



# United Nations Industrial Development Organization

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## Industrial Development Board

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Item 10 of the provisional agenda

**Multilingualism**

## Multilingualism

### Report by the Director-General

In accordance with resolution GC.13/Res.4, provides a report on developments with regard to multilingualism at UNIDO.

## I. Introduction

1. At its thirteenth session, the General Conference adopted a resolution on multilingualism at UNIDO (GC.13/Res.4) and underscored the importance, for industrial development, of ensuring that all Member States and also the general public, particularly in developing countries, enjoy the greatest possible access to the Organization's information and documentation. The Conference also requested the Director-General, *inter alia*, to take, within existing resources, all measures necessary to ensure strict implementation of the rules of the Organization that govern its language arrangements with respect both to the Organization's relations with its Member States and to the use of languages in the work of the Secretariat. The Conference further requested the Director-General to present to the Board at its thirty-seventh session a progress report on the implementation of the resolution. The present document thus seeks to provide an update on relevant developments in that area.

For reasons of economy, this document has been printed in a limited number. Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copies of documents to meetings.

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## **II. Background**

2. The distinction between working languages and official languages in the practice of the United Nations can be traced back to its early days. The formal source for the basic rule that today English and French are the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat is represented in resolution 2 (I), entitled “Rules of Procedure Concerning Languages”, adopted by the General Assembly on 1 February 1946. It chose Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish to be the official languages in all organs other than the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while English and French were designated as working languages.

3. Since the establishment of UNIDO in 1967, the Secretariat has been using English and French as its working languages, in line with the aforementioned General Assembly resolution 2 (I). Since the entry into force of the Constitution of UNIDO on 21 June 1985, the rules regarding the use of working languages at the Organization have remained the same as those previously applicable, namely English and French.

4. It should be noted that, as in many other organizations of the United Nations system, a distinction is made between the use of working languages of the UNIDO Secretariat and the use of languages of the policymaking organs. The General Conference, the Industrial Development Board and the Programme and Budget Committee have adopted rules of procedure governing the use of languages of each of these bodies (commonly referred to as official languages), which are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Accordingly, all pre-session documents presented to the governing bodies are issued in all six languages as stipulated in their respective rules of procedure (i.e., rule 61 for the General Conference, rule 65 for the Board and rule 57 for the Committee). Pre-session documentation is also available in all languages on the UNIDO website. In-session documents (conference room papers) are issued in English only.

5. Agreements with States, United Nations system organizations or other intergovernmental organizations and entities are drawn up in one of the working languages of UNIDO, i.e., in English or French. When, in addition, the party to an agreement also wishes to conclude the agreement in another official language of UNIDO, the Secretariat complies with the request, provided that the respective UNOV Translation Section certifies the concordance of the originals prior to signature.

6. Official correspondence is sent to Member States in English, French and Spanish, in line with current practices at the United Nations based on instructions from the respective States. Project documents can be submitted either in English or French to the Programme Approval Committee.

## **III. Parity of official languages in the Secretariat**

### **A. Online availability of legislative documents**

7. All pre-, in- and post-session documents of the legislative organs are translated and issued in all six official languages. Moreover, these documents have

consistently been available online since 1998. Significant progress has been made in uploading already translated material issued since UNIDO became a specialized agency. Reports of all policymaking organs since 1985 have been uploaded in all six languages on the public website.

## **B. Information material, technical assistance and training**

8. As regards basic technical information, the Conference stressed the importance of providing information, technical assistance and training materials relating to the Organization in the languages of the beneficiary countries, when those are languages of the Organization. Besides English, Regional Programmes at the Secretariat also work in the main language of their respective region (e.g. French, Spanish or Russian). Most UNIDO Representatives in Africa and the Arab region are bilingual, thereby facilitating communication in both French and English internally and with local counterparts. Correspondence with Member States, stakeholders and various partners is mostly done in English and/or the region's main language. In the Europe and NIS Programme, the use of Russian has been essential to handle operations of the programme efficiently. The Latin America and the Caribbean Programme works mainly in English and Spanish, including day-to-day communications with field offices.

