



WORKING PAPER

ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 19: Multilingualism at ICAO

**MULTILINGUALISM: AN ICAO INITIATIVE TO STRENGTHEN
ITS ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

(Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) with the support of 20 Member States of the Latin American Civil Aviation Commission (LACAC))²

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This working paper addresses the importance of multilingualism as one of the core values for ensuring implementation of the strategic objectives of the United Nations specialized agencies, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization. In this connection, a set of activities is proposed to help ensure communication between ICAO and its 193 Contracting States, which is the key to progress on the “No Country Left Behind” initiative.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) take note of the information set out in this working paper;
- b) request the Assembly to treat multilingualism as an ICAO initiative, which will serve to improve its organizational culture and thereby ensure the necessary equality of opportunity to strengthen other initiatives such as “No Country Left Behind”;
- c) consider appointing a Coordinator for Multilingualism at ICAO, answerable to the Secretary General and responsible for fostering activities to promote compliance with ICAO Assembly Resolutions, with a view to democratizing access to the timely information so sorely needed in this period of revival of aviation activity, following the hardships caused by COVID-19;
- d) consider setting up a regulatory framework, together with a work plan to be developed over the next three years, which can be updated during the upcoming ICAO Assembly sessions;
- e) entrust the Secretary General with the promotion of activities in conjunction with the Regional Offices and Bureaus in order to support the realization of multilingualism in the activities context;
- f) instruct the Council and the Secretary General to work together to evaluate the multilingualism-related resolutions and ensure their implementation, while guaranteeing efficiency in the translation and interpretation services, for the benefit of all ICAO Members; and
- g) promote the establishment of a language internship programme for young university students who may in the future join the aeronautical sector, thereby also contributing to the ICAO initiative “Next Generation of Aviation Professionals” (NGAP).

¹Spanish version provided by Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

²Argentina, Aruba (Kingdom of the Netherlands), Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to all the ICAO Strategic Objectives
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Adequate use should be made of resources available from the regular budget, given the importance of language services to ICAO as a United Nations specialized agency.
<i>References:</i>	<i>Charter of the United Nations;</i> <i>Convention on International Civil Aviation (Doc 7300);</i> <i>Assembly 40th Session. Montréal, 24 September - 4 October 2019. Executive Committee. Reports and Minutes (Doc 10136) – Agenda Item 18;</i> <i>United Nations A/RES/73/346 Multilingualism – approved by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 September 2019. Seventy-third session of the United Nations General Assembly. 20 September 2019;</i> <i>Assembly Resolutions in Force as of 4 October 2019 (Doc 10140) – Resolution A37-25: ICAO Policy on the language services;</i> <i>A40-WP/464; A40-WP/451; and A39-WP/357</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Article 1.3 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), under “The Purposes of the United Nations”, describes one of the purposes as to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems, and in promoting development without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; thus, multilingualism has been recognized by the United Nations, since its inception, as a core value contributing to the reinforcement of the objectives established at the highest multilateral level.

1.2 For the foregoing reasons, multilingualism is considered as a means of promoting, protecting and preserving the diversity of languages and cultures in the world, enhancing efficiency and transparency and guaranteeing the principles of international law, such as equality of opportunity, as it seeks to include all members of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, such as ICAO, in the initiatives established to help improve the conditions in which the activities of Contracting States are conducted. In this connection, it should be stressed that Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are the official and working languages of the United Nations and of ICAO, a subordinate body of the latter, for which reason equality among these six official languages must be safeguarded.

