

## **Fifth Bureau meeting of the Executive Board**

Virtual meeting - Monday 11 May 2020

16:00 – 17:00 East Africa Time

### **Briefing note on the implementation of a virtual first session of the Executive Board in 2020**

#### **1. Platforms and foreseeable technical challenges**

##### **a. Use of UN Video Conferencing and Microsoft Teams**

1. The above recommended platforms allow maximum 100 and 10,000 participants respectively. It is understood that 250 participants is the number that allows for optimal usage by the Member States.
2. In all cases participants join through the web after receiving an individual invite with connecting instructions. All countries and the secretariat would have access to a screen and voice.
3. A convener or organizer of a meeting can manage the session by recording, muting participants and allowing breaks.

##### **b. Technical challenges and limitations**

1. The experience with the platforms listed above depends a lot on the participants connection speed and equipment readiness. If some users have a bad connection or equipment, it could impact their meeting participation and experience.
2. There is only basic session moderation available. Chats can be used to request for the floor but there is no raising of hand, push button request or speak on demand options. The secretariat would have to manage the list of speakers directly through written request on the chat section and would call on each participant to take the floor.
3. Other costed alternatives such as Cisco Webex, Zoom, or BlueJeans, with better meeting management and moderation options exist, but need to be procured at a cost. These are more user friendly and has connectivity alternatives.
4. It may be need for a dry run days before the meeting for familiarity purposes. This could also be enhanced through a short connection manual to all participants with the contact of an IT focal point in case of technical glitches.
5. Concerns on on-line privacy and security. This could be resolved through confirmation that the platforms have end-to-end encryption settings to ensure the meeting participants have no risk of account and data hacking as well as malwares, since anyone having the connection link can join and it may not be possible to know and check the identity of the person behind the connection. In this respect, Zoom is not currently supported by the UN Secretariat Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT), whereas MS Teams is.

## 2. Examples of UN official meetings conducted virtually and in English only in NY and in Nairobi HQ

### (i) **The United Nations Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission:**

Meetings held in March-April 2020, in accordance with modalities described in letter S/2020/273 dated 2 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council, as follows:

- a) The virtual discussions are conducted via video teleconference in English only. Verbatim records of the events are not be published.
- b) Briefers are encouraged to, where appropriate and according to their own practice, to share in advance their presentations with the President of the Council. Conference Services translate the statements sent in advance.
- c) Webcasts of the statements delivered by briefers during the public portion of the Council's video teleconferences are archived as United Nations webcasts.
- d) Adoption of decisions follows a written procedure for the adoption of resolutions, if necessary. These temporary, extraordinary and provisional measures enable the Council to discharge its mandate and are not considered as a precedent in the future.
- e) All participants requested to see to it that both principal and alternate delegates are logged in at the same time, thereby ensuring that, if a principal's connection is dropped, an alternate can take his or her place immediately.
- f) Briefers encouraged to be succinct and to limit their remarks to 7 minutes.

### (ii) **ECOSOC and Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ):**

Informal ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development follow-up meeting, 23 April 2020, 10:00 -11:00.

ACABQ Winter session, meeting 23-24 April 2020, 10:00 - 13:00 and 15:00 - 18:00.

- a) The UN General Assembly (UNGA) and UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) have adopted a temporary methodology for decision-making on essential decisions related to the Organization, while the COVID-19 pandemic prevents in-person meetings at UN Headquarters. On 27 March 2020, the UNGA adopted decision 74/544, titled 'Procedure for taking decisions of the General Assembly during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic'.
- b) All decisions and resolutions adopted via the silence procedure will be noted by the UNGA plenary at its first possible meeting in the General

Assembly Hall .The decision-making method is known as the ‘silence procedure’ described in the step by step process which is available [here](#).

- (iii) **UNEP - 150th CPR meeting, 30 April 2020, 14:00-17:00**
  - a) In English only, on the GotoMeetings platform.
  - b) Schedule of meetings is attached.

