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Agenda item 3

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## STRATEGY, PLANNING AND REFORM

### United Nations system-wide Agreement with the International Association of Conference Interpreters

#### Note by the Secretary-General

#### SUMMARY

*Executive summary:* This document refers to changes in the working arrangements at IMO meetings taking into consideration changes in the terms and conditions governing interpretation services and costs for interpretation of IMO meetings

*Strategic direction:* 4

*High-level action:* 4.0.5

*Planned output:* 4.0.5.1

*Action to be taken:* Paragraph 15

*Related documents:* C 106/D (paragraph 3(b).2(ii)), C 106/3(b) (paragraph 6.3); C 105/3(b); C/ES.26/3, C/ES.26/D and CWGSP 12/10

#### Introduction

1 The Council Working Group on Strategic Planning (CWGSP), at its twelfth session in September 2011, whilst revisiting measures to reduce meeting costs that had previously been rejected (C 105/3(b), annex 2, page 36), reviewed the working arrangements for, and the effective use of, interpretation services. The working group noted the detailed information provided by the Secretariat on these topics in document CWGSP 12/10 and also noted the changes that could be envisaged to those arrangements as a result of the entry into force, on 1 July 2012, of the newly renegotiated United Nations system-wide Agreement with the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), regulating the conditions of employment of short-term conference interpreters, of which IMO is a signatory.

2 This document proposes optional measures for the reduction of meeting costs related to the length and frequency of meetings and the use of interpretation services and provides information on and possible alternatives for changes to working practices for interpretation at IMO. These would enable the Organization to comply with the working practices stipulated in the above-mentioned Agreement, while at the same time accommodating its current budgetary allocations.

## **Background**

3 The working conditions and rates of pay of freelance interpreters within the United Nations system organizations are governed by an Agreement between the United Nations system organizations and AIIC, developed and agreed under the aegis of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). This Agreement is renegotiated every five years and, following extended negotiations which began in May 2011 and were finalized in February 2012, a new five-year Agreement will enter into force on 1 July 2012. The major issues under discussion during the negotiations were the introduction by the United Nations organizations of a new methodology for setting target daily rates for freelance interpreters and freelance interpreters' working conditions.

4 The new methodology was introduced to address the organizations' concerns that the existing methodology for the setting of daily rates, agreed during the last round of negotiations in 2006, had not succeeded in bringing these rates for all existing six Headquarters (HQ) duty stations (Austria, France, Italy, North America, Switzerland and United Kingdom), in line with an arbitrarily set core rate. The new methodology is, therefore, based on the United Nations salary scale and post adjustment system for staff in the professional and higher categories and, at 1 January 2012, yields a daily rate for London of £411.50. The principle of the World Rate is retained, where interpreters working away from their professional domicile will receive the World Rate, which at present stands at £386.15, also subject to adjustment in July 2012. The adjustment periodicity for all HQ rates is six months and the World Rate will be adjusted once a year.

5 As well as being a complete paradigm shift, this new methodology also provides stability, predictability and does away with wide fluctuations while at the same time offering the freelance interpreters greater pay parity and ease of calculation for the organizations.

## **IMO working practices**

6 With regards to the issue of working conditions, two requests, of particular relevance to IMO, were put forward very robustly by AIIC. The first was that all United Nations Organizations should apply the rate set under the new Agreement. The other, specifically targeted at IMO's practice of using "exceptional arrangements", such as restricted teams and paying interpreters 160 per cent of the daily rate as compensation for working additional sessions, was that the Organization should align itself fully with the terms of the Agreement by respecting and complying with the number of interpreter work sessions per contract period, stipulated in annex C to the Agreement, attached in annex 1. This request was also fully supported by the interpreters regularly engaged by IMO.

7 All the foregoing matters were successfully renegotiated and, as a consequence, the new Agreement with AIIC will soon enter into force and IMO, with many years' experience of and participation in these CEB-coordinated arrangements for the entire United Nations system, will seek to implement the new provisions taking into account the requirements of the Organization's meetings programme and within budgetary constraints.

## **Scenarios for working practices under the new Agreement**

8 The Council may recall that, at its twelfth session the CWGSP, focusing on the importance of measures to reduce meeting costs and, in view of the renegotiated Agreement, reviewed existing working practices of providing interpretation for every day of a meeting, and compared these with the actual number of plenary sessions worked by committee and sub-committee meetings (see tables attached in annex 2). The CWGSP examined in detail both the possibility of introducing new working arrangements without

compromising the efficiency of the meetings and the financial implications for IMO of aligning itself fully with the renegotiated Agreement's terms and conditions. In turn, at its twenty-sixth extraordinary session, the Council noted the Working Group's deliberations on these issues and its recommendation that, as a general rule applicable principally but not exclusively to sub-committees, meeting plans should be made on the basis of eight (instead of 10) plenary sessions requiring interpretation each meeting week, with arrangements for additional sessions being made only where there is a demonstrable need.

9 Also, following consideration of these issues at C/ES.26, subsequent decisions of the International Civil Service Commission have affected the budget for the current biennium (see document C 108/(5(e)), requiring the application of some changes to working practices in order to achieve cost-savings, and with a view to ensuring that interpretation costs remain within the budgetary allocation for the current biennium, the alternative working practices developed and presented in the two scenarios below are now put forward for consideration by the Council and for a policy decision on the interpretation arrangements that are to prevail for meetings scheduled to be held after entry into force of the renegotiated United Nations system/AIC Agreement in July 2012.

**.1 Scenario 1: Full interpretation for the entire period of meetings, e.g. five-day meeting with 10 plenary sessions**

In this scenario, in order to maintain the same level of interpretation currently provided at IMO meetings and as stipulated in annex C to the Agreement in annex 1 and depending on the number of languages, 14/11 interpreters are engaged for five days, in which they are limited to working eight sessions (a session being a three-hour period). To cover the shortfall in the number of sessions required, again depending on the number of languages, another five/six interpreters, are engaged for two/four days, limited to working either four or seven sessions, respectively (see attached in annex 3). Owing to the fact that additional interpreters, including some non-local ones, will have to be recruited, at the new rates of pay, currently estimated at £411.50 a day, interpretation costs for a five-day meeting with 10 plenary sessions, including travel and DSA costs, are estimated at £34,647.24 for a five-language meeting and at £47,268.21 for a six-language meeting.

**.2 Scenario 2: Five-day meeting with eight plenary sessions**

Reducing the availability of interpretation to eight plenary sessions in any five-day meeting also allows IMO to comply with the Agreement because this modality forms the very basis of the working arrangements stipulated by the Agreement, whereas it is IMO that has been using exceptional arrangements, an option which is no longer available under the renegotiated Agreement, as outlined in paragraph 6 above. This reduction could be achieved by careful planning of the work of the plenary sessions, particularly of sub-committees, where it is frequently the case that plenary does not need to meet for the full 10 sessions to successfully complete its workload as shown in annex 2. Interpretation costs for a five-day meeting with eight plenary sessions, based on the anticipated workload assumed by the Secretariat, is estimated to be £26,929.33 for a five-language meeting and £37,398.66 for a six-language meeting.

10 However, as indicated above, this arrangement requires advance planning by the relevant Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Secretaries as to the number of sessions with interpretation required. While this needs to be agreed at the time of the engagement of the interpreters, which takes place at least six months in advance of the meetings themselves and up to a year in advance for meetings such as Assembly or Diplomatic Conferences, the actual meeting timetable remains completely flexible up to and during the meeting itself.

Furthermore, in the event that, at a later date, a committee or sub-committee requires additional plenary sessions with interpretation, this is possible, depending upon the lead time given, additional budgetary implications and availability of interpreters.

11 For meetings scheduled with an intervening weekend, such as the eight-day MSC and the Assembly there will be no change to the existing working practices. The interpreter work sessions stipulated in annex C to the Agreement (see annex 1) would prevail and the appropriate number of interpreters would be recruited, thereby providing for full interpretation for the entire period of the meeting. In the case of the two-week Assembly meeting, which also needs full interpretation for the two committees meeting concurrently, IMO's current practice of recruiting the appropriate number of interpreters to cover all sessions of the two committees will not change. This would also comply with the terms of the United Nations/AIIC Agreement, with no additional cost implications.

12 Annex 4 provides the estimated interpretation costs of all IMO meetings scheduled to be held from 1 July 2012 through 31 December 2013, based on the examples outlined in scenarios 1 and 2 above. The table also provides a comparison with the current budgetary provision for interpretation during the same period.

### **Trialling of reduced sessions**

13 Taking into account the above-mentioned developments and the anticipated entry into force of the renegotiated United Nations system/AIIC Agreement in July 2012, the Secretary-General, mindful of the fact that, on a number of occasions over the past years, some committees and sub-committees, in light of their workload, have been able to voluntarily reduce the number of plenary sessions, instructed that a trial be conducted to review and, wherever possible, put into practice measures to reduce the number of plenary sessions requiring interpretation from 10 to eight sessions, with a view to assessing the resulting implications and assisting the Council with its policy decision on this matter.

14 In reviewing the outcome of the trial, the Council may note that one out of two committees and four out of six sub-committees, which have met since January 2012, have successfully completed their agendas, employing the restricted modalities of scenario 2 above (i.e. only eight sessions with interpretation), as shown in annex 2, to the full satisfaction of Member States. The reduced number of interpreted sessions has created no disruption to the normal flow of work of those meetings and, in fact, has given the opportunity to the Secretariat to expedite the production of the meeting and working group reports, which has considerably facilitated the meetings' work. Because of their workload, the remaining meetings held to date (one committee and two sub-committees) have used 10 sessions of interpretation.

### **Action requested of the Council**

15 The Council is invited to take note of the information contained in this document relating to the proposed changes in the working arrangements at IMO meetings as a result of the direct relationship between those arrangements and the cost for interpretation and to decide, as appropriate, on a policy for the future, taking into account the two alternative scenarios and corresponding estimated costs as compared with the budgetary allocations for the current biennium, shown in annex 4.

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**ANNEX 1**

**ANNEX C TO THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE AGREEMENT WITH THE  
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONFERENCE INTERPRETERS**

**Number of interpreter work sessions**

<b>Number of contractual days</b>	<b>Number of sessions</b>
1 day	2
2 days	4
3 days	5
4 days	7
5 days	8
6 days	8
7 days	8
8 days	10
9 days	12
10 days	13
11 days	15
12 days	16
13 days	16
14 days	16

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**ANNEX 2**

**COMPARISON BETWEEN CONTRACTED SESSIONS AND WORKED SESSIONS OF INTERPRETATION AT IMO MEETINGS – NOVEMBER 2010 TO 4 MAY 2012**

**Assembly/Council/Committee plenary sessions**

Meeting	Contracted sessions	Worked sessions	Unworked sessions
LEG 98	10	8	2
MSC 89	16	16	-
TC 61	6	5	1
COUNCIL 106	10	10	-
MEPC 62	10	10	-
FAL 37	10	6	4
COUNCIL/ES.26	4	4	-
ASSEMBLY 27	16	16	-
COUNCIL 107	2	1	1
MEPC 63	10	10	-
LEG 99	10	8	2

**Sub-Committee plenary sessions**

Meeting	Contracted sessions	Worked sessions	Unworked sessions
SLF 53	10	9	1
STW 42	10	9/7**	1
BLG 15	10	10	-
FSI 19	10	9	1
COMSAR 15	10	7	3
DE 55	10	10	-
NAV 57	10	8	2
FP 55	10	10	-
DSC 16	10	10	-
LC 33	10	10	-
SLF 54	10	7	3
BLG 16	10	8	2
DE 56	10	10	-
COMSAR 16	10	8	2
FSI 20	10	10	-
STW 43	10	6	4

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\* including one-day workshop on Piracy, during which STW plenary did not meet.  
\*\* actual STW worked plenary sessions.





**ANNEX 3**

**FIVE-DAY MEETING WITH 10 PLENARY SESSIONS**

**Five languages required for all sub-committee meetings  
(Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish)**

<b>Number of interpreters</b>	<b>Duration (Meeting days)</b>	<b>Number of sessions/assignments per interpreter</b>
11	5	8
<i>Additional interpreters to cover the shortfall</i>		
4	2	4
1	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	

**Six languages required for Assembly, Council, committees, LC/LP and Diplomatic Conferences  
(Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish)**

<b>Number of interpreters</b>	<b>Duration (Meeting Days)</b>	<b>Number of sessions/assignments per interpreter</b>
14	5	8
<i>Additional interpreters to cover the shortfall</i>		
4	2	4
2	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	

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ANNEX 4

**BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS OF VARIOUS MEETING INTERPRETATION SCENARIOS  
FOR THE PERIOD 1 JULY 2012 TO 31 DECEMBER 2013, BASED ON ESTIMATED  
DAILY RATES AND DSA RATES AS AT 1 MAY 2012**

Meetings	No of languages	Scenario 1	No of sessions Scenario 1	Proposed combined Scenarios 1 and 2	No. of sessions proposed combined Scenarios 1 and 2
<b>2012</b>					
NAV 58	5	£34,647.24	10	£26,929.33	8
DSC 17	5	£34,647.24	10	£34,647.24 <sup>*</sup>	10
MEPC 64	6	£47,268.21	10	£47,268.21 <sup>*</sup>	10
Dip. Conf	6	£18,447.30	6	£16,141.40	5
LC 34	6	£47,268.21	10	£37,398.66	8
C 109	6	£47,268.21	10	£37,398.66	[8]
MSC 91	6	£47,268.21	10	£47,268.21 <sup>*</sup>	10
<b>2013</b>					
FP 56	5	£34,647.24	10	£26,929.33	8
COMSAR 17	5	£34,647.24	10	£26,929.33	8
BLG 17	5	£34,647.24	10	£34,647.24 <sup>*</sup>	10
SLF 55	5	£34,647.24	10	£26,929.33	8
FSI 21	5	£34,647.24	10	£34,647.24 <sup>*</sup>	10
DE 57	5	£34,647.24	10	£34,647.24 <sup>*</sup>	10
FAL 38	6	£47,268.21	10	£37,398.66	8
LEG 100	6	£47,268.21	10	£37,398.66	8
MEPC 65	6	£47,268.21	10	£47,268.21 <sup>*</sup>	10
STW 44	5	£34,647.24	10	£26,929.33	8
MSC 92	6	£89,230.50	16	£89,230.50 <sup>*</sup>	16
TCC 63	6	£29,420.38	6	£23,854.10	5
C 110	6	£47,268.21	10	£37,398.66	[8]
NAV 59	5	£34,647.24	10	£26,929.33	8
DSC 18	5	£34,647.24	10	£34,647.24 <sup>*</sup>	10
LC 35	6	£47,268.21	10	£37,398.66	8
C/ES 27	6	£15,691.87	4	£15,691.87	4
A 28 & C 111	6	£135,072.35	18	£135,072.35 <sup>*</sup>	18
<b>TOTALS (A)</b>		<b>£1,094,395.93</b>		<b>£980,998.99</b>	
<b>Current budgetary allocation for the above meetings (B)</b>		<b>£997,400.00</b>		<b>£997,400.00</b>	
<b>Difference between the current budgetary allocation and the total estimated costs of the meetings (B-A)</b>		<b>-£96,995.93</b>		<b>£16,401.01</b>	

\* All meetings would follow Scenario 2 except those marked with an asterisk, which would need all sessions to have interpretation.