1.3 Resolution A37-25, ICAO Policy on the language services, one of the *Assembly Resolutions in force as of 4 October 2019* (Doc 10140), emphasizes the importance of providing ICAO documentation in the official languages of the Organization, in order to ensure its proper functioning, since a uniform and harmonized understanding of regulations will contribute to maintaining the safety and security of aviation. It therefore reaffirms multilingualism as one of the fundamental principles to achieve goals of ICAO. It also recognizes the continuous objective of guaranteeing parity and quality of service and the simultaneous distribution of ICAO publications in all working languages of ICAO as a principle of the Organization’s publications and documentation policy.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 Through the “No Country Left Behind” (NCLB) initiative of ICAO, the Organization has made strenuous efforts to effectively implement the Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPS) under the Chicago Convention, as well as policies and programmes that are the responsibility of the 193 States

Signatories to the 1944 Convention on Civil Aviation and underpin the development and modernization of the global air transport system. However, in order to move forward in the discussion of new topics, debate proposals and implement regulations, it is crucially important to maintain seamless communication in all the official languages of the United Nations system, thereby facilitating the understanding and implementation of the rules and recommendations that have emerged in this field. Thus, through the discussion of ideas, including with experts from different regions, who consequently speak different languages, it will be possible to consolidate the desired “unity in diversity”.

2.2 This coordination should not only be considered from the standpoint of officially binding texts, but all the factors influencing the implementation of multilingualism should be assessed, since this is seen as a cross-cutting theme in the processes developed by the Organization. Examples include official documents and publications, SARPs, PANS, face-to-face and/or virtual meetings, web pages, online systems, training, etc., which in aggregate are crucial to ensuring the active participation of all Contracting States.

2.3 It is noteworthy that, despite the efforts deployed by the Secretary General to implement the guidelines contained in Resolution A37-25, ICAO Policy on the language services, *Assembly Resolutions in Force as of 4 October 2019* (Doc 10140), insufficient progress has been made in giving effect to multilingualism, because of budget cuts affecting translation-related expenditure, which ultimately impact essential activities such as:

- a) *Participation in the development of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and other regulations designed to update the international regulatory framework in force:* the non-English speaking experts of various countries face constraints on their participation in discussions on the drafting of binding documents for the development of the sector in their countries, a situation that fetters the participation of these States and undermines the principle of equal opportunity.
- b) *Publication of ICAO documentation:* need for timely publication of documents in all working languages, in relation not only to SARPs or PANS, but also the guidance materials created to guide States in their implementation. ICAO has published official documents on its Secure Portal, which are available only in English, bringing the number of English-only documents to more than 70 at the time of drafting of this working paper. There is a similar situation with circulars. And on various occasions binding documents have been distributed in English, obliging non-Anglo-Saxon States to wait for the publication of official translations in order to avoid exposure to possible errors of interpretation of the established texts.
- c) *Attendance at symposiums, forums and/or world events organized by ICAO:* it has been observed that face-to-face activities of global scope are mostly conducted in English; likewise, in cases where a simultaneous translation service is provided, it is available only for the official opening proceedings. This limits the involvement of non-Anglo-Saxon countries, and the information presented does not reach the entire audience.
- d) *Training*
 - i) *In the case of TRAINAIR PLUS:* the Standardized Training Package (STP) courses have been prepared and most of them are made available and dispensed in English only; this circumstance hampers the training of local technical staff who do not have the necessary ICAO standard to benefit from them. If it is wished to translate an STP,

the requesting State has to pay the author for the purchase of the course and carry out the translation, which ultimately has to be approved by the country of the author before it can be taught. In the case of the ITP, the documents are translated only by ICAO through GAT.

- ii) *Limits on access to ICAO-sponsored scholarships or fellowships:* most ICAO scholarships have as their primary requirement an advanced level of English, which ultimately limits the possibility for non-Anglo-Saxon States to benefit from the exchange of good practices arising out of these activities.
- iii) *Role of ICAO instructors in TRAINAIR PLUS:* given that most STPs and ITPs are in English, the instructors who do not have proficiency in English cannot deliver these courses.
- iv) *Web pages, online systems, digital tools, etc.:* ICAO has devised online systems for consultation by and interaction among all Contracting States on topics of interest and major importance for international aeronautical activity, one example being the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Implementation Centre (CRRIC) created as a website under the ICAO Secure Portal, with the aim of bringing together resources and tools to contribute to the implementation of activities of support, coordination, monitoring and presentation of reports relating to advances in the aeronautical sector in the wake of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite the great importance of this topic for reinvigorating global civil aviation, this platform and its content are maintained in English, and the same is true for the *COVID-19 Response and Recovery Platform*, housed on ICAO's official web page. Moreover, the Organization's social networks publish most of their content in one language only.