### **3. Interpretation, decision-making process and reporting of the session**

#### **a. Interpretation**

- 2. Phase 3 of UNON COVID-19 Emergency Response Programme has been activated on 7 April 2020 by UNON Director-General and therefore access to the UNON compound is restricted to critical staff required on site (medical, security, IT services, logistics, facilities and compound management required to sustain critical functions) and activities of interpretation from Conference Services ceased on the compound.
- 3. For the time being, Conference Services cannot provide interpretation by any virtual means. The Under Secretary-General of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) has requested a few days ago OICT in New York to start the procurement of a remote interpretation system. UNON Conference Services will also organise a distance interpreting tests in the upcoming days. If the test is successful, the system could be procured.
- 4. In both cases, the procurement of the system and the training of interpreters, technicians, secretariat staff as well as Member States will be needed. It is therefore not foreseen that a remote interpretation system will be available in the very near future.
- 5. The first session of the Board in 2020 could be held virtually but in English only, without any interpretation services. Should that be the case, advance notification would be sent to the members of the Executive Board, proposing that the session be held in English. The Chair should then announce it at the beginning of the session and obtain the permission of members of the Board to proceed in English.

#### **b. Requirement to start the session**

- 1. The Chair should proceed to a roll call at the beginning at the session and call every member to make sure that the rule on quorum is met to start the session, i.e. that at least one third of the members are present for debate to begin and a majority present for decision-making.
- 2. This should be confirmed by the Chair at the beginning of the session and reflected in the session’s record.

#### **c. Decision-making**

- 1. The first option could be that decisions that UN-Habitat needs from the Executive Board could be deferred to a later date and be decided at the next earliest physical meeting opportunity unless majority of Member States

present agree otherwise. Thus, the basis of discussions during the upcoming virtual session of the Board could be only briefings and updates from the secretariat on Agenda items which do not require a decision from the Board. The virtual session would be short, without negotiations towards decisions.

2. A second option could be to follow the procedure for decision-making adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 74/544 whereby draft decisions of the General Assembly are sent by the President of the General Assembly after consultation with the General Committee to all Member States under a silence procedure of at least 72 hours. If the silence is not broken, the decision shall be considered adopted, and the General Assembly shall take note of the decision at its first plenary meeting. Following this precedent, the Chair of the Executive Board would send draft decisions to all members of the Executive Board after consultation with the Bureau under a silence procedure of at least 72 hours. If the silence is not broken, the decision shall be considered adopted, and the Executive Board shall take note of the decision at its first in-person meeting.
3. A third possibility for decision-making on a specific item, as the platforms do not offer provision for voting, is that the Chair should conduct a roll call again immediately before decision-making in order to ensure that the majority of members are present and to make sure consensus has been reached, and if not, then a vote should be organised by way of roll call in alphabetical order.

#### **c. Reporting of the session**

1. The usual report writing services from Conference Services will be provided by report writers during the virtual session.
2. The report of the session should record that it took place virtually.

#### **4. Arrangements prior to and during the virtual session**

The Bureau could consider the following arrangements to enable a smooth moderation of the session but these are just suggestions:

- (i) The secretariat will be requested to share pre-session documentation supporting Agenda items 30 days in advance of the session and PowerPoint presentation 20 days in advance of the session, with the understanding that the secretariat is at liberty to amend a presentation in accordance with any new latest developments that may have occurred by then.
- (ii) Member States will be invited to submit their questions 10 days in advance of the session and the responses to questions from Member States should be provided by the Secretariat at least 5 days prior to the start of the session.
- (iii) Member States including members of the Board will be invited not to deliver any statements by during the session, written statements, however, will be posted on the webpage of the session within 15 days after the end of the session.
- (iv) During the virtual session, the questions from Member States to the Secretariat could be coordinated through regional representatives of each group.

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