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Pattern of conferences

Simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in the six official languages on the United Nations web site*

Note by the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 36/117 B of 10 December 1981, the General Assembly reiterated its deep concern at the steady lengthening of delays in the distribution of documents in the different official languages and decided that documents “shall be given effective simultaneous distribution” in the official and working languages of the organs of the United Nations. This decision, which mandates that no language version of a particular document, including its original language version, may be released for distribution until all the other required language versions are available, was reiterated in resolutions 42/207 C of 11 December 1987, 50/11 of 2 November 1995 and 53/208 B of 18 December 1998.

2. In section III, paragraph 5, of its resolution 55/222 of 23 December 2000, the General Assembly decided “that there should not be any exemption to the rule that documents must be distributed in all official languages”, and emphasized the principle “that all documents must be distributed simultaneously in all official languages before they are made available on United Nations web sites”.

3. The General Assembly deeply regretted in section III, paragraph 3, of its resolution 56/242 of 24 December 2001, “the failure of author departments to abide by section III, paragraph 5, of its resolution 55/222”, and in this regard requested the Secretary-General “to take corrective measures to ensure the full implementation of this provision and to report to the General Assembly in the first part of its resumed fifty-sixth session”.

* Due to the short length of this document, no summary is provided. The recommendation for action is presented in bold at the end of part IV, Conclusion.



II. Current practice

4. Most parliamentary documentation posted on the United Nations web site strictly follows the simultaneous availability rule. This is ensured by the fact that these documents are made available on the web site by copying them from the Official Document System (ODS) after they are released on that system in accordance with the same rules. The process of posting documents on the United Nations web site was discussed in detail in document A/C.5/56/12.

5. It must be emphasized that posting parliamentary documents on the web site, as stated above, is an interim arrangement pending the opening up of the ODS. Given the current level of staffing, not all documents can be posted on the web site in all languages at the same time. The Secretariat continues to make every effort to implement the provisions of resolution 55/222.

6. In its report under item 32 “Multilingualism” of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly (A/56/656, para. 32), the Secretary-General stated that various author departments of the Secretariat and/or United Nations bodies provide, as a courtesy, advance copies of reports and other documents, at times in draft form, in hard copy or on the web site of the department or office.

7. This courtesy is extended in response to informal requests by organs or committees of the United Nations or by individual delegations, and often in connection with the run-up to major intergovernmental meetings and conferences. These advance copies are almost invariably in English.

III. Corrective measures

8. The question of the posting of official documents on the web site of the United Nations prior to their official simultaneous issuance in all official languages has been brought to the attention of author departments by the Department of Public Information and by the Coordinator for Multilingualism. They have been apprised in this regard of the relevant resolutions, as well as the appropriate administrative instructions in the ST/AI/189 series on the control and limitation of documentation.

9. In order to further help ensure compliance with the aforementioned resolutions and instructions, the Publications Board approved an administrative instruction on United Nations Internet publishing (ST/AI/2001/5).

10. In addition, a Working Group on Internet Matters has been established to review the guidelines relating to the posting of, inter alia, official documents on the web site of the United Nations.

11. These guidelines establish an administrative foundation and framework for maintaining the United Nations web site and for the development and implementation of policies concerning Internet projects. These guidelines set out the procedures and objectives for disseminating United Nations materials over the Internet.

12. Paragraph 3.17 of ST/AI/2001/5 states: “In general, parliamentary documentation must be posted in accordance with policies governing its official dissemination. Advance text and unedited draft or incomplete versions of parliamentary documentation should not be disseminated on the Internet, except in

consultation with the Chairman of the concerned body and its Secretary, with an appropriate disclaimer.”

13. In paragraph 34 of his report contained in document A/56/656, the Secretary-General stated that it was up to Member States to take a position on the pattern of ad hoc availability of courtesy draft or advance copies of documents. Resolution 56/262 of 15 February 2002 adopted in connection with the consideration of the above-mentioned report, however, did not address the matter.

IV. Conclusion

14. The Committee may wish to note the corrective measures taken pursuant to section III of General Assembly resolution 55/222.
