

Increasing the transparency and the openness of the ITU Association for Proper Internet Governance¹

Over the years the ITU has become increasingly open and transparent, in response to requests from the membership that it do so. The same is true of other agencies of the United Nations.

There is consensus that provisions regarding access to documents and meetings should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are appropriate. The purpose of this contribution is to stimulate such a review, by proposing specific provisions that will further increase the transparency and openness of the ITU.

1. Access to documents

It is generally accepted that the ITU's output documents should be made available to the public. Since the public has paid for those documents through the financial contributions of the ITU Member States, the ITU should only recover the publication and distribution costs of output documents: electronic copies should be made freely available.

Most UN agencies allow public access to most, if not all, of their input documents, agendas, background papers, etc. Of course some documents should not be made public, but this should be the exception, not the rule.

Therefore, we propose to revise Resolution 66 as follows:

Resolution 66, resolves 1:

1 that documents intended to facilitate the ~~timely~~-development of output documents/recommendations of the Union shall be made available ~~also~~-in electronic format and be accessible by the public unless otherwise specified by the source of the document or the meeting to which the document is addressed; all output documents shall be made available in electronic form and be freely accessible by the public~~to any Member State, Sector Member and Associate;~~

2. Openness of meetings

Conferences of the Union are normally open to the public (see GR, 164). This is logical, because deliberations in national bodies are also open to the public. In recent years, the ITU has opened more and more meetings to the press and public, with favorable results. It would thus appear appropriate to extend the rule for conferences to all other meetings of the Union, while of course recognizing that there might be exceptions and that some meetings should not be open to the public.

We therefore propose the following revision to the General Rules.

General Rules, 165 (art. 29.3)

3 Other meetings of the Union shall ~~not~~ be open to the press and the public, with the practical arrangements made by the Secretary-General, unless the meeting in question decides otherwise.

3. Participation of experts

At the invitation of the Secretariat and the chairman, experts who are not members of the ITU may be invited to participate in study group meetings in order to provide specific information, see 248A CV. This procedure is used in practice, with very favorable results.

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It seems sensible to allow the same for other meetings of the Union, and indeed there have been cases where the Secretary-General has invited experts who are not members of the Union to address a meeting.

We therefore propose the following revision to the Convention.

Add new 241F to the ITU Convention:

13 The Secretary-General may, in consultation with the chairman of a meeting, invite an organization or individual which is not a member of the ITU to take part in the meeting. Such participants may be asked by the chairman during the course of a meeting to provide relevant information to assist the proceedings.

4. Participation by civil society

Civil society organizations, which are usually non-profit, view payment of membership fees as a barrier to becoming Sector Members of the ITU. But in fact such organizations can request exemption from payment of membership fees, and such exemptions are routinely granted by Council.

An organization can apply for membership conditional on exemption of membership fees. In this case, its application and request for exemption are presented to Council and the organization becomes a member only if Council approves the exemption.

But this procedure and practice is not clearly explained on the ITU web site.

Therefore we propose that the conference adopt the following decision, which can simply be noted in the minutes of a plenary session:

“The Secretary-General is instructed to publish on the ITU web site clear information regarding the criteria for exemption from payment of membership fees, and to explain the procedure whereby an organization can apply for sector membership conditional on approval of exemption of membership fees.”
