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Internet Society Background Paper on ITU Plenipotentiary 2022

This background paper is intended to provide the Internet Society community and interested parties with a general overview of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference and our perspectives on some of the main issues which may be discussed.

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Summary

The International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Plenipotentiary Conference 2022 (Plenipot or PP-22) is the main decision-making body of the ITU. It provides overall strategic and financial guidance from an administrative, budgetary, and operational perspective. The Plenipotentiary is held every four years and will be held from 26 September to 14 October 2022 in Bucharest, Romania¹.

The ITU Plenipotentiary Conference is an international treaty conference where government delegations represented by Member States can negotiate changes to the two primary basic instruments of the Union: the Constitution and Convention (CS/CV). Delegations also adopt resolutions and decisions, which are not treaty-level agreements but provide direction for the work of the ITU. PP-22 will also approve the ITU budget and strategic plan, elect ITU leadership, and elect members to the ITU Council and Radio Regulations Board, among other actions.

While Internet-related Resolutions are expected to be revised at PP-22, no changes are expected to the CS/CV.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, three major ITU conferences are being held in 2022: The World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA), the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), and the Plenipotentiary. This has put a strain on resources and preparations for the three Conferences. Some proposals not adopted at WTSA and WTDC (e.g., use of telecommunications/ICT during pandemics) will be proposed to PP-22.

Background

The ITU is a United Nations specialized agency headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. The ITU was established over 150 years ago (joining the UN in 1948), making it one of the oldest international organizations in the world. It plays a vital role in forging cooperation in the global telecommunications system, telecommunications infrastructure development, and the allocation of frequency bands in the radio spectrum.

The ITU includes three sectors that carry out the activities mandated by the Plenipotentiary Conference:

- Radiocommunication Sector (ITU-R)
- Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T)
- Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D)

¹ <https://pp22.itu.int/>

Sector work programs are defined by an assembly or conference held every four years:

- World Telecommunication Standards Assembly (WTSA) for the ITU-T
- World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) for the ITU-D
- Radiocommunications Assembly (RA) for the ITU-R.

ITU Council governs the ITU during the intervening period between plenipotentiaries. Essentially, ITU Council, working with ITU elected officials and staff, manages activities required by Plenipotentiary resolutions that the Union should carry out. ITU Council generally meets once a year but exceptionally meets twice during the year of Plenipotentiary. The council is composed of up to one-fourth of the Member States elected on a regional basis at Plenipotentiary and can make decisions on a range of issues (delegated by Plenipotentiary). However, they cannot make changes to the Constitution and Convention, which is a task reserved only for a Plenipotentiary.

Main Objectives of the Plenipotentiary

Plenipotentiary has specific objectives to accomplish which are outlined in its constitution. Amongst its work, Plenipotentiary includes the following activities:

- Sets the ITU's general policies;
- Considers council reports (2019 to 2022);
- Adopts the Union's four-year strategic and financial plans as well as the budget;
- Elects the Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary General, and Directors of the three Bureaus;
- Elects Member States to ITU Council and Members of the Radio Regulations Board;
- Revises, modifies, or proposes new resolutions or decisions related to telecommunications;
- Considers proposals for amending the Constitution and Convention (CS/CV); and
- Deals with membership issues (sets contributory units, consider membership structure, fees, reciprocity, etc.).

Regional Preparatory Meetings

Regional telecommunication organizations began preparations in 2020, and while the timetables have varied, these preparations run through September 2022 at the regional and national levels.

The main objectives of the preparatory are to:

- Determine the regional priorities and goals for Plenipotentiary
- Facilitate consolidation of views at the regional level
- Develop common proposals for the conference
- Coordinate preparations amongst the regional telecommunication organizations to help build consensus before the conference (including informal interregional coordination meetings).

Inputs to Plenipotentiary

The CS/CV provides general guidelines for Member State inputs to the Plenipotentiary. In this instance, the firm deadline for all contributions is 5 September 2022 (although a contribution could be accepted later if agreed by the delegates at PP-22). The Plenipotentiary receives information from various sources that drive its work, principally:

