



ASSEMBLY – 35TH SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 20: Increasing the effectiveness of ICAO

INCREASING ICAO EFFICIENCY

(Presented by the United States of America)

SUMMARY

Too great a percentage of the ICAO budget is currently devoted to administration, and in particular, to language services. Other U.N. agencies are taking steps to relieve their budgets of the cost of these services. This paper outlines some possible actions ICAO could take to follow suit, and asks that ICAO consider implementing these or similar actions during the coming Triennium, in order to dedicate more of its resources to the core mission activities of safety, security and the environment.

REFERENCES

A35-WP/35 – *Report of the Council on Implementation of Assembly Resolutions A31-2, A32-1, and A33-3*
Doc 9790 – *Assembly Resolutions in force as of 5 October 2001.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In order to sustain its mission under the Chicago Convention, ICAO must continue and expand efforts to enhance and improve efficiency, especially in its administrative functions. One area that should be considered is language services. As a specialized agency of the United Nations, ICAO has an incontrovertible mandate to conduct its business in multiple languages. However, by ICAO's own account, over one fifth of its triennial operating budget is now spent on language and publications services. This is becoming an overwhelming cost for a relatively small, technical agency. It also dwarfs spending on some of ICAO's core mission responsibilities. A new approach to handling these costs is necessary.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 It is highly appropriate and necessary for ICAO documentation and meeting proceedings to be available in multiple languages. This is part of the basis of the United Nations system, and of international cooperation in general.

2.2 Currently there are six official ICAO languages, with Arabic and Chinese having recently been added with no net increase in translation staff. The United States applauds this accomplishment, as well as the other cost containment efforts reported in A35-WP/35, such as the use of electronic translation programs and the use of private sector translators to complete some projects.

2.3 However, the proposed budget for the upcoming triennium includes over \$37 million for language services, an increase of over \$4 million from the last triennium and 18.8% of the overall budget.

2.4 Assembly Resolution A22-30 requires ICAO to “consider...ways in which the ICAO budget might be relieved of the rising cost of language services.” While the measures ICAO has taken to date are laudable, they have failed to relieve any of the cost burden. In fact, as stated above, significantly more of ICAO’s scarce economic resources are to be devoted to language services during the upcoming triennium than during the previous one.

3. **DISCUSSION**

3.1 ICAO should look to other U.N. organizations for practices that could help control language costs. For instance, the International Maritime Organization holds many of its technical meetings in only one or two languages, reserving translation in all official languages for major meetings.

3.2 Another agency, the Universal Postal Union (UPU), has largely taken language services out of its budget, and assesses each State fees on an “as-used” basis, and on a percentage of the cost and the number of States using each language.

3.3 The World Trade Organization has reduced translation costs by outsourcing much of its translations to developing countries.

3.4 According to ICAO, of 188 Contracting States, over 100 use English exclusively as their official language of correspondence. Thus, the bulk of the translation costs are being borne by all for the benefit of a smaller number of States. This could easily be rectified by taking the cost of language services out of the regular program budget, as the UPU has done, and supporting the provision of language services through fees assessed on the basis of language use.

3.5 Another option is to set a spending cap for language services at an appropriate percentage of the overall budget, and require that any additional spending be funded by voluntary contributions.

4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 These are only two options that ICAO could consider; many other creative and effective approaches could be devised. ICAO would save a substantial amount of money that could—and should—be reinvested in its core mission activities of safety, security and the environment. In the process, it could set an example for other larger international bodies of responsible stewardship of resources, with no decrease in the quality of service it provides to Member States.

4.2 We strongly encourage the ICAO Council to continue efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization.

5. **ACTION BY THE ASSEMBLY**

5.1 The Assembly is invited to relieve the ICAO budget of the cost of language services by exploring alternative means of providing and paying for these services, such as those outlined in this paper.