adopted new technologies including artificial intelligence, their current capabilities were considered as complementary to the work of human language professionals. It would continue to leverage rapidly evolving future applications to further enhance efficiency and quality of language services. It was also collaborating with other United Nations organizations to adopt common policies, practices and tools. The zero nominal growth budget proposal for the next triennium with no top-up for language services as a supporting enabler would further constrain the Organization's capacity to provide quality language services. However, the Secretariat would continue to implement the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy within the resources available.

19.8 The Secretariat further assured that it would continue to implement a quality management system for language services, including services provided by freelance professionals. The Secretariat encouraged Member States to provide necessary human and financial support, and noted that, as reflected in the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy, the Deputy Director, Languages, Publications and Conference Management was designated as the Multilingualism Coordinator responsible for the implementation of multilingualism at ICAO.

19.9 One Member State did not support action a) contained in A42-WP/36, as the Assembly had not been given a full overview of the current situation on multilingualism at ICAO. Another Member State indicated that it was not acceptable for multilingualism to be implemented as conditional on the availability of funds, as that would derail a fundamental principle of the Chicago Convention.

19.10 Having considered A42-WP/36, 222 and 422, and in light of the discussion, the Committee recommended that the Assembly, recognizing multilingualism as an integral part of the Organization's programmes and activities,

- a) acknowledge ICAO's efforts in the implementation of the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy and its Action Plan;
- b) request ICAO to continue its implementation of the ICAO Multilingualism Strategy endorsed by the 41st Session of the Assembly subject to available resources; and
- c) encourage Member States to support multilingualism through collaboration, secondments, or voluntary contributions.

19.11 In closing, the Chairperson acknowledged International Translation Day, established by the United Nations in 2017, to be celebrated on 30 September. He recognized the interpreters, translators and other language services staff, who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the seamless flow of information across linguistic boundaries.

19.12 The Secretariat invited delegates to complete a survey on language and conference services, to help assess and improve services in those areas.

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