9. Technical assistance, training and capacity-building activities are mostly provided in the recipient country's language. Therefore, Regional Programmes often rely on staff from the Programme Development and Technical Cooperation Division fluent in the language of the recipient country to deliver technical assistance. A number of publications and project-related documents are issued in two languages or as bilingual texts. It is also envisaged that the Publications Committee provide guidance and advice on the selection of key publications for translation into other official languages.

10. In the area of administration, considerable progress was achieved with regard to the availability of key internal documents in both working languages. Following Board decision IDB.36/Dec.2 on multilingualism, the Programme Support and General Management Division launched a survey in the last quarter of 2009, and as a result, 53 internal documents, such as circulars, manuals, forms and Director-General's Bulletins, were identified and their translation into French was requested. The two main operational documents, the Financial Regulations and the Financial Rules are now available in French, while the Procurement Manual has been translated into both French and Spanish.

## **C. Staff recruitment**

11. In resolution GC.13/Res.4 (paragraph 3), the Conference stressed the importance of respect for the equality of official United Nations languages of the Secretariat, and requested the Director-General to continue taking appropriate measures thereon in conformity with Article 11, paragraph 5, of the Constitution of UNIDO. It should be noted that vacancy announcements for Professional posts usually indicate that, in addition to fluency in English, knowledge of French or another United Nations language is an asset. The Organization will continue to

systematically include this provision in vacancy announcements for Professional positions. The objective is to widen the recruitment scope and reach as many qualified, and possibly bilingual, candidates as possible. In the same vein, and in the interest of achieving a wide circulation of vacancy announcements, the latter are also advertised in francophone media. UNIDO also subsidizes for staff members the cost of learning official languages of the United Nations.

#### **D. Advocacy and UNIDO website**

12. The Conference also requested the Director-General to ensure that, within existing resources and by using new information and communication technologies, the Organization's latest documents would be made accessible on its website in all languages of the Organization, and also to progressively develop the possibilities of making the website available in all six official languages. Following discussions between the Advocacy and Communications Group (ACG), representatives from some Member States and the Policymaking Organs Secretariat, it was agreed that, although the UNIDO website is technically able to cater for all six United Nations languages, the initial focus would be on setting up a French website, based on the existing English version. A French-speaking consultant was hired to compile existing information in French, begin translating the texts presently only available in English, and develop a French version of the UNIDO website. A first version of this website was presented to Member States before being launched late November 2009, prior to the General Conference.

13. In order to continue ensuring a continuing flow of information, ACG will endeavour to update the French website regularly and in particular, feature stories and news will be translated and uploaded in parallel with their English versions. In cooperation with the relevant technical units, the news and events pages will be improved to allow for automated input and archiving mechanisms. Finally, UNIDO will seek to establish cooperative arrangements with educational institutions in various Member States in order to develop web pages also in other official United Nations languages.

14. The Organization is also undertaking efforts to bring more field offices online. A number of field offices are already online, some in more than one language: China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kenya, Lebanon, Madagascar (also in French), Morocco, Pakistan, Senegal (in French and English), South Africa, Tunisia (in French and English), Turkey, United Republic of Tanzania and Uruguay (in Spanish only). Subject to availability of funds, it is foreseen that the following offices should also go online: Algeria, Cameroon (in French), Colombia and Mexico (in Spanish), Nigeria, Sudan, Thailand and Viet Nam.

#### **IV. Coordination of multilingualism**

15. Since the issue of multilingualism was raised at the thirty-sixth session of the Board in 2009, the awareness throughout the Organization about the use of both working languages as well as the importance of having the means to communicate with all its partners and stakeholders in their own languages, has increased

significantly. All efforts are therefore undertaken to further promote linguistic diversity in UNIDO's work. The designation of a coordinator for multilingualism within existing posts in the Organization is still under consideration.

## **V. Action required of the Board**

16. The Board may wish to take note of the information provided in the present document.

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