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### Multilingualism

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### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted in response to the General Assembly's request, in resolution 56/262 of 15 February 2002, for a comprehensive review of activities to implement its resolutions on multilingualism.

The report provides information on issues relating to the working languages of the Secretariat, the use of languages in meetings and public information. It updates statistics and offers a detailed survey of the language capacities of United Nations web sites. Annexed to the report is a response from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to the General Assembly's request for information on protection, promotion and preservation of all languages.

The report identifies improvements in the availability of United Nations outputs in the official languages, most achieved within existing resources as a result of innovations by the Secretariat. Such innovations will continue to improve language parity. However, the report acknowledges that the major obstacle to multilingualism is the shortage of resources and recommends that departments identify, in their budget submissions, the resources required to produce material in the six official languages and in relevant non-official languages.

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\* A/58/150.

## **I. Introduction**

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/262 of 15 February 2002, by which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-eighth session a comprehensive report on the implementation of its resolutions on multilingualism. He was also requested to report on measures that could be taken by Member States and international organizations within the United Nations system to strengthen the protection, promotion and preservation of all languages, in particular those of linguistic minorities and languages facing extinction.

2. The General Assembly also addressed issues related to multilingualism in resolutions on various other agenda items during its 56th and 57th sessions, including: questions related to the budget (56/253), human resources management (57/305), pattern of conferences (56/242, 57/283 B) and questions related to information (56/64, 57/130 B). Furthermore, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) has recently issued an extensive study on the implementation of multilingualism in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2002/11) (see A/58/93). As a result, Secretariat offices are increasingly sensitized to linguistic concerns. They are generally motivated to produce their outputs in multiple languages, official and even non-official, both to respond to the expectations of Member States and to make their own work more widely known. While numerous practical difficulties still exist with respect to full parity among the six official languages, substantial, albeit uneven, progress has been achieved in virtually all areas, as detailed below.

## **II. Issues relating to the working languages of the Secretariat**

3. As stipulated by the General Assembly in paragraphs 4 and 5 of its resolution 56/262, employment and promotion of staff continues to be carried out in strict accordance with article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations and in line with the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions, particularly resolutions 2480 B (XIII) and 55/258. While there exists no legislative requirement for staff, or prospective staff, of the Secretariat to have proficiency in both working languages of the Secretariat, or in all the working languages of the regional commissions, as applicable, the Secretary-General has continued to promote, to the extent feasible and within available resources, a more balanced use of all the working languages. Nevertheless, the influence of the language of the host city, whenever it is a working language, on the prevailing language(s) at the various duty stations remains unchanged from the previous report on multilingualism (A/56/656).

4. At Headquarters, a typical example is the Office of Legal Affairs, where fluency in English is the basic requirement while knowledge of one or more of the other official languages is encouraged. Knowledge of various languages is an important factor in recruitment and promotion, and sometimes candidates are interviewed in the languages in which they indicated some fluency. In some cases, work is assigned to staff taking into account the special needs for language accuracy.

5. In Geneva, however, French is more prevalent. Common Support Services, for example, is a bilingual environment where the two working languages, French and English, are used for exchanges, correspondence and meetings. The main working language is French, as most of the staff is locally recruited. French is also the

official language for outside communications with the Swiss authorities and local suppliers. French also predominates in the Security and Safety Section, although the objective is to have all staff achieve a very good knowledge of one working language and a working knowledge of the second language, and even a third official language. For this purpose, efforts are being made through both recruitment and training.

6. In Vienna, as well, the security staff are proficient in either of the two working languages and also in one, sometimes two, of the following five official languages: Arabic, French, English, Russian, Spanish, as well as numerous non-official languages. In Bangkok, security officers are encouraged to learn Thai as well as English and other official languages.

7. Offices with a strong field component may find that competency in non-working, even non-official, languages is a major asset. For example, while English and French are working languages in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, used at Headquarters and in most field offices, other languages are an advantage for recruitment against posts in certain duty stations (for example, Russian in Moscow, Arabic or Hebrew in the occupied Palestinian territory, Portuguese in Angola).

## **A. Vacancy announcements and recruitments**

8. In May 2002, the Office of Human Resources Management introduced a new system of recruitment, selection and placement of staff in the Secretariat. Using web-based technology (Galaxy), the system allows simultaneous posting of vacancy announcements at all duty stations and, for external vacancy announcements, on the United Nations web site. As of 31 May 2003, the new system has generated a total of 1,910 vacancy announcements, including 1,430 for the Professional and higher categories. French versions of all vacancy announcements became a standard feature in Galaxy at the beginning of 2003. Versions in all other official languages will be available by the end of 2003.

9. Applications may be submitted in all official languages. Of 100,437 applications received between 01 May 2002 and 31 May 2003, 69.6 per cent were in English, 15.9 per cent in French, 10.8 per cent in Spanish, 3 per cent in Russian, 0.5 per cent in Arabic and 0.2 per cent in Chinese.

10. All vacancy announcements clearly spell out the linguistic requirements, in accordance with the projected functional and geographical work environment. At Headquarters, and at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), for example, vacancy announcements typically include the following text: "English and French are the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat. For the post(s) advertised, fluency in oral and written English is required. Knowledge of a second official United Nations language is an advantage."

11. These linguistic requirements are examined at different stages of the recruitment process. The precise level of language mastery as determined by the content and environment of the function is evaluated by the substantive department/office, as advised by the Office of Human Resources Management.

## **B. Language incentives**

12. In accordance with administrative instruction ST/AI/1999/2 of 13 May 1999, incentives are offered to staff members to study and use the official languages. Language proficiency examinations in the six official languages are conducted twice a year at numerous test sites for staff members throughout the system. For those in the Professional category and above in posts subject to geographical distribution who have adequate and confirmed knowledge of a second official language, the interval between salary increments is reduced to 10 months where the normal qualifying period is one year, and to 20 months where the normal qualifying period is two years. A language allowance is payable to staff members in the General Service and related categories and in the Field Service category; a second language allowance is payable to staff in these categories who pass a language proficiency examination in a third official language.

## **C. Learning of the six official languages**

13. The importance of linguistic competence is reflected in the budget for the biennium 2002-2003 and the proposed budget for 2004-2005, which maintain resources for language training at all levels. In the report of the Secretary-General on human resources management reform (A/55/253), language and communications programmes to promote multilingualism are described as “targeted programmes to address priority needs” of the Organization (see A/55/253, annex VI, para. 7).

14. In addition to regular language courses, special courses are offered at Headquarters, such as “Réunions et négociations” and “Media-assisted Arabic”. Courses are also offered in oral presentations, improving pronunciation and drafting letters, memorandums and reports. Language teachers have developed individual web sites, with course syllabi and assignments and links to relevant language learning web sites. Self-study centres at major duty stations provide staff members with the latest multimedia software to study at their own pace, including languages for mission assignments, such as Haitian Creole and Portuguese. In Vienna, workshops were held to cover effective writing in English, conversation in French, Chinese and English, as well as specialized terminology. In Nairobi, there are workshops in administrative writing, report writing and conversation, in both English and French, although efforts to extend the range of courses are limited by the fact that the Language Programme is entirely self-financed.

15. Certain duty stations also offer classes in local languages. ESCAP organizes Thai language training outside office hours to help international staff members to understand the language and deepen their sensitivity to the culture. Similarly, the United Nations Office at Vienna offers German and the United Nations Office at Nairobi conversational Ki-Swahili.

16. Table 1 indicates the number of participants in the language training programmes at the four headquarters duty stations in 2001 and 2002.

Table 1  
Number of participants in language training programmes, 2001-2002

<i>Office</i>	<i>Arabic</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Russian</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>2001</b>							
UNOG	139	88	421	850	151	438	<b>2 087</b>
UNON	14	0	112	241	7	69	<b>443</b>
UNOV	68	32	106	116	35	155	<b>512</b>
HQ	411	203	961	1 551	297	945	<b>4 368</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>1 600</b>	<b>2 758</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>1 607</b>	<b>7 410</b>
<b>2002</b>							
UNOG	148	103	476	977	151	456	<b>2 311</b>
UNON	38	6	82	150	4	65	<b>345</b>
UNOV	82	30	65	107	34	138	<b>456</b>
HQ	478	257	892	1 519	281	969	<b>4 396</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>746</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>1 515</b>	<b>2 753</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>1 628</b>	<b>7 508</b>

17. Figures for ESCAP for 2002 are as follows: Chinese 58; English 255; French 48; Russian 9; Spanish 22. Figures for ECLAC for 2002: English 87; French 38; Spanish 7.

18. Figures for ESCAP for 2003 (2 terms) are as follows: Chinese 46; English 170; French 57; Russian 13; Spanish 22. Figures for ECLAC for 2003: English 95; French 52; Spanish 11.

19. Table 2 updates information contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/58/93, table II.2).

Table 2  
Number of participants taking a language proficiency examination, 2000-2002

<i>Session</i>								<i>Total per year</i>	<i>Registered per year</i>
<i>Date</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Arabic</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Russian</i>	<i>Spanish</i>		
Jan. 2000	51	12	5	726	231	81	79	1 134	2 292
May 2000	52	15	3	722	244	82	92	1 158	
Jan. 2001	53	3	6	681	232	78	111	1 111	2 372
May 2001	54	20	2	793	280	59	107	1 261	
Jan. 2002	55	43	6	952	302	90	121	1 514	2 852
May 2002	56	19	9	872	265	46	127	1 338	

*Note:* It should be noted that not all candidates sitting for a language proficiency examination are students in language training programmes; some are staff members who wish to confirm their knowledge of languages in order to qualify for incentives.

### **III. Issues relating to the use of official languages in meetings**

20. Information on utilization rates of interpretation services at Headquarters, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi are contained in section 2 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/58/6 (sect. 2)), tables 2.15, 2.22, 2.31 and 2.39, respectively. Moreover, issues relating to the improvement of interpretation services are discussed in detail in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/58/194 and Corr.1 and 2).

21. In accordance with paragraph 8 of resolution A/56/262, the Secretary-General has reviewed the main reasons why informal calendar meetings are held without interpretation and determined that the explanation is twofold. First, as such meetings are not provided for in the official calendar of conferences and meetings approved by the General Assembly, services for these meetings are offered, whenever possible, on an “as available basis”. They are thus supported from “within existing resources” that may become available owing mostly to the cancellation of meetings of calendar bodies. As the capacity of duty stations to provide interpretation services varies significantly, the likelihood of their providing interpretation services further to ad hoc requests is equally at variance. For example, since the established capacity to provide such interpretation services is commensurate with the daily number of calendar meetings to be supported, the chances that a calendar meeting may be postponed or cancelled are greater in New York, where resources are earmarked on a daily basis to support meetings of the Security Council, than at any other duty station. For that reason, the overwhelming majority of requests to provide interpretation services for informal meetings are met at Headquarters. Similarly, the capacity for a smaller duty station to provide services on an “as available basis” decreases in accordance with the number of budgeted resources earmarked to supporting calendar conferences and meetings.