2.4 It is important to propose concrete initiatives to address these situations which seriously hamper the timely dissemination of information, adversely affecting the principles of equal opportunity.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF AN ICAO COORDINATOR FOR MULTILINGUALISM**

3.1 In resolution A/RES/73/346, the United Nations General Assembly referred to the request made to the Secretary-General to appoint an official as Coordinator for Multilingualism, who would be responsible for managing the implementation of relevant policies in all areas of activity, and emphasized the progress made since the creation of that post.

3.2 Taking into account United Nations experience in the appointment of an official to promote the implementation of outstanding tasks related to multilingualism, and for the sake of progress on the commitments assumed by the ICAO Secretary General in section 18.11 of Item 18: Multilingualism at ICAO, 40th Session of the Assembly, where the Executive Committee requests the Secretary General to “develop a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of multilingualism in the Organization, with a view to providing quality language services in a timely and efficient manner while strengthening linguistic capabilities both at Headquarters and in Regional Offices”, it is recommended that a Coordinator for Multilingualism be appointed at ICAO. Through this post, the Secretariat will be able to devise a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of multilingualism in the Organization, to be developed in the next triennium, with a view to improving the provision of language and translation services, both at Headquarters and in Regional Offices, as well as events, training, web portals, etc.

3.3 Appendix A to this working paper sets out a proposal for activities to be developed by the Coordinator for Multilingualism at ICAO and Appendix B defines the role of the Secretariat vis-à-vis the Coordinator.

4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 Multilingualism represents one of the core values for guaranteeing implementation of the strategic objectives of the specialized agencies in the United Nations system, such as ICAO, and the language services therefore play a key role in ensuring the proper implementation of the regulations, in a uniform and timely manner. It is important to stress that this represents a fundamental mechanism for ensuring effective communication between ICAO and its 193 Contracting States, for which reason it is considered the key to progress on the “No Country Left Behind” initiative.

APPENDIX A

Proposed activities to be developed by the Coordinator for Multilingualism at ICAO

- Develop a regulatory framework for multilingualism in order to promote a general and coordinated approach to the subject at ICAO, taking into consideration the recommendations made by States.
 - Design a strategic work plan grouping together all the ICAO resolutions on multilingualism in force, for the upcoming triennium, which may be extended for equal periods.
 - Submit proposals for the funding of language services, including the possibility of requesting voluntary support from the ICAO States Parties, the Commissions, Regional Offices, internships, etc.
 - Promote internships for young language students and new aviation professionals, and set up a team to handle this task.
 - Conduct a review of content on official pages and enquiry points available to States, as well as published studies and statistics, in order to achieve parity between the six official languages.
 - Implement an awareness-raising plan on the importance of guaranteeing multilingualism at ICAO, considered as a value for strengthening organizational culture and multilateralism.
 - Promote social, academic and work-related activities to encourage States to support multilingualism at ICAO.
 - Maintain contact with the United Nations Coordinator for Multilingualism and report on progress on this subject; and also request support, if necessary, for the implementation of outstanding tasks, with a view to ensuring their advancement within the Organization.
 - Conduct any activities that may be assigned by the Secretary General.
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APPENDIX B

Role of the ICAO Secretary General vis-à-vis the Coordinator for Multilingualism

- Supervise proper implementation of ICAO Assembly resolutions.
- Lend support to the Coordinator for Multilingualism to ensure the effective and systematic implementation of the resolutions in all departments answerable to the Secretariat and Regional Offices.
- Institute a quality management system in order to guarantee the standard of interpretation and translation services in the ICAO official languages.
- Continue working on the formulation of strategies that contribute to possible alleviation of the growing cost of language services under the ICAO budget.

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