- **ITU Council Reports:** PP-22 will consider council reports issued after Plenipotentiary 2018.
- **Draft Strategic and Financial Plan** (informally called the Strat-Plan): the Strategic and Financial Plan guides the activities of the ITU. It lays out its vision, mission, thematic priorities, and values, reflects a broad set of strategic goals and targets, and ITU Sector objectives and outcomes. The Council Working Group on Strategic and Financial Planning (CWG-SFP) developed a draft plan to be approved at Plenipotentiary. Typically, the CWG-SFP receives input from WTSA, WTDC, open public consultations, and input from Member States, Sector Members, and Sector Advisory Groups (TDAG, TSAG, and RAG). Given the truncated schedule due to the pandemic, the CWG-SFP had limited time to consider input from WTSA-20² and no time to consider output from WTDC-22 (though it did get input from TDAG).
- **Common Regional Proposals**³: Most Plenipotentiary contributions will come from Regional Telecommunication Organizations (APT, ATU, CITEC, CEPT, RCC, AST) preparatory processes. Common proposals are the consolidated views from the regional organizations on Plenipotentiary Resolutions, the Draft Strategic and Financial Plan or amendments to the rules, and procedures for ITU Conferences and Assemblies. In addition, regions can propose changes to the Constitution or Convention.
- **Member States Contributions:** Member States can submit proposals directly to the Plenipotentiary, including proposed amendments to the Constitution and Convention, new resolutions, modifications, or revisions to Plenipotentiary Resolutions, and proposals to amend the rules and procedures for ITU Conferences and assemblies.

Internet Considerations

The ITU's mandate was initially focused on international telecommunications, and the scope of its activities is stated explicitly in [Article 1 of the ITU Constitution](#). Since Plenipotentiary 1998, the ITU has

² Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, WTSA-20 was held in 2022.

³Regional Groups refer to Common Proposals by different names; Arab States; Arab States Common Proposals (ACPs); Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) / Asia Pacific Common Proposals (ACP); Africa Telecommunication Union (ATU) /Africa Common Proposals(AFPC) Inter America Telecommunication Commission (CITEC) /Inter America Common Proposals (IAP); RCC - RCP, CEPT - ECP.

expanded its work to include Information and Communications Technology (ICT), including increased work on Internet-related studies. The Internet resolutions (in particular Resolutions 101 and 102), Cybersecurity (in particular Resolution 130), and internationalized domain names, amongst others, have established a role for the ITU on issues related to the Internet. There is a continued debate among the Member States on the appropriate role for ITU on the Internet (including Internet governance), with some countries advocating for a more significant role.

Internet-related issues were discussed at the two conferences earlier this year:

- **World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA 2020):** Some of the Internet-related issues discussed at WTSA-20 included non-radio aspects of IMT-2020 and beyond, including Open Access Networks, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, IP addressing, use of ICTs in the pandemic, Internet telephony and Over the Top (OTT) Services. The WTSA-20 plenary requested that the proposal on the use of in-person and virtual options on an equal footing in the activities of the ITU-T and the draft resolution on the use of ICTs to combat pandemics be forwarded to the Plenipotentiary. The WTSA-20 plenary also recognized that AI would be a topic of discussion at PP-22.
- **World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC 2022):** Some of the topics from WTSA-20 emerged at WTDC-22 (e.g., pandemic, Open Access Networks. Other Internet-related topics discussed at WTDC-22 included: IP addressing, high-altitude platforms, complementary access networks (e.g., community networks), cybersecurity (including 5G and smishing) and spam, and broadband Internet.

Internet-Related Issues Likely to Be Discussed at Plenipotentiary:

- Cybersecurity, including the inclusion of cybersecurity as a thematic priority in the Strategic plan and increasing ITU's role in cybersecurity discussions across the UN
- ITU's role in implementation of the UN Secretary General's Digital Cooperation roadmap.
- ITU's role in Internet governance.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the inclusion of AI in the work of ITU-T (discussed at PP-18)
- Utilization of telecommunication/ICTs to combat pandemics.
- Digital transformation and the digital economy
- Internet of Things

Note: The exact issues to be discussed at PP-22 will become known once the proposals emerge in the preparatory processes in the coming weeks. The Internet Society will provide updates accordingly via its ITU PP-22 website and ITU PP-22 Issues Matrix⁴.

⁴Internet Society Event page – ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022: <https://www.internetsociety.org/events/un/plenipot-2022>

In addition, it is expected that proposals encouraging stronger participation of industry members will be discussed. This topic received significant debate at both WTSA-20 and WTDC-22.

PP-22 will also discuss whether to hold another World Conference on International Telecommunication (WCIT) to update the International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs) and whether to continue the work of the expert group on ITRs (EG-ITR). The final report of the last EG-ITR submitted to PP-22 (through Council) indicates no consensus on the need to update the ITRs.

Internet Society's role at Plenipotentiary

The Internet Society is a Sector Member of the ITU-T and ITU-D Sectors and will participate in Plenipotentiary 2022. As Sector Member, we follow the activities and engage in discussions as it related to the Internet's technical, social, and economic development. We support the open Internet model for its continued success. We advocate for using collaborative multistakeholder approaches for decision-making in a globally distributed network environment.

