



SEVENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Report of the Information and
Communications Technology
Subcommittee**

1. The Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee met on 10 November 2005. The Subcommittee Officers were as follows: Mr. M. Sawers (Government member, Australia), Chairperson and Reporter; Mr. A. Finlay (Employer member), Vice-Chairperson; Mr. S. Nakajima (Worker member), Vice-Chairperson.

Preliminary discussion

2. The Executive Director of the Management and Administration Sector (MAS), representing the Director-General, opened the first session of the Information and Communications Technology Subcommittee by recalling the context in which the Subcommittee had been created. The Governing Body had recommended at its March 2005 session that it would be useful to set up a body to look at information and communications technology (ICT) issues in a more strategic way. At its June 2005 session, the Governing Body then decided to establish the Subcommittee with the following terms of reference: to assist the PFAC in the governance of the ICT policies of the Office and, secondly, to review and debate substantive ICT issues with a direct impact on the budget and to make recommendations for consideration by the PFAC. The Subcommittee itself did not have decision-making powers; it provided a forum for the discussion of all issues relating to ICT so that they could be brought forward for consideration and recommendation by the PFAC.
3. The Chairperson emphasized the strategic aspect of the work of the Subcommittee and the need to avoid getting bogged down in details. The real value of such a subcommittee was its focus on ICT governance within the Organization.
4. Mr. Finlay (Employer member) commented that whilst the two reports were helpful in terms of a broad statement of where things stood, they did not provide enough information to enable any meaningful discussion of the issues. He also suggested that the Subcommittee should, if possible, meet before the PFAC. Documentation necessary for a meaningful discussion should look forward, rather than providing a report of activities. Information on IRIS should cover four areas: the objectives in terms of implementation and roll-out; the target outcomes; accountability; and time frames. He hoped the

Subcommittee would be able to address the critical points with respect to technology, training, security and internal oversight. The other major IT projects – wide area network, document management system and voting system – should also have a separate set of outcomes. Three other areas of interest to the Employers were the ongoing maintenance and upgrades of the systems, an informal discussion of technology, and planned support for the mobile workforce.

5. Mr. Nakajima (Worker member) agreed with the proposals of the Employers' group on trying to schedule the meeting before the PFAC and on the need for more documentation. He stressed the importance of transparency and accountability to achieve better governance. He added that due to the importance of the subject matter, the Subcommittee should meet twice a year.
6. The representative of the Government of Germany stated his concern about the return on investment for an important IT project such as IRIS. He also referred to the report of the Geneva Group submitted to the ILO Director-General with seven concrete recommendations for more effective IT investments, and was interested to know whether the report had had any impact on the work of the ILO, and especially on the IT department.
7. The Executive Director of MAS clarified that the Governing Body's decision was for the Subcommittee to meet at least once a year. She agreed that the timing of the current meeting was not unsatisfactory, but that it was not envisaged that the Subcommittee would meet at every Governing Body.
8. The Chief of the Information Technology and Communications Bureau (ITCOM) confirmed receipt of the Geneva Group report, adding that since it had only been received on 24 October there had not yet been the opportunity to analyse it carefully. The ICT Network (consisting of the ICT chiefs of United Nations system organizations) was also planning to discuss this report.

Information Technology Systems Fund

9. The Subcommittee had before it a paper¹ concerning the IT Systems Fund which included three projects: headquarters/field telecommunications infrastructure improvements through a Wide Area Network (WAN), an electronic document management system (EDMS), and an electronic voting system (EVS).
10. Mr. Nakajima raised a number of questions regarding the progress of each of the three projects, their budgetary resources, maintenance and final products delivery.
11. The representative of the Government of Nigeria, speaking for the Africa group, expressed concerns regarding the connectivity for all external offices to headquarters.
12. The Chief of ITCOM provided clarifications on the connectivity of the offices in the field, stressing that all the offices were connected to the Internet, had full email communication, and could access the Intranet at headquarters. However, IRIS was a more demanding application than email or Web surfing. Therefore, prior to the introduction of IRIS in the field, all field connections to the IRIS servers outsourced in Holland would be tested; only those connections which could not handle the IRIS load would then be upgraded using the existing project funds.

¹ GB.294/PFA/ICTS/1.

13. He confirmed that one of the products of the EDMS, the redesigned ILO web site using the new software, was already operational in test mode on the headquarters network, and that the general public would have access to the new public site by early 2006. The additional software development for the EVS would be completed within the allocated budget.

Information technology: IRIS

14. The Executive Director of MAS presented the paper on IRIS submitted to the Subcommittee² as an update of previous documents. She commented that even though there were still difficulties with the operation of IRIS and that there had been pressure on the staff to deal with the challenges brought on by IRIS, the system was working and functioning on a daily basis as indicated by the statistics published in the document. The main administrative functions of the Office were being processed by IRIS at headquarters. Additionally, the Strategic Management Module, closely linked to the programme and budget process, including the development of decent work country programmes, was being used not just at headquarters but also in the field. She pointed out that IRIS was still in its early stage of implementation and that the current priority was to fully stabilize the system at headquarters, and ensure that the users had sufficient confidence, training and skills to work effectively with the system. She recognized that there was a need for ongoing training, which presented a challenge because of limited resources.
15. Concerning the roll-out to the field, the Executive Director of MAS stressed the Office's overall commitment for that process to be completed in the course of the next biennium. Although there were no specific timetables at the current stage, initial consultations had been undertaken with Regional Directors. Once the Office was satisfied that the system had been stabilized at headquarters, a pilot site in the field would be selected in consultation with the regions. Full roll-out to all the regions would be based on the pilot experience.
16. Mr. Nakajima expressed concerns regarding staff training and the availability of resources for that purpose. The Office should not overlook the health and safety issues related to IRIS. He requested that more detailed information about the use of the allocation of US\$11.6 million for the 2006-07 biennium be provided for the March 2006 Governing Body. The Workers stressed that the ILO was linked to the world and that its IT systems should be developed towards meeting the ILO core objective enhancements at headquarters and in field offices as well as the needs of ILO constituents.
17. Mr. Finlay reiterated the need for additional documentation from the Office. He appreciated that the Office was addressing the problems. However, there was a need for more specific information on the issues being addressed.
18. The representative of the Government of Nigeria, on behalf of the Africa group, agreed with the request for further information and briefing documentation of the projects to include objectives, frameworks and deliverables.
19. The representative of the Government of Germany suggested that further information be provided by the Office on the details of project delivery as compared to anticipated benefits. He further suggested that the External Auditor be asked for a special study on the IRIS project after the completion of the roll-out. He inquired as to whether the budget allocation for 2006-07 would be sufficient to cover the running costs of IRIS.

² GB.294/PFA/ICTS/2.

- 20.** The representative of the Government of Australia noted that the original 2000 project proposal, which was costed at US\$20 million, provided for the preparation of a report on lessons learned during the fifth phase of the project. He wanted to know the Office's plans in relation to that exercise. He also sought clarification on how the Office would determine that stabilization of IRIS had been achieved.
- 21.** The Executive Director of MAS indicated that a Users' Forum had been created as part of the IRIS governance structure specifically to address the concerns of users. The introduction of IRIS had been a very significant change in the ILO. The Office was in a difficult period of transition and, in spite of all the preparation, unforeseen difficulties could not be avoided; issues were being addressed, lessons were being learned and they would be documented. Communication with the staff at headquarters and in the field had been enhanced with the publication of an electronic newsletter. Training was very important and resources had been set aside for staff development, including IRIS training. User support was also key and the Office had set up a series of help desks by functional areas. Work-related problems for some staff, such as stress, were being addressed by the Human Resources Development Department in consultation with the ILO Medical Adviser and the Staff Union.
- 22.** The Treasurer and Financial Comptroller explained that the External Auditor's report to the Conference in June would include a significant section on IRIS. Transitional problems were being resolved and work had commenced to simplify processing. With regard to the cost of the project, the Office would prepare a document providing an overview of the project's financing. He confirmed that IRIS would be supported within the 2006-07 allocation. In response to the concern of the Workers, the problems with payments made in the early days of IRIS now occurred infrequently and were not solely due to the introduction of IRIS. He reassured them that where electronic funds transfers were not feasible, alternative payment methods were available.
- 23.** The Acting IRIS Project Director stated that all issues were being documented; of about 150 issues registered to date, 85 or 90 had been resolved, with the objective that the remaining issues would be dealt with by the end of the year or shortly thereafter. The system could then be considered to have stabilized.
- 24.** In response to the requests for more background information, the Chairperson, in consultation with the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons, suggested that instead of a formal meeting of the Subcommittee, an informal information session would be arranged by the Office during the 295th Session of the Governing Body in March 2006. This would enable the Office to present the members of the Subcommittee with further information on IRIS, the three projects in the IT Systems Fund, and its overall IT strategy and respond in more detail to their questions. The Subcommittee would then hold its second formal session at the November 2006 Governing Body meeting.

Geneva, 15 November 2005.