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**Note to the Bureau of the Human Rights Council**

**Suggested measures for improving the issuance compliance of**

**Human Rights Council documentation**

**Background:**

During its meeting on 23 February 2016, the Division of Conference Management (DCM) was invited by the Bureau of the Human Rights Council to reply to concerns regarding the timely availability of official documentation and asked DCM to submit by the end of April a set of suggestions for improving the issuance compliance of Human Rights Council documentation. The Division fully shares the concerns of the Bureau and a number of measures are being implemented to improve the Division’s performance in this regard as outlined below. This note has therefore been prepared to provide additional clarifications to the Bureau on the documentation processes, current challenges being faced by the Division in the issuance of documents within the timelines prescribed by the General Assembly i.e. 10 weeks before the date of consideration and ongoing measures for the improvement of the timely delivery of documents for the sessions of the Human Rights Council.

**Documentation process in brief:**

Parliamentary documents, mandated by the United Nations bodies and entities and intergovernmental bodies **in preparation for scheduled meetings**, i.e. pre-session documents, are submitted for processing in their final edited format **10-weeks ahead of the date of consideration. All documents within 10,700 words limits require 4 weeks for processing in order to be delivered 6 weeks before their consideration. A document is considered as issued only once all language versions have been processed.** In line with established practice, all HRC documents are edited before submission.

In order to ensure the smooth processing and timely issuance of pre-session documents, DCM and the submitting offices, by mutual agreement, commit to specific slotting dates – or deadlines – for their submission and issuance. DCM expects that these dates will be respected; documents received after the agreed slotting date are considered as late submissions. Timely submitted documents take priority over late submissions. **Nevertheless,** if owing to circumstances beyond the control of the Secretariat, pre-session documents cannot be submitted for processing to meet the 10-week submission deadline , they may be eligible for a “negotiated late slotting” process at the request of the Secretariat. This implies that depending on the proposed date of submission, the issuance dates of such documents could be as late as a few days before their consideration, although still qualifying as timely issued. This is regularly applied for reports of the Special Rapporteurs in view of specific constraints encountered in the drafting of their reports.

**Challenges:**

*Limited resources*

The allocation of resources to DCM over the past decade and since the creation of the Human Rights Council has not matched its increasing workload. The number of meetings serviced by the Division in 2015 was 49% higher than in 2006,due in large part to the initiation of the UPR mechanism in 2008 and the 20 additional weeks of meetings per year of the Human Rights Treaty Bodies resulting from A/Res/68/268, which was implemented on 1 January 2015. In terms of documentation, there has been an increase of 29% more words submitted for processing over the same period. Meanwhile, DCM only received 3% more posts in the current biennium as compared to 2006-2007, and 14% more funds under Temporary Assistance for Meetings (TAM). As a result, there was an average gap of 28% between 2006 and 2015 between incoming documentation workload and budgeted workforce (posts plus TAM). With OHCHR constituting over 60% of DCM’s translation workload of HRC and the HR treaty bodies are disproportionately impacted by current gaps in capacity, although other client organizations are also negatively impacted by the delays in the processing of some documents.

*Capacity constraints*

Difficulties are compounded by the unpredictable and irregular flow of submissions and the dearth of language professionals or reliable companies that the Division can resort to in order to temporarily strengthen its capacity. The Division, and the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) as whole, are facing a particularly difficult situation due to the lack of qualified French translators in the market that meet the very high examination standards applied by the United Nations for language professionals. Given the politically sensitive and sometimes highly technical nature of United Nations official documents, the quality of translators is paramount. The Department is often competing with other organizations, which tap into the same pool of translators.

*Additional documentation emanating from the HRC*

The 31st session points to a worrying trend towards ever-increasing workload generated by the Council, not only in terms of documentation but also meeting servicing, with 31 lunchtime and evening meetings serviced over 19 days. The total number of meetings held in four weeks minus one day culminated at 66. By way of comparison, the former Commission on Human Rights held a total of 63 meetings in the whole of 2005.  The number of pre-session documents for each session continues to increase as does the number of in-session documents. The 31st session presented a record number of draft resolutions, including revisions and amendments, with a total of 88 drafts as compared to previous sessions which reached a maximum of 50 for the last session. In this regard, it is respectfully suggested that a careful review by the Human Rights Council of standing mandates and resulting documentation requirements would contribute to the rationalization and enhanced management of documentation resources. Detailed figures of workload related to the Council are provided below.

*Calendar of meetings*

Back to back sessions following the 20-week increase of meetings for Human Rights Treaty Bodies make it particularly challenging to plan and secure resources for processing pre- and in-session documentation. As an example, the Human Rights Council and the Human Rights Committee meet in parallel in March and in June and both have high volumes of documents. Fine-tuning of submission dates seems to have reached its limits. Likewise, the crunch of documents which the Division has to process every year from July to November for all its clients is such that bottlenecks are unavoidable. This affects particularly the September session of the Human Rights Council..

*Lifting of simultaneous distribution*

The General Assembly resolutions impose strict rules on the simultaneous distribution whereby documents can only be released when all language versions have been processed. The Division is regularly called on by Member States to report on the number of exceptions requested and granted to the rule. DCM has agreed upon request the lifting of simultaneous distribution, while always reminding of relevant General Assembly rules.