Sector Members have a limited role at Plenipotentiary Conference, acting on an advisory basis. They do not have voting rights, generally do not chair meetings, and have limited speaking opportunities during main meetings. However, they can participate during ad hoc meetings and meet with delegations concerning topics under discussion.

In Romania, we want to keep sharing our vision of an Internet for everyone while maintaining it open, globally-connected, secure, and trustworthy. Our messages include:

- Protect the Internet from becoming a Splinternet: Actively engage with Members to prevent the adoption of proposals that could fragment the Internet, which contradicts the original principles of the Internet, which was/is intended to be open, borderless, and globally connected.
- Harmful changes to the Internet model: It is critical to keep Internet Technical Standardization in the appropriate standards bodies, such as IETF, and ensure that the management and administration of Internet numerical resources are held under the Regional Internet Registries' (RIR) purview.
- Uphold the Internet multistakeholder governance model: We expect the multistakeholder governance model will be closely scrutinized to give governments greater control. Internet Society will actively engage with Members to maintain and strengthen the multistakeholder model and the critical properties the Internet needs to exist.

Internet Related Resolutions

As the Internet has grown and become more embedded in all facets of life, it has also become embedded in more UN and ITU activities. While the following are identified as the main Internet-related Resolutions, other Resolutions also increasingly have an aspect related to the Internet.

Issues	Plenipotentiary Resolutions
Internet-related public policy issues	<p>RES 101: Internet Protocol-based networks</p> <p>RES 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;</p> <p>RES 133: Role of administrations of Member States in the management of internationalized (multilingual) domain names</p> <p>RES 178: ITU role in organizing the work on technical aspects of telecommunication networks to support the Internet</p> <p>RES 180: Promoting deployment and adoption of IPv6 to facilitate the transition from IPv4 to IPv6</p> <p>RES 206: OTTs</p>
Cybersecurity: Confidence and security in the use of ICTs (incl. SPAM & CIRTs)	<p>RES 130: Strengthening the role of ITU in building confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies</p> <p>RES 181: Definitions and terminology relating to building confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies</p> <p>RES 196: Protecting telecommunication service users/consumers</p>
Child Online Protection and access to illegal information on the Internet	<p>RES 174: ITU's role with regard to international public policy issues relating to the risk of illicit use of information and communication technologies</p> <p>RES 179: ITU's role in child online protection</p>
WSIS+10, Digital Economy and SDGs	<p>RES 140: ITU's role in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as in their follow-up and review processes</p>

Issues	Plenipotentiary Resolutions
	<p>RES 200: Connect 2030 Agenda for global telecommunication/information and communication technology, including broadband, for sustainable development</p> <p>RES 201: Creating an enabling environment for the deployment and use of information and communication technology applications</p> <p>RES 204: Use of information and communication technologies to bridge the financial inclusion gap</p> <p>RES 205: ITU's role in fostering telecommunication/ information and communication technology-centric innovation to support the digital economy and society</p>
Role of Standardization and the ITU	<p>RES 122: The evolving role of the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly</p> <p>RES 123: Bridging the standardization gap between developing and developed countries</p> <p>RES 135: ITU's role in the durable and sustainable development of telecommunications/ information and communication technologies, in providing technical assistance and advice to developing countries and in implementing relevant national, regional and interregional projects</p> <p>RES 178: ITU role in organizing the work on technical aspects of telecommunication networks to support the Internet</p>
Digital Inclusion (Youth, Gender, Persons with Disabilities)	<p>RES 70: Mainstreaming a gender perspective in ITU and promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women through telecommunications/information and communication technologies</p> <p>RES 175: Telecommunication/information and communication technology accessibility for persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs</p> <p>RES 198: Empowerment of youth through telecommunication/information and communication technology</p>
Access and infrastructure	<p>RES 137: Deployment of future networks in developing countries</p>

Issues	Plenipotentiary Resolutions
	<p>RES 139: Use of telecommunications/ information and communication technologies to bridge the digital divide and build an inclusive information society</p> <p>RES 186: Strengthening the role of ITU with regards to transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities</p> <p>RES 203: Connectivity to broadband networks</p>
Emerging technologies (IoT)	<p>RES 197: Facilitating the Internet of Things and smart sustainable cities and communities</p>
ITR Review and WTPF	<p>RES: 146: Periodic review and revision of the International Telecommunication Regulations</p> <p>RES 2: World telecommunication/information and communication technology policy forum</p>

Proposals concerning the above Resolutions will be tracked on the Internet Society's ITU Plenipotentiary 2022 Issues Matrix.