22. The second factor resides in the methods of work developed over the years by intergovernmental bodies whose members prefer to conduct informal consultations and negotiations without interpretation. Such practices, well developed in certain duty stations, may have originated in the limitations imposed by the established capacity at those duty stations. Once an intergovernmental forum routinely conducts its informal meetings without interpretation, however, its membership reaches the conclusion that its informal consultative process is furthered by an informal work dynamic without the benefit of formal interpretation services.

### **IV. Issues relating to public information**

23. During the period under review, as mandated by General Assembly resolutions 56/64 and 57/130 B, the Department of Public Information has placed increasing emphasis on preparing its outputs in the six official languages, and numerous non-official ones, to the extent possible within existing resources. It does so in full recognition that its mission of “strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact” requires it to address civil society worldwide in its own languages. It was in this spirit that the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information assumed the role of Coordinator for questions related to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat. Despite the obstacles faced (insufficient resources, difficulties in recruiting qualified staff) notable progress has been achieved.

## A. United Nations web site

24. In its role as manager of the United Nations web site, the Department of Public Information has emphasized multilingualism as a major objective. The volume of material posted in languages other than English continues to increase, and access to this content has grown considerably. Table 3 represents the increase in hits, pages and visits between May 2002 and May 2003 in the six official languages.

Table 3  
Access to language sites (May 2002-May 2003)

		<i>Hits</i>		<i>Pages</i>		<i>Visits</i>		<i>Unique URLs</i>	
Arabic	May 02	2 116 438	1.44%	320 803	1.50%	44 911	1.98%	18 856	3.83%
	May 03	3 085 977	1.44%	445 485	1.88%	62 529	2.28%	13 553	4.30%
Chinese	May 02	1 244 531	0.85%	138 596	0.65%	25 395	1.12%	15 424	3.14%
	May 03	2 944 211	1.37%	333 366	1.41%	47 822	1.74%	18 321	5.81%
French	May 02	7 375 669	5.02%	846 764	3.97%	149 430	6.58%	25 935	5.27%
	May 03	10 177 246	4.75%	1 113 520	4.70%	199 403	7.27%	24 131	7.65%
Russian	May 02	2 201 143	1.50%	459 661	2.16%	42 471	1.87%	77 679	15.79%
	May 03	2 734 847	1.28%	455 037	1.92%	50 663	1.85%	15 177	4.81%
Spanish	May 02	11 720 283	7.97%	955 394	4.48%	187 818	8.27%	22 140	4.50%
	May 03	15 026 010	7.01%	1 059 848	4.48%	239 668	8.74%	14 011	4.44%
English	May 02	122 319 469	83.22%	18 601 945	87.24%	1 819 804	80.17%	331 934	67.47%
	May 03	180 231 869	84.14%	20 267 641	85.61%	2 141 354	78.11%	230 310	73.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>May 02</b>	<b>146 977 533</b>		<b>21 323 163</b>		<b>2 269 829</b>		<b>491 968</b>	
	<b>May 03</b>	<b>214 200 160</b>		<b>23 674 897</b>		<b>2 741 439</b>		<b>315 503</b>	

25. The practice of direct linkage from the web site to documents on the Official Document System (ODS) has significantly increased the number of parliamentary documents accessible in the six official languages. When the Google search engine is fully operational for the main United Nations web site in late 2003, searching will be available in the six languages as well, extending to the full text of documents on ODS.

26. Multilingual web development is also facilitated by the new, more centralized and integrated Internet service of the Department of Public Information. This will ensure greater adherence to standards for rendering new designs in all official languages, as stipulated in the guidelines for Internet Publishing (ST/AI/2001/5). Multilingualism is a major consideration in the discussions of the Department of Public Information with substantive Departments on new web site projects.

27. Member States have begun to stress the responsibility of the individual Departments for producing their web sites in the six official languages.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, despite efforts by the Department of Public Information and other Departments, the gap between languages on the United Nations web site remains. This is because not all web content has traditionally been created in all languages

(for example, press releases and treaties, the production of which in all languages would have major financial implications for the Organization). The recent agreement between the Department of Public Information and the University of Salamanca to provide translations of information materials for posting on the United Nations Spanish site, at no cost to the Organization, offers a model to help reduce the language gap. So far, over 2,000 pages have been translated by the University, which has, inter alia, notably increased the Spanish content on the Department's United Nations Cyberschoolbus site. Similar sources are being identified for the other languages.

28. As far as the major web sites of the Department of Public Information itself are concerned, the United Nations News Centre merits special note. Following the successful development of a database-driven site in English and French, the Arabic, Russian and Spanish versions of the site were launched during 2003. The Chinese version is expected to be online by mid-September 2003. All versions are designed on the same UNICODE platform, which allows the use of dynamic database functions in all languages. Improvements made to any one of the news centres can be extended to the others, while the data and programming segments can be reused for other applications, such as news clippings.

29. Using in-house technical and linguistic expertise, programming and graphic design is now carried out as a common service for all languages. This has resulted in a more uniform appearance of web pages in all official languages, and much faster information delivery. These innovations and productivity improvements have permitted implementation of the news centres and other sites in different languages to be achieved within existing resources. Even so, given the need for back-up and support systems to sustain this daily operation, additional capacity is still required. Additional resources are also needed to provide webcasting in the six official languages.

30. Another web site of the Department of Public Information, UN Works, is produced in all six official languages and Japanese (developed by UNIC Tokyo). The UN Works programme also relies on media partners to produce and distribute public service announcements, programming and web site content adapted for different languages. One media partner reaches over 425 million homes in 155 countries with programming in 33 languages.

31. Illustrative examples of successes, problems and solutions in various Secretariat Departments and Offices follow below.

#### **Department for General Assembly and Conference Management**

32. UNTERM, a major terminology database and web site, provides equivalents in the six official languages for over 70,000 topical terms, proper names and common phrases used in United Nations documents and publications.

#### **Office of Central Support Services**

33. The Procurement Division brochure "How to do business with the UN" is produced in all the official languages both in printed form and on the Web. However, multilingual availability is limited to basic information as the Division lacks the resources to translate daily updates to its site.



34. The United Nations Postal Administration operates two web sites, one in New York in English, and the other in Vienna in English, French and German for European customers. Resources permitting, a single site will be developed in 2004-2005, including all six official languages, German and Italian.

35. For the Information Technology Services Division, multilingualism is driven by the requirements of client offices. For example, ePAS was developed in English and French as requested by the Office of Human Resources Management, while ODS was developed in both content and functionality in the six official languages as required by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The Division fully supports multilingual requests, subject to resource availability.

#### **Office of Internal Oversight Services**

36. As a relatively small office with limited resources, the Office of Internal Oversight Services has hitherto provided its Internet site, with substantial information about its oversight activities, in English only. However, a French version is planned, resources permitting.

#### **Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

37. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs encourages its web site managers to use ODS to post documents in all official languages systematically, and will develop a contents management system to facilitate this task. The challenge lies in posting other materials in several official languages. Considerable efforts are being made in this direction, by various means, to the extent permitted by available resources. Examples include:

- (a) Millennium indicator web site (Statistical Division): English and French, with Spanish under development;
- (b) Methodological publications (Statistical Division): all official languages;
- (c) Johannesburg Summit web site (Division for Sustainable Development, in cooperation with the Department of Public Information): all six official languages;
- (d) Division for Sustainable Development web site: English only for this very labour-intensive site (about 1,000 individual pages, continually updated), but with links to available documents in other languages;
- (e) SIDSnet (small island developing States): English and French, made possible by a contribution from the Government of France in collaboration with the International Organization of la francophonie;
- (f) Youth web page (Division for Social Policy and Development): English and French, using internal staff resources;
- (g) Beijing Plus 5 web site (Division for the Advancement of Women): all six official languages.

38. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is concerned about timeliness; specifically, it is concerned that posting information in several languages might delay updating, or that it might be difficult to update pages with equal timeliness in all languages. A second consideration is the quality of translations provided by outside partners. The involvement of the substantive offices or translation services

would still be needed to ensure consistency and quality control. Finally, while resources have been requested for updating the language content of the Department's web site in 2004-2005, they represent only a small step towards multilingualism.

#### **Office of Legal Affairs**

39. Most of the web sites of the Office of Legal Affairs are in English, with two noteworthy exceptions. The web site of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) has fully navigable sites in English, French and Spanish, with current and archival documents also available in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. A fully navigable Russian site is scheduled for late 2003.

40. The United Nations Treaty Collection, containing treaties and other categories of treaty-related information, is offered to Member States, international organizations and other clients in English and French, with the full texts of treaties posted in over 140 original languages. The Treaty Handbook is posted in all six languages, while texts of multilateral conventions on terrorism and organized crime, both United Nations and regional, are available in all authentic languages, in addition to English and French. The category of "recently deposited multilateral treaties" is being continuously expanded to include new instruments in their authentic languages.

41. Other language sites are still under construction, pending availability of the requisite staffing. Since the vast majority of the web sites of the Office of Legal Affairs are maintained by professional staff so as to ensure substantive accuracy, availability of multiple language versions is a function of the linguistic and other technical skills of the officers concerned; thus, time-consuming translation activities are subject to their respective workloads. Furthermore, web site maintenance is ancillary to their main assignments. Finally, current resources allow little room for the coordination of translation of the Department's various web sites, which are numerous, content-rich and dynamic, requiring updating on a weekly, if not daily, basis.

#### **Department of Political Affairs**

42. The Department of Political Affairs is currently working with the Department of Public Information to render the Security Council web site in all six official languages, with the Department of Political Affairs covering the costs for updating the site in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. The web site of the Department of Political Affairs has links to all language versions of Council documents.

43. The United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) contains the texts of current and historical United Nations material on the question of Palestine and other issues related to the Middle East, essentially in English. However, efforts have recently been made to add links to other language versions. Furthermore, since February 2003, the Department of Political Affairs has begun adding documents to the ODS in all official languages, including those dating back some 10 years. The French versions of relevant United Nations press releases have now been posted.

### **Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

44. *OCHA On-line* is currently exclusively in English. The ongoing redesign provides for all six official languages, but the issue of resources for development/translation needs to be addressed. The content of *Reliefweb* is approximately 85 per cent English, 10 per cent French and 5 per cent Spanish. French is used for West African countries and Spanish for Latin America (Colombia). New guidelines are being developed on the basis of the principle of publishing in different languages “according to business objectives”.

45. The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) news service is in English and French. However, the rolling banner on the French page — “Les contraintes financières empêchent la traduction de la plupart des services de IRIN” — illustrates the challenge of translating documents into French.

