

To: Executive Committee

From: Secretariat

Date: 8 May 2015

For noting by Executive Committee: Secretariat plan for updating administrative processes concerning recognised Observers

The Secretariat has devised a simple plan to update and clarify administrative arrangements in relation to recognised observers to the closed session.

The former and current position

The Conference has long admitted observers to its closed session. This was undertaken by hosts initially on an informal basis and later pursuant to resolutions guiding the grant of the status of [national observers](#) and [international observers](#) (though the admission by hosts of other types of observers was not precluded by those resolutions). On at least one occasion the Credentials Committee approved [observers](#). Under the current [rules](#), and for the last several years, the Executive Committee is to receive and assess applications for observer status with decisions on accrediting observers left to the closed session.

There has not previously been a single place to obtain information on obtaining observer status. Instead in the lead up to a particular conference the application form (with instructions and a deadline 3 months before the conference) would be posted on a host's website with general registration information. A composite list of observers has not previously been published. A list is held by the Secretariat although it may not be accurate in all respects and the contact details may not all be current. The list currently held

Reason for, and description of, planned administrative changes

The proposed new arrangements (outlined below) will assist the Secretariat in its administrative tasks, likely provide a more reliable indicator for hosts as to likely numbers of observers that may need to be accommodated in the meeting room and give greater certainty for observers themselves. In particular the changes will ensure that the list of observers and their contact details remains current. The changes will also ensure that the list of observers does not simply get cumulatively larger year by year but accords with realistic current needs for observer status.

The new arrangements can be implemented administratively without any need to amend the rules. They do not affect any arrangements the Committee has adopted for assessing the credentials of proposed new observers. These arrangements are been planned now to coincide with posting observer material on the new permanent website (including a list of observers, application forms and explanatory material).

At its heart, the plan is to differentiate between long-term observers who might be expected repeatedly to attend in that capacity over many years and 'one-off' or ad hoc observers who wish to observe a particular meeting or perhaps two meetings in a row. The long term observers are typically international organisations. The short term cases are typically local organisations attending simply because the Conference is held in their country or region.

The Secretariat plans to ask every currently listed observer whether they want to continue in that capacity – informal enquiries suggest at least two bodies no longer require the status of an observer. Those that wish to continue holding the status would be categorised as either long term or ad hoc – if there was any doubt the matter could be brought to the Executive Committee but the Secretariat expects most cases to be obvious or capable of easily being clarified with the observer concerned.

The long term observers would be listed on the website and not required to renew their observer status for three years. Renewal would be a simple administrative process simply requiring an indication that the status is still required. The ad hoc observers would be asked to renew their status each year and, depending upon the character of the organisation, may be asked for justification. These steps would keep the list current.

The other administrative steps that the Secretariat would take include:

- Requiring the observers to maintain their contact details with the Secretariat.
- Maintaining a list on the website.
- Updating observer application forms for posting on the permanent website and, where possible, simplifying the forms to make them easier to complete and process.
- Adding information to the website to explain the administrative approach and answer questions frequently asked by observers.
- Clarifying some anomalies in the current list of observers/members.
- Strategically seeking out observers rather than passively waiting to be approached (e.g. the UN Secretary-General's Office).

Recommendation

That the Executive Committee notes the changes the Secretariat proposes to implement after the Committee's meeting in May.