For in-session documents the implications are even more complex with possibly serious political implications when Member States are being asked to adopt draft resolutions that are not available in all six languages. The Bureau continues to request the lifting of the rule for in-session documents. This essentially relates to the extension of the deadline for tabling of resolutions by Member States - usually set at 1:00 p.m. on the Thursday of the penultimate week of the session, but which can be extended as late as Monday or Tuesday of the last week. This negatively impacts the availability of documents in time for the voting process, as language sections normally require a minimum of 48 hours turnaround for in-session documents and the delays place additional constrains on sections to meet deadlines. DCM would also like to impress on the Bureau, therefore, the need to table the voting in function of which documents are available in all six languages.

The provision of advance unedited versions pending the release by DCM of the document in all languages, which has been granted on some occasions, is within the sole purview and responsibility of the Human Rights Council Bureau. Such practices present the risk of having several different versions of a document being circulated, which could lead to potentially politically sensitive situations. Any derogation from the rules on simultaneous distribution resulting from a change in working methods of the Council would be the prerogative of Member States.

**Progress to date and ongoing efforts:**

*Departmental-wide efforts*

The Division is closely engaged in the DGACM Steering Group on documentation, chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, that is addressing a number of issues to improve timely delivery of documents, including streamlining processes and increasing outreach efforts for succession planning, as well as the development of a common roster for the recruitment of outside contractors which should facilitate the recruitment of qualified translators. The Division is also reviewing all its procedures to align  them more closely with New York, and is hoping that computer-assisted translation tools developed by the Department will shortly be adapted to its specific needs and will speed up processing of documents.

As a longer term effort, through closer cooperation with Universities and Memoranda of Understanding for the training and preparation of language students to take the United Nations professional language examinations, DGACM hopes to reduce the lack of capacity in specific language combinations.

*Enhanced forecasting and slotting*

DCM has enhanced the advance planning of documents through the implementation of a further staggering of the existing “staggered slotting” process whereby documents are slotted not on the basis of the first day of the week of consideration but on the actual day of consideration of the report. The procedure, which aims to stagger submissions as much as possible to avoid bottlenecks in the processing chain, was piloted during the 30th and 31st sessions and will now be the norm for all future sessions.

*Improved planning and monitoring tools*

The Division has invested efforts in the creation of enhanced planning and monitoring tools to assist with the prioritization of documents, as well as with identifying problem areas or bottlenecks in the processing chain or at specific periods of the year to contribute to improved capacity planning. The *Pipeline Visualization* Tool has been deployed for usage by DCM Translators since January 2015. The tool has enabled the Division to plan even more carefully and indicate more forcefully to language sections which documents they have to focus in priority to facilitate the intergovernmental process. In addition, DCM has recently deployed a personalized dashboard to provide individual translators with real time data and assist them in managing their daily work and competing priorities. In addition, DCM is developing a resource forecasting tool which will allow it to identify more clearly its staffing needs along the year.

**Conclusions:**

Thanks to these measures, and while the situation is not yet fully satisfactory, there have been real improvements in the timely availability of documents for the Human Rights Council sessions (see tables below). This positive trend is continuing in 2016, with 62% of documents delivered on time for the 31st session (main session) as compared to 29% for the same session in 2015. Although the 31st session saw the highest volume ever of in-session documents (draft resolutions including revisions), DCM managed to maintain a satisfactory turn-around time of less than 2 days.It is anticipated that the Division’s efforts combined with wider efforts by DGACM will further improve the situation.

Nevertheless, in the current budgetary context, any continued increase in workload could negatively impact on timely issuance of documents. As such, DCM looks forward to cooperating more closely with the Bureau of the Human Rights Council to find mutually agreeable and innovative solutions to address future challenges.

**Table 1. Submission/ issuance compliance for the Human Rights Council (2013-2016)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Session year** | **Session title** | **Number of slotted documents** | **Number of timely submitted documents** | **Number of timely issued documents** | **Issuance compliance** |
| **March 2013** | 22nd session | 93 | 73 | 26 | **36%** |
| **June 2013** | 23rd session | 96 | 55 | 20 | **36%** |
| **Sept. 2013** | 24th session | 69 | 61 | 22 | **36%** |
| **March 2014** | 25th session | 94 | 67 | 30 | **45%** |
| **June 2014** | 26th session | 86 | 53 | 19 | **36%** |
| **Sept. 2014** | 27th session | 89 | 70 | 11 | **16%** |
| **March 2015** | 28th session | 96 | 66 | 19 | **29%** |
| **June 2015** | 29th session | 79 | 59 | 34 | **58%** |
| **Sept. 2015** | 30th session | 87 | 72 | 27 | **38%** |
| **March 2016** | 31st session | 98 | 76 | 47 | **62%** |

**Table 2. Number of amendments to resolutions as compared to previous sessions**



**Table 3. Total translation/ interpretation workload (HRC and UPR)**

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| **2015 HRC Sessions**1. A total of **1,452 meetings** were held.
2. A total of 2,415 interpretation assignments were utilized.
3. A total of **265 documents were slotted** out of which 197 **(75%) were submitted on time** and within the word limit.
4. Out of the 197 documents which were submitted on time and within the word limit, 80 **(40%) were issued on time**.
5. Approximately 10.8 million words were translated.

**2015 UPR Sessions**1. A total of **91 meetings** were held.
2. A total of 459 interpretation assignments were utilized.
3. A total of **128 documents were slotted** out of which **112 (88%) were submitted on time** and within the word limit.
4. Out of the 112 documents which were submitted on time and within the word limit, **44 (39%) were issued on time.**
5. Approximately 4 million words were translated.
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