### **United Nations Office at Vienna**

46. In Vienna, there are two central web sites maintained on behalf of the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, respectively. Both are in English but have links to official documents in all official languages (and some documents in German and Portuguese). In addition to the pages of UNCITRAL and the United Nations Postal Administration (see above), the Vienna site hosts an International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) page in English, French and Spanish, with some press releases available in German. The Office is in the process of translating the main components of its web site into all official languages.

47. While a lack of funding remains the main constraint, certain programmes have introduced linguistic diversity on their web pages. The External Relations Unit of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime encourages the posting of documents in as many languages as possible (emphasizing official languages), with substantive offices selecting the materials to be translated. The Unit’s own products are almost always translated into multiple languages, official and non-official. The Unit is also developing multilingual web sites for field offices (for example, a Portuguese site for the Brazil regional office).

48. VINTARS, a web-accessible terminology database in the six official languages, was developed in UNICODE, to handle full-complement Latin script, Arabic, simplified Chinese and Cyrillic equally. VINTARS provides specialized terminology in the subject areas of the United Nations Office at Vienna (drugs, crime, outer space, and trade law), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO). It exists in an in-house version containing some 30,000 entries and an external version with some 10,000 records.

### **United Nations Office at Nairobi**

49. In Nairobi, there are three central web sites maintained for the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT). Each site is mainly in English, with links to official documents in all official languages. However, in 2003, several web pages, designed on behalf of the United Nations system were produced in multiple languages, for example, the World Water Day 2003 site (in English, French and Spanish) and the World Environment Day 2003 site (in Arabic,

English, French and Spanish). The secretariats of various UNEP-administered multilateral environmental agreements maintain web pages in several languages, generally English, French and Spanish.

50. Several UNEP and UN-HABITAT regional offices also maintain web sites in multiple languages: the UNEP African Office page is in English and French, as is the UN-HABITAT Arab and African States Regional Office site; and the Latin American and Caribbean Offices sites for both organizations are in English and Spanish. The UN-HABITAT Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific maintains a site in English and Japanese, as does the UNEP Osaka-based UNEP International Environmental Technology Centre. The UN-HABITAT Beijing Information Office site is available in Chinese and English.

51. UN-HABITAT is currently approaching donors, initially from Spanish-speaking countries, to support the translation of key pages of its main web site into Spanish. If this initiative is successful, the agency will add other languages as well.

#### **Economic Commission for Africa**

52. The web site of the Economic Commission for Africa is in English and French. Considerable efforts are made to strengthen the French web presence, including recruitment of a French webmaster under a grant from the Government of France. Moreover, a project is under way to develop an Arabic version of the site.

#### **Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

53. ESCAP has an “English-only” web site, but Commission session documents are carried in Chinese, French and Russian as well as English. Developing parallel web sites in additional languages would require careful planning and adequate resources. Consideration must be given to the following issues: (a) technical decisions on character sets, fonts, encoding methods and language tags; (b) additional hardware and software requirements to accommodate parallel sites; and (c) editing and translation of existing pages (currently 8,800 pages).

#### **Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean**

54. Most of the material posted to the web site of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is available in Spanish and English, making it possible to achieve significant success in disseminating ECLAC outputs via the Internet. Additionally, the web site of the ECLAC office in Brasilia is completely in Portuguese; it includes that office’s regular publications and Portuguese versions of several of the Commission’s main publications. The online catalogue of the ECLAC Library is available in Spanish and English, with French and Portuguese versions under development.

#### **Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

55. The web site of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is maintained in English and Arabic. The Library web page provides lists of both Arabic and English journals available at the library as well as links to valuable sources of information in both English and Arabic. The library e-mail is available on its web page for correspondence in English and in Arabic. Furthermore, the library catalogue is bilingual Arabic/English and accessible to Internet users

worldwide. The Library is also responsible for scanning ESCWA documents in Arabic, English and French for ODS.

## **B. Radio and television**

56. United Nations Radio produces and broadcasts a live 15-minute news and current affairs programme from United Nations Headquarters every day, including holidays, in the six official languages. Programming is also produced in Portuguese and Kiswahili. These programmes are also accessible via the Web.

57. The Department of Public Information produces its regular video output, including the series of video news magazine features *UN in Action* and the annual *UN Year in Review* in all official languages as required by partner stations and other outlets.

58. To meet the needs of francophone staff and delegates, French-language programming from TV5 is now broadcast on television sets in the public areas at Headquarters.

59. Broadcasting services of substantive offices include the IRIN Outreach Radio Project which provides the victims of humanitarian crises with impartial information as well as a better understanding of the activities and objectives of the humanitarian community. The project supports efforts towards conflict resolution and reconciliation by providing local radio broadcasters with thematic programmes in local languages. The project was tested in Somalia and then expanded to Burundi (in French as well as local languages).

60. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has produced video spots, which are posted on its web site in 20 languages, and is currently producing 35 radio spots in seven languages (the six official languages plus Hindi), which will be posted as well. Radio spots have also been produced in Serbian, Greek and Turkish.

61. UNEP works with the London-based Television Trust for the Environment on the production of a weekly programme on environmental affairs that is broadcast globally on the British Broadcasting Corporation's World Service in English and Chinese, with many programmes also available in Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. In addition, UNEP has produced several video news releases in English and French.

## **C. Publications and other information material**

62. *Press releases.* Press releases, including coverage of all open intergovernmental meetings at Headquarters, as well as United Nations conferences away from Headquarters, are provided in English and French both in hard copy and on the United Nations web site.

63. *Promotional materials.* The Department of Public Information regularly produces background materials, such as fact sheets, brochures and press kits, on the priority issues of concern to the United Nations, and to promote conferences, international years and other special events. Depending on the availability of resources, these materials are produced in English, French and as many additional official languages as is feasible. Even if resources do not allow printing in all

official languages, materials are often translated for posting on the web site in all official languages.

64. *Major outreach publications.* The quarterly *UN Chronicle*, which has been placing new emphasis on educational outreach, is published in all six official languages. This has been made possible through the internal production of the English and French editions, as well as through innovative and cost-saving co-publishing arrangements for the Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish editions. The *UN Chronicle Feature Service* disseminates important articles in English and French to publications around the world, in coordination with the United Nations information centres, as well as directly to newspapers, journals and online magazines; articles from the Feature Service have also been published in several local languages, including German and Portuguese. The *UN Chronicle Online* is continually updated with new articles and features, including new links related to education, in both English and French.

65. *UN in Brief* and the Charter of the United Nations are published in all six languages, while *Basic Facts About the United Nations* is printed in English, French and Spanish. All are available on the web, in full or in extract, in all six languages. Arrangements are made with external publishers and through United Nations information centres for production in other languages as well.

66. *Marketing of publications.* The Department of Public Information, through its Sales and Marketing Section, continues to promote publications produced throughout the Organization in all six official languages. While English, French and Spanish sales catalogues are issued on a regular basis, Russian and Arabic catalogues are also now produced through cooperative ventures with sales distributors. In an effort to promote Chinese publications, an exhibit has been arranged at the Beijing International Book Fair both to sell publications and to arrange co-publication agreements with Chinese publishers. Efforts to further co-publication arrangements with various language publishers continue, both in the official languages and in languages such as Japanese and German. Furthermore, the United Nations bookshops carry a wide range of reference books that support both the language coordinators and individual students who wish to improve their language skills.

#### **D. United Nations information centres**

67. United Nations information centres ensure that their products and activities take into account the diverse language needs of the local communities they serve. Materials are produced and promoted in all media and in both official and numerous local languages.

68. During the reporting period, January 2002 to the present, the centres produced and/or translated 603 publications, articles, press releases, public service announcements and newspaper supplements into 28 languages, including Arabic, Armenian, Bahasa Indonesian, Bangla, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Farsi, Finnish, French, German, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Kirundi, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Sinhala, Slovak, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, Turkish and Uzbek. Newsletters were produced in 10 languages, radio programmes (119) in seven languages and television broadcasts (66) in 14 languages. The centres currently maintain 50 web sites in 31 languages: Arabic, Armenian, Bangla,

Belarusian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Farsi, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Kiswahili, Malagasy, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu and Uzbek.

## **E. Special programmes**

69. The Department of Public Information carries out special programmes related to Africa, Palestine, decolonization and human rights. In the case of the Africa programme, all information materials, both in print and for the Internet, are produced in English and French.

70. The Department continues to sensitize public opinion on the question of Palestine through its special information programme. In December 2002, a focal point for Arab media was appointed with the following responsibilities: to monitor selective Arabic-language media; to place high-quality translations of statements, op-eds and other relevant documents emanating from Headquarters in those media; to establish links with Arabic-language media in order to strengthen interest in the work of the United Nations. The Department also maintains a web page on decolonization in English, French and Spanish and continues to highlight human rights issues in all media in official and local languages.

## **F. Guided tours**

71. Guided tours of United Nations Headquarters are offered in 20 different languages, while the tours web site appears in the six official languages as well as German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Swedish. For 2002, visitors taking the tour in English accounted for 82 per cent of the total or 284,508 visitors; the top five groups of visitors on tours in other languages were: Chinese — 27,042 (10 per cent), French — 5,677 (2 per cent), Japanese — 4,636 (1.6 per cent), Spanish — 4,266 (1.5 per cent), and German — 3,279 (1.2 per cent). In Vienna, guided tours are available in the six official languages and in Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, German, Italian, Farsi, Polish, Serbian, Slovak and Ukrainian, with tours conducted in languages other than English accounting for around 90 per cent of the total. Tours are conducted in English and German on a daily basis, and in other languages upon request, subject to availability of the tour guide. At ESCAP, group visitors programmes are available in English, Thai, French, Korean, Japanese and Chinese.

## **G. Library services**

72. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library is continuing to develop its web products in the six official languages, to the extent possible within existing resources. The *UNBIS Thesaurus* is now available on the Web as a fully multilingual product, with splash screen, search screens and help text as well as basic content provided in all six languages. Other pages with full parity for content generated by the Library include *UN Documentation: Research Guide* and the *UN Conferences and Observances* page. Other offerings, such as the *UN Small and Field Libraries* page are maintained in English, French and Spanish.

73. The clients of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, in particular various Member States, have emphasized the need for linguistic balance in print resources as well as online. Therefore, despite the limited acquisitions budget, efforts have been made to increase the percentage of print products acquired in official languages other than English, by gift and exchange as well as purchase. Table 4 provides counts of non-United Nations items catalogued for the collection by official language for 2002 and 2003. It should be noted that, during this period, the percentage of items in official languages other than English increased from 27 per cent to over 40 per cent of monograph acquisitions.

74. Other United Nations libraries are also striving to maintain some linguistic diversity in their collections, although like the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, they are turning increasingly to electronic services to provide a wide variety of information in multiple languages. For example, in ESCWA, the collection comprises materials in Arabic and English, with some materials in French as well. Patrons are served in the language of their choice: Arabic, English or French. At the United Nations Office at Nairobi, however, 90 per cent of monographs are in English, while print subscription services have been drastically reduced in recent years, as online services have become more readily accessible. Library services at the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime are provided in a decentralized manner. The United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime subscribe to 95 periodicals in hard copy, of which 5 are in Chinese, 69 in English, 3 in French, 1 in English/French, 2 in English/German, 10 in German and 2 in Italian. Of 75 monographs purchased, 46 were in English, 2 in French, 1 each in Arabic and Spanish, and the remainder were multi-language reference works.

Table 4

**Material added to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library General Collection in official languages of the United Nations, 2002-2003**

2002													Total
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Arabic	14	10	1	39	7	5	3	0	6	0	13	3	101
Chinese	8	4	0	5	3	10	18	0	4	2	3	1	58
English	80	96	87	217	189	205	196	159	261	282	180	199	2 151
French	27	20	11	34	53	20	35	15	27	44	23	39	348
Russian	7	3	1	4	8	8	8	9	6	3	8	7	72
Spanish	21	14	8	23	19	15	26	0	27	39	30	26	248
													2 978
2003													
Arabic	2	5	5	5	7								24
Chinese	2	23	16	4	5								50
English	235	180	162	263	222								1 062
French	34	42	37	42	46								201
Russian	5	13	11	3	12								44
Spanish	36	15	28	44	15								138
													1 519

Note: This table excludes material acquired in non-official languages.



75. A problem the Dag Hammarskjöld Library has faced in its efforts to catalogue materials and create outputs in all official languages, apart from the limited staff resources available for these exercises, is the difficulty in recruiting staff for certain official languages. This is particularly true in the case of Arabic, where it has not been possible to recruit an Arabic-speaking professional librarian from the last three national competitive recruitment examinations (replacement staff has been hired as a temporary measure). The major reason lies in the limited number of underrepresented Member States in that language group, with age limitations on candidates a likely secondary factor.

## **V. Conclusions**

76. Efforts to promote multilingualism are important for sustaining diversity and pluralism within the United Nations. They also enable the Organization to provide the best possible support to Member States, particularly in their deliberative bodies, and to project the work and values of the United Nations to the largest audience. At the same time, multilingualism has been approached by most Departments in a pragmatic way, with the focus on ensuring the greatest efficiency and professional quality of work.

77. The major obstacle to use of the two working languages in the Secretariat is the inherent contradiction noted by the Joint Inspection Unit (see para. 2), that staff cannot have the option of being monolingual in either of two languages unless their supervisors (and colleagues) are required to be proficient in both. Hence, the tendency for a *de facto* lingua franca to emerge at each duty station.

78. The greatest obstacle to multilingualism in outputs is the shortage of resources, for while consistent funding is available for translating parliamentary documents into the six official languages, the same is not true for publications. Meanwhile, maintenance of web sites in various languages has largely been accomplished "within existing resources". As a result, Departments have prepared their sites in the official languages selectively, both with regard to the materials and the languages covered. Furthermore, the latter has sometimes been influenced by the availability of staff members fluent in the languages in question, or of external agencies willing to provide funding or in-kind services for particular languages, as well as by anticipated target audiences. The Secretariat will continue to seek innovative solutions and partnerships to achieve greater linguistic parity, to the extent permitted by available resources.

### **Further action**

79. To facilitate the further development of competence in the six official languages among Secretariat staff, training programmes will continue and remain current with global developments in the area of language learning.

80. All vacancy announcements will be issued in English and French, while the Galaxy home page will be available in the six official languages by the end of 2003.

81. Secretariat Departments are encouraged to identify clearly, in their budget submissions, the resources required to ensure production of outputs (other than

official documents) in the six official languages, and as applicable, in relevant non-official languages.

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> See General Assembly resolution 57/130 B, para. 63, and *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/58/21)*, para. 67, draft resolution B, para. 63.

## Annex

### Protection, promotion and preservation of all languages

#### United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1. The 2002 edition of the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing*, published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), reported that half of the 6,000 or so languages spoken in the world are endangered, and with them an irreplaceable dimension of our knowledge and understanding of human thought. The process whereby languages are disappearing is a continual one and not a new phenomenon. However, the past 30 years or so have seen a dramatic increase in the disappearance rate of languages.
2. The causes of this phenomenon are multiple and complex. People tend to abandon their native tongues either because they belong to small groups immersed in different or unfriendly cultural and linguistic environments, or because they come into contact with an invasive or economically stronger culture. In such situations, adults, in full disregard of their own language, encourage children to learn the language of the dominant culture, not only to become competitive in the labour market but also to acquire social status.
3. By adopting the *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* in 2001, the General Conference reaffirmed the need for urgent action to promote linguistic and cultural diversity, notably through safeguarding the linguistic heritage, fostering the learning of several languages from the youngest age and promoting linguistic diversity in cyberspace.
4. Moreover, the *Preliminary Draft Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, currently in the process of elaboration under the auspices of UNESCO, proposes the redefinition of the concept of intangible *cultural heritage* to include "oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage".
5. UNESCO has launched several interdisciplinary programmes and activities aimed at the promotion of multilingualism and linguistic diversity across its fields of competence, notably of culture, communication and education.
6. In March 2003, UNESCO brought together experts from all over the world, including native speakers of endangered languages, who recommended a plan of action encouraging Member States to: survey and profile those languages which are found to be endangered and actively promote their recognition and documentation; create conditions conducive to the active use of and access to those languages; foster speech communities' pride in their own languages and cultures; and secure equal prestige for all languages of a State. In this context, the economic and social benefits of linguistic and cultural diversity are to be explored as a stimulus for sustainable development.
7. In the framework of the *UNESCO Red Book of Languages in Danger of Disappearing Project*, studies of seriously endangered languages in the South-Western Pacific, Siberia, Australia, Indonesia and Thailand were carried out, and an International Clearing House for Endangered Languages set up in Tokyo. The results

of a survey of indigenous languages in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands will feed into national education policies.

8. In today's emerging knowledge societies, development in all spheres of life is closely linked to the ability to access sources of knowledge, exchange information and interact in cyberspace. Language, the primary communication vector, is crucial to this process. At present, however, participation in the digital environment exists only for a small percentage of the 6,000 or so languages in use today. Recent studies indicate that approximately 94 per cent of online content exists in only 12 languages. Consequently, the benefits of emerging knowledge societies are largely restricted to those persons able to use one of the major global languages.

9. The creation of a multilingual cyberspace in which quality content in all known languages is accessible (either directly or by translation) can significantly enhance access to information (on health, education, agriculture, the economy and other topics) needed for development. Equitable access to knowledge and knowledge-based opportunities is increasingly critical to the ability of people to enhance their standard of living.

10. UNESCO presently addresses these concerns and challenges within the framework of the *Draft recommendation concerning the promotion and use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace*. This document will be presented to the member States of UNESCO for adoption at the thirty-second session of its General Conference, in October 2003.

11. Through a number of pilot projects, the UNESCO Initiative B@bel formulates guiding principles, supports national initiatives, disseminates linguistic resources and best practices and develops online multilingual tools. Projects include the development of a sound record library of endangered languages, a multilingual content management platform supporting the Internet and a module for endangered language communities, including a mechanism for systematic support to language preservation.

12. As education in many parts of the world takes place in multilingual contexts, the challenge for education systems is to adapt to these complex realities and provide a quality education which takes the needs of learners into consideration, while balancing these needs with social, cultural and political demands. While uniform solutions for plural societies may be both administratively and managerially simpler, they disregard the risks involved both in terms of learning achievement and loss of linguistic and cultural diversity.

13. In September 2002, an international group of experts met to debate and make recommendations on language policy and education. They concluded that future action should be guided by the following principles: (a) mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers. Mother tongue instruction is essential for initial instruction and literacy and should be extended to as late a stage in education as possible. Literacy can only be maintained if there is an adequate supply of reading material, for adolescents and adults as well as for school children, and for entertainment as well as for study. All education planning should include, for each stage, provisions for the continuous training of sufficient numbers of fully competent and qualified teachers; (b) bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a

key element of linguistically diverse societies. Communication, expression and the capacity to listen and engage in dialogue should be encouraged, first of all in the mother tongue, then in the official or national language of the country concerned, as well as in one or more foreign languages. The early acquisition of a second language in addition to the mother tongue, and the intensive learning of a third international language, should represent the normal range of practical linguistic skills in the twenty-first century; (c) language as an essential component of intercultural education, in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights. Measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination in education at all levels, emphasizing the language and educational rights of persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples. Everyone should be able to find their place in the community — in most cases the local community, to which they primarily belong — and at the same time be given the means to reach out to other communities, values, belief systems and faiths.

## Conclusions

14. Policy makers have difficult decisions to make in regard to languages. While there are strong educational arguments in favour of mother tongue (or first language) instruction, a careful balance also needs to be made between enabling people to use local languages in learning, and providing access to global languages of communication through education.

15. The links between language and identity are extremely complex. The question of identity is closely related to the question of ethnic identity and national identity, and by extension to the issues such as national and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, immigrant populations, hence to the question of cultural diversity.

16. The *International Mother Language Day*, celebrated every year on 21 February, is one of the most important present forms of advocacy in favour of multilingualism. The stakes are manifold since languages are an integral part of humanity's intangible heritage and as such, claim particular attention and care. Moreover, the preservation of mother tongues contributes to sustainable development, given the evident interaction between linguistic diversity and biodiversity. Celebrated this year for the fourth time, the event is gathering increasing momentum and, in many countries, generating initiatives aimed at highlighting the richness of the languages of the world.

17. Yet, action in this domain will need further reinforcement. Increased awareness-raising will be crucial, not only of Governments but also of civil society at large, in regard to language endangerment in the contemporary world and the consequent need to react with sound multilingual approaches in future.

18. Such awareness-raising could be enhanced by proclaiming the year 2004 as the *United Nations Year of Multilingualism*. The proclamation of the International Year would serve both to promote intercultural understanding and to strengthen multilingualism as a source of cultural and national identity. Mastery of more than one language opens up new areas of communication and knowledge for young people. The Year would give recognition to this fact and, in particular, to the role of the six official languages of the United Nations system as vehicles of mutual understanding, dialogue among civilizations, development and international

cooperation. It would strengthen the potential of multilingualism to foster peace, harmony and the construction of knowledge societies.

19. The United Nations Year of Multilingualism could also complement the “Voices of the World” initiative of Ms. Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Languages, planned for the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations and aimed at stressing the value of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the peoples of the world.

20. Activities at the national and international levels, such as symposiums and conferences, youth forums, workshops in universities and schools, exchange of teachers, concerts, song, theatre and cinema festivals, television and radio programmes, studies and publications, could be initiated on this occasion.

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