

2014 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference

20 October – 07 November 2014;
Busan, South Korea

The Basic Texts of the ITU are available for purchase or download from the ITU website:
<http://www.itu.int/pub/S-CONF-PLEN-2011>

SUMMARY

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is a United Nations Specialized Agency of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland that has been operating since 1865. Every four years, the ITU hosts a treaty conference called the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference. The Plenipotentiary Conference, or Plenipot, is the highest policy-making event of the ITU. At a Plenipot, ITU Member States elect the ITU official leadership, set the strategic plan of the ITU, adopt Resolutions related to policy and other telecommunication matters, map out the financial plan of the Union (including membership fee structures, and address staffing matters for the Union. In addition, Member States may amend the basic Treaty texts of the ITU, called the ITU Constitution and Convention (CS/CV).

BACKGROUND

The ITU is a UN Specialized Agency, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, that has been coordinating and addressing a range of international telecommunications matters since 1865. The work of the ITU has, of course, evolved since 1865 when the ITU stood for “International Telegraph Union”. According to the ITU Constitution, the ITU’s work is focused on “...facilitating peaceful relations, international cooperation among peoples and economic and social development by means of efficient telecommunications...” (Preamble to the ITU Constitution). The current structure of the ITU includes three sectors and the General Secretariat (shown in Annex 2):

- ITU-R: The Radiocommunication Sector
- ITU-T: The Telecommunication Standardization Sector
- ITU-D: The Telecommunication Development Sector
- The General Secretariat

The various Sector Conferences (WTDC, WTSA, WRC) guide the work plan for each Sector while the Plenipotentiary Conferences and the ITU Council provide high-level governance for the overall functioning of the ITU. Additionally, the outcomes of the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) have some bearing on the overall work of the Union.

In essence, the Plenipot is the primary governing meeting of the ITU. Issues related to the scope, activities, finances, management, and policy approaches of the ITU are debated and negotiated during this three-week conference. In between Plenipot Conferences, governing decisions that do not involve changing treaty text or elections, are addressed via the ITU Council. The ITU Council is composed of 41 Member States that are elected on a regional basis during a Plenipotentiary Conference.



The Membership of the ITU is, generally, organized into Member States and Sector Members. As an intergovernmental organization, only the 193 Member States have the right to vote in all matters at the ITU. Sector Members, totaling roughly 700, are usually entities dealing with telecommunications from private industry, regional organizations or other technical organizations. Sector Members may participate in the activities of the Sector to which they join (joining requires financial contributions) including in leadership positions of Sector study groups (i.e. ITU-T) and Sector Conferences (i.e. WTSA) as well as in the substantive work of the Sector, subject to some limitations like voting.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ITU PLENIPOTENTIARY CONFERENCE

ITU Plenipotentiary Conferences consider inputs and documents from a range of sources. For example, regional telecommunications organizations will meet in the months prior to Plenipotentiary Conference to consolidate regional views and common regional proposals to the Plenipotentiary Conference. Additionally, a number of reports and decisions from the ITU Council will be sent to the Plenipotentiary Conference for further consideration and action. Finally, ITU Member States may make proposals directly to the Conference. Proposals to change the treaty texts, CS/CV, are *technically* due eight months prior to the Conference while general non-treaty text proposals are due four months prior to the Conference. In reality, new proposals are made throughout the preparatory process for the Plenipotentiary Conference and sometimes during the meeting itself.

The regional organizations that are typically involved in developing common regional positions include (but not limited to):

- Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL)
- African Telecommunication Union (ATU)
- Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT)
- Arab States
- European Conference of Postal and Telecommunication Administrations (CEPT)
- Regional Commonwealth Countries (RCC) Commission for International Cooperation Coordination (CIS)

INTERNET CONSIDERATIONS

The mandate of the ITU is clearly focused on international telecommunications and the specific scope of the ITU's activities is specifically stated in Article 1 of the ITU Constitution. In recent years, however, there has been considerable discussion among ITU Members about the proper role, scope and activities of the ITU in Internet public policy. These issues emerge at the technical level within study groups and at the policy and regulatory level in meetings like the WCIT, Plenipotentiary Conferences and other ITU conferences and meetings like the 2013 World Telecom Policy Forum (WTPF).

At the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, Internet-related issues could emerge in a number of ways:

- Within the overall mandate and scope of the ITU activities as found in the CS/CV
- Within the terminology of the ITU – how phrases like “ICTs” are defined and used throughout the ITU documents

- Within the strategic plan of the ITU – setting out the focus and work plan of the ITU for 2014-2018
- Within the revision or addition of new Plenipot Resolutions related to Internet topics

Topics of specific interest to the Internet community may include (but are not limited to):

- Definitions of “ICT” emerging from WTDC
- Outputs of the ITU Council Working Group on International Internet Public Policy Issues
- Revisions to a host of ITU Plenipot Resolutions including (but not limited to):
 - Resolution 101: Internet Protocol-based networks
 - Resolution 102: ITU’s role with regard to international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet and the management of Internet resources, including domain names and addresses
 - Resolution 130: Strengthening role of ITU in building confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies
 - Resolution 133: Role of administrations of Member States in the management of internationalized (multilingual) domain names
- Implementation of WSIS outcomes and possible new WSIS-related activities
- Issue from WTPF about the role of government in Internet governance
- WCIT Resolution 3 on the ITUs role in fostering greater growth of the Internet

ROLE OF THE INTERNET SOCIETY

The Internet Society as a Sector Member of the ITU-T and ITU-D Sectors., follows the activities and engages in discussion as it relates to the Internet’s technical, social and economic development ensuring that a multistakeholder dialogue occurs on the issues and that technical recommendations are based upon Open Standards.

The Internet Society is a mission driven organization working to enable and defend the Open Internet from the unintended consequences of policies that would restrict innovation and hinder the economic and social benefits that are derived from the Internet.

ANNEX 1: Glossary of terms

Useful Acronyms for the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference

| Acronym | Definition |
|---------|---|
| APT | Asia Pacific Telecommunity |
| ATU | African Telecom Union |
| CEPT | European Conference of Postal and Telecommunication Administrations |
| CIS | Commission for International Cooperation Coordination |
| CITEL | Inter-American Telecommunication Commission |
| CS/CV | ITU Constitution and Convention |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technologies |
| ITU | International Telecommunication Union |
| ITU-D | ITU Telecom Development Sector |
| ITU-R | ITU Radiocommunication Sector |
| ITU-T | ITU Telecom Standardization Sector |
| WCIT | World Conference on International Telecommunications |
| WRC | World Radio Conference |
| WSIS | World Summit on the Information Society |
| WTDC | World Telecommunication Development Conference |
| WTPF | World Telecommunication Policy Forum |
| WTSA | World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly |

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ANNEX 2 – Diagram of ITU Structure



