

ONLINE PARTICIPATION IN 13TH APPU CONGRESS

(Document prepared by the Bureau, in conjunction with Thailand)

1. Subject	References/paragraphs
Informing Congress on: - the proposal to enable online participation in the 2022 APPU Bangkok Congress as a special arrangement - the reasons for the modification to the meeting style - the implications from a change in the meeting style to include online participation i.e., – amendment to the APPU Congress Rules of Procedure (RoP) – specific conditions being set for online attendance particularly no participation in secret ballots, or in non-electronic voting – modification to proxies to enable online-only participants to have votes cast on their behalf for secret ballots and other non-electronic voting - the need to anticipate online participation being approved by Congress so that members can take necessary preparatory steps to be fully represented if they cannot attend physically - further technical and implementation aspects being a separate programme of work	§§ 1.1 – 1.2 § 4.2 § 5 § 6, Appendix 1 § 7 § 8 §§ 9 – 10 § 11
2. Decisions expected Congress is asked to: - note the background to the proposal to include online participation in the 13th APPU Congress - approve the ○ amendment to the APPU Congress Rules of Procedure (RoP) ○ specific conditions set for online attendance particularly no participation in secret ballots, or in non-electronic voting - note the modification to proxies to enable online-only participants to have votes cast on their behalf for secret ballots and other non-electronic voting - note the need for the Bureau to have anticipated the approval of online participation so that it could advise members of any documentation requirements they may have to observe - note that the anticipation of Congress approval (and the various matters that are proceeding on this basis in the meantime) does not remove members' rights to clarify, offer opinions and views, propose alternatives, etc, until such time as approval is given	§§ 1 – 5 § 6, Appendix 1 § 7 § 8 § 9 § 10

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document informs members of a proposed modification of the meeting style for the 13th APPU Congress. The proposal is from the host country, Thailand, via the APPU Bureau.

- 1.2 The specific modification is to allow online participation in addition to physical participation.
- 1.3 Congress 2022 Doc 24.8 sets out relevant background and other detail to enable the orderly formalisation of the proposal and its associated conditions / arrangements.

2. Standard style of APPU Congresses

- 2.1 The standard style of APPU Congresses has been a physically-attended meeting.
- 2.2 When preparing for the 13th Congress in the first part of 2022, the view was that a physically-attended meeting was a realistic possibility given that the Congress was not being held until August-September. As discussed later in this document, there have been some changes that necessitate a variation to the original decision on meeting style.

3. General impact of Covid-19 pandemic on international meetings

- 3.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in some international organisations making contingency arrangements to enable participation by those unable to travel. This participation is generally referred to as “online participation” or “remote participation”.
- 3.2 As a case in point, the 2021 UPU Abidjan Congress amended its Rules of Procedure (RoP) to allow for online participation. There were conditions applied to such participation, most notably regarding secret ballots or voting using the (UPU) traditional system.

4. Participation in 2022 APPU Bangkok Congress (style of meeting)

- 4.1 In its letter APPC-22/30/120 of 4 April 2022 (“Credentials and Proxies for 13th APPU Congress”), the APPU Bureau, on advice from the host country (Thailand), stated the style of meeting as follows:

“The Congress will be a physical meeting. There are no plans at this stage to organise a hybrid Congress involving physical or online representation.”

As mentioned in paragraph 2.2, at the time of specifying the meeting being a physically-attended event, this was a realistic expectation.

- 4.2 Following a discussion on 8 June between Thailand and the Bureau, it is proposed to change the style of the meeting. The general reason for the change is the current status of the pandemic. In this regard, while there has been a significant improvement in public health and safety conditions in Thailand, other pandemic-related factors in the region suggest that it is not realistic to expect all members to be able to physically attend. These factors include:

- (i) travel insurance with medical cover for Covid-19 treatment is either not available or is prohibitively priced;
- (ii) quarantine requirements when returning to home country (in some cases up to three weeks’ quarantine is imposed on returning travellers);
- (iii) financial constraints within the government sector; and
- (iv) personal / family comfort regarding international travel at the moment.

4.3 The changes to the style of meeting that Thailand and the Bureau have agreed are as follows.

- (i) The Congress will primarily be a physical meeting.
- (ii) There will be the opportunity for online participation.
- (iii) Members who participate online will be included in the quorum tally (except when the situations described in sub-paragraph (v) (a) and (b) below take place).
- (iv) All delegations attending physically or online will need to deposit credentials.
- (v) Online participants will have full meeting rights except for:
 - (a) secret ballots; or
 - (b) voting that does not use an official electronic voting system.
- (vi) An online participant can only take part in a secret ballot, or in voting that does not use an official electronic voting system, by giving its proxy to a member who is physically present at the Congress.
- (vii) Approval of the changes to the style of meeting discussed between Thailand and the Bureau would be done through a proposal to amend the APPU Congress Rules of Procedure. The proposal would be scheduled for the first Plenary session of the Congress, and only open to members physically present at the Congress.

5. Implications of changes to style of meeting

5.1 Fortunately, the UPU has already been through a meeting style change the same as that now proposed for the APPU Congress. Accordingly, the APPU is able to “borrow and adapt” the UPU documentation as the basis for its arrangements. A key advantage of the UPU experience is that the APPU is using proven material to formalise the meeting style modification.

