



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
13 December 2016

Original: English

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Inland Transport Committee

#### Seventy-ninth session

Geneva, 21-24 February 2017

Item 16 (a) of the provisional agenda

**Any other business: Issues relating to the servicing of meetings and availability of documents by the Committee and its subsidiary bodies**

### **Information note on rules and procedures for the submission and translation of documents for the Committee and its subsidiary bodies**

#### **Note by the secretariat**

##### *Summary*

At its seventy-eighth session, the Committee expressed its concern about issues encountered in the servicing of meetings due to delays in the translation of pre- and post-session official documents and reports (ECE/TRANS/254, paras 169 and 170). The secretariat was requested to provide detailed information on the rules that apply to the submission, processing and issuance of pre-session and post-session documentation for sessions of intergovernmental bodies serviced by the Sustainable Transport Division, and on their legislative origins. Furthermore, the Committee asked the secretariat to compile all relevant administrative rules in force that govern translation, especially in non-UNECE official languages, and other relevant administrative procedures and make this available to the Working Party Chairs and Vice-Chairs, as well as to the Bureau members.

The Committee is invited to **review** this information and **consider if it wishes to propose** changes to these rules to the relevant legislative authority.

1. At its seventy-eighth session, the Committee expressed its concern about issues encountered in the servicing of meetings due to delays in the translation of pre- and post-session official documents and reports by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) Division of Conference Management (DCM). It requested the secretariat to provide detailed information on the rules that apply to the submission, processing and issuance of pre-session and post-session documentation relating to sessions of intergovernmental bodies

serviced by the Sustainable Transport Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and on their legislative origins. This would allow the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) to consider such rules and propose changes to these rules to the relevant legislative authority, if needed. Furthermore, the Committee asked the secretariat to compile all relevant administrative rules in force that govern translation especially into non-UNECE official languages, and other relevant administrative procedures and make this available to the Working Party Chairs and Vice-Chairs, as well as to the Bureau members (see ECE/TRANS/254, para. 170).

2. From the review it seems that no internal rules address the specific situation in an absolutely clear way and a lot depends on mandate setting powers, and there is also room for interpretation of rules and mandates. When UNECE secretariat services global bodies, such as treaty bodies of global United Nations conventions, specific rules of procedures for each treaty body must be clearly included in the legal instrument, which was subject to acceptance by the Secretary-General and if necessary by the General Assembly notably in relation to budget implications, before the Secretary-General could accept to become depositary. Provisions in the different conventions may vary a lot and their individual review would be warranted, Budgetary implications of the translation and interpretation must also be taken into account. When a UNECE inter-governmental body acts as a treaty body for a global convention, the ECE rules are automatically applicable. However, the Convention may include other provisions specifically addressed to ECE. In light of the complexity of the issue, the secretariat is seeking further legal opinions, including the one from the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations to facilitate the consideration by the Committee that will be invited to decide on its course of action.

3. Soon after the creation of the United Nations, it became evident that the resources allocated to conference management, including translation services, were not sufficient to cover the ever-increasing documentation and meeting needs of the ever-increasing number of bodies created by the main organs of the United Nations and of their subsidiary bodies, and that rules had to be established to control the number of parliamentary sessions and the volume of related parliamentary documentation.

4. Every year, the General Assembly adopts a resolution on all aspects of conference management which serves as the legislative basis for administrative instructions issued by the Secretary-General or the Under-Secretary-General for the General Assembly and for Conference Management in order to give effect to the said resolutions. The department that implements these rules is DCM at the United Nations Office at Geneva, and in particular the Document Management Section (DMS) which screens all the documents submitted by the Sustainable Transport Division and other Divisions of UNECE for compliance with General Assembly resolutions and corresponding internal instructions. All rules applicable in Geneva, whatever the submitting department is, are clearly explained on the DMS website at <http://conf.unog.ch/dms>.

5. The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on Conference Management in the past sixteen (2000 to 2015) years are: A/RES/55/222, A/RES/56/242, A/RES/57/283 B, A/RES/58/250, A/RES/59/265, A/RES/60/236 B, A/RES/61/236, A/RES/62/225, A/RES/63/248, A/RES/64/230, A/RES/65/245, A/RES/66/233, A/RES/67/237, A/RES/68/251, A/RES/69/250 and A/RES/70/9. These are available in the six United Nations official languages on the United Nations Official Document System (ODS) at <http://documents.un.org/>.

6. The Regulations for the control and limitation of documentation are contained in Secretary-General Administrative Instructions issued as a series of fifty-eight documents under the symbol ST/AI/189 and addenda, also available on ODS. The series of administrative instructions is currently under review because they do not reflect all the most recent resolutions of the General Assembly and the most recent developments in

information technology tools used by the Secretariat in managing the processes of documentation, such as forecasting, optimizing translation resources, issuance, reproduction, storage and ODS, etc.

7. It should be borne in mind that the translation services provided by DCM are provided only in relation to parliamentary documentation and official publications, on the condition that these documentation and publications are properly mandated by an appropriate legislative authority.

8. All Secretaries of UNECE Sectoral Committees and Working Parties are expected to know the rules described in this document and to comply with them when submitting any kind of official document. Therefore, Working Party Chairs, Vice-Chairs or delegates who would like explanations about a specific rule should contact the Secretary of the Working Party to obtain the relevant information either from the Secretaries themselves or through the Secretary to DMS.

9. The main rules may be summarized as follows:

(a) All pre-session, in-session and post-session documents submitted to DMS must be entered in a '6-month' forecast, which is done twice a year and finalised 14 weeks before the starting date of the meeting. The forecast should indicate a correct symbol, the origin of the document (government, other delegation, secretariat) and the mandate, which is available in a resolution or decision, or in an approved programme of work.

(b) The length of pre-session documents originating within the secretariat is subject to a word-limit of 8,500 words (including footnotes and other references), while the length for those not originating within the Secretariat is subject to a word-guidance of 10,700 words. There is no official limit on the length of documents submitted by governments, but governments are invited to comply with the latter. If a document exceeds the limit but is of a legal nature and therefore mandated, negotiations on a feasible issuance date should be held in advance with DMS.

(c) Pre-session documents must be submitted to DMS at the latest 10 weeks before the opening of the session, so that documents may be processed within four weeks and issued six weeks in advance in accordance with rule 3 of the UNECE Rules of procedure ('10-4-6' pattern - see also General Assembly resolution 47/202). Arrangements can be made for late slotting of documents that cannot meet the 10-4-6 pattern due to force majeure reasons. Such requests should be restricted 'to situations that are truly beyond the control of the secretariat' and with the understanding that the processing time remains four weeks and, therefore, the issuance date will be after the 6-week timeline.

(d) Based on workload standards applied to documents under tight turn-around processing timeline, working level agreement is that in-session documents (Conference Room Papers or CRPs) must be submitted 24 hours in advance. Only three CRPs of a maximum length of 660 words (two estimated pages) each may be submitted daily for a given session.

(e) Post-session documents (reports) should be submitted two weeks after the end of a session and should not exceed 10,700 words. Although there is no General Assembly resolution requiring that post-session documents be issued within a given time frame, DMS has requested that the need of such reports for upcoming sessions, is mentioned in the 'remarks' field during the forecasting stage so that processing sections can be notified and these requests can be taken into consideration.

(f) DCM does not provide editing services to UNECE, therefore documents have to be edited by UNECE staff to make sure that all United Nations editorial standards are complied with. For this reason, certain Secretaries of working parties have requested that submissions from Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental

organizations be received 12 weeks before the opening of the session, i.e. two weeks before the 10-week deadline. This rule has been embodied in the rules of procedure of certain working parties.

(g) The General Assembly resolutions concerning multilingualism require documents to be distributed only when they are available in all working languages of the body concerned ('simultaneous distribution').

10. The competent United Nations body to consider conference management issues is the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, which is responsible for administrative and budgetary matters. In its work, it considers recommendations made by the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee and Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

11. Should ITC delegations wish to amend the Conference Management rules that are applicable globally to all United Nations bodies and their subsidiary bodies, the secretariat suggests that they should approach their permanent mission to the United Nations in New York and discuss how best modifications to the current rules could be proposed.

12. It should also be borne in mind that additional rules have to be applied to the various bodies of the United Nations: there can be restrictions based on their entitlements for conference services or translations depending on their terms of reference and rules of procedure.

13. For UNECE Sectoral Committees and subsidiary bodies, the terms of reference and rules of procedure are defined in E/ECE/778/Rev.5. Rule 44 states that English, French and Russian are the working languages of the Commission. Therefore, a Sectoral Committee or working party may not request additional languages for its proceedings, unless specifically mandated, when extrabudgetary funds are provided and when negotiations are undertaken with DMS to identify a slot with available capacity within processing sections.

14. Meetings of Treaty bodies, such as Administrative Committees of global conventions serviced by the UNECE Secretariat are expected to be conducted and documents prepared in languages required by the rules of procedure contained in the relevant conventions. The question remains to be further clarified when the Committee or its subsidiary bodies assume the role of a treaty body. Translation and interpretation practices are to be governed by the rules and mandates, but budget considerations play a role as well in the interpretation of these rules and mandates.

15. Apart from the UNECE Rules or procedure, the following documents serve as a basis for determining the entitlements of sectoral committees and their subsidiary bodies:

- ECE/EX/1 for working parties;
- ECE/EX/2/Rev.1 for teams of specialists (such as group of experts);
- ECE/2013/37 (Biennial report, 1 April 2011 - 11 April 2013), Appendix III (Guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies).

16. The Committee is invited to **consider** the above and **decide** on its course of action while also taking into account that this may warrant a full review of the programme budget implications, including the identification of sources of funding (regular or extra-budgetary) and according to the United Nations programme and budget setting procedures.