5.2 There are three areas where drafting has been done to enable the APPU to include the online attendance option. These are set out below.

- (i) Amendment of the APPU Congress RoP to acknowledge the existence and status of online participation as a legitimate attendance option at the 2022 Congress. Paragraph 6 covers the amendments to the APPU Congress RoP in detail.
- (ii) A clear statement on the conditions for online participation, particularly regarding secret ballots or voting that does not use an official electronic voting system. Paragraph 7 sets out the conditions for online participation.
- (iii) Requirements and options for credentials and proxies. Paragraph 8 covers this area.

5.3 Prior to dealing with the technical aspects set out in paragraphs 6-8, it could be useful to examine why it is necessary to formalise the online attendance option to the extent outlined in paragraph 5.2. The Bureau provides the following comments.

- (i) Whereas the APPU EC held online meetings without formalisation of processes and rules, Congresses operate on a different level. In particular, Congresses involve accredited government representatives where decisions can be made that bind member states.
- (ii) The processes and rules for participation in Congresses should reflect the visibility and authority expectations of an inter-governmental decision-making body. Visibility refers to reasonable awareness of who is represented by whom. Authority refers to evidence of representatives having the right to speak, vote and, where appropriate, sign.
- (iii) Physical meetings are managed in a way that deals adequately with the visibility and authority expectations of an inter-governmental decision-making body. The processes and rules have existed for many years. They are proven to be effective.
- (iv) As with the UPU prior to its Congress in 2021, the APPU has no experience with online meetings at the level of a Congress. However, taking the UPU example, the APPU (in the simplest manner possible) needs to specify:
 - (a) that online participation can occur (e.g., providing for such an option in its RoP)
 - (b) the conditions under which online participation will operate; and
 - (c) how aspects of authority, particularly in relation to voting, are managed.

6. Amendment of APPU Congress RoP

- 6.1 An amendment to the APPU Congress RoP has been prepared. It is at Appendix 1. It is based on the text that the UPU adopted at the 2021 UPU Abidjan Congress. Modifications have been made to fit the APPU situation.
- 6.2 Comparisons between the APPU and UPU texts (thus identifying any modifications) are set out in the Table 1 (commencing on the next page).

Table 1: Comparison of APPU and UPU texts for Rules of Procedure amendment

Para	UPU	APPU	Comment
1	Any reference in these rules to “take part”, “participate”, “seating”, “represented”, “being present”, “attend” and “voting” shall be understood as also including the possibility of remote participation of Union member countries (and other observers) by electronic means, i.e. via web/video/audio conferencing facilities made available by the International Bureau to ensure active participation, including voting, in Congress meetings.	Any reference in these rules to “take part”, “participate”, “represented”, “attending” and “vote” shall be understood as also including the possibility of online participation of Union member countries (and other observers) by electronic means, i.e., via web/video/audio conferencing facilities that may be made available by the host country and / or the Bureau to ensure active participation, including voting, in Congress meetings.	The highlighting of words indicates which ones are either not repeated in the APPU RoP or are written with a different verb-ending. UPU defines the option as remote participation. APPU, as a stated preference, defines the option as online participation. UPU specifies that the IB makes the remote access links available. At this stage, for the Bangkok Congress, it is not known whether the online access links will be made available by Thailand or by the Bureau. In addition, it is not known at this stage what the resource requirements are for offering online participation. Hence the optional phrasing that is designed to ensure a practical and economic arrangement is facilitated.
2	The possibility of remote participation referred to above shall not apply in the event of: i) any secret ballot; or ii) any non-secret vote taken by the traditional system, in which case Union member countries availing themselves of the aforementioned possibility shall not be counted for the purposes of article 17 of the present Rules, nor be entitled to vote or give notices of representation to other Union member countries.	The possibility of online participation referred to above shall not apply in the event of: i) any secret ballot; or ii) any non-secret vote that does not use an official electronic voting system, in which case Union member countries availing themselves of the online participation possibility shall not be counted for the purposes of article 9 of the present Rules, nor be entitled to vote or give notices of representation to other Union member countries (as provided for in article 4, paragraph 4 of the present Rules).	The UPU text does not permit remote participation in open voting that uses the traditional system (i.e., show of hands, or roll-call). The APPU does not define the types of voting in its RoP. Accordingly, the UPU text cannot be used. The APPU solution is to only allow open voting if an official electronic voting system is used (which is what the UPU allowed in 2021). Indicates a different RoP article number in the APPU document. Words have been added to confirm that the reference to notices of representation applies under the current APPU Congress RoP.
3		An online participant can only take part in a secret ballot, or in voting that does not use an official electronic voting system, by giving its proxy to a member who is physically present at the Congress.	New provision added by the APPU to make it clear how an online participant can take part in a secret ballot or in voting that does not use an official electronic voting system.

6.3 There are two results achieved from introducing the new Article into the APPU Congress RoP.

- (i) Online participation in the Bangkok Congress is an option.
- (ii) Online participation does not include participation in;
 - (a) secret ballots; or
 - (b) open voting that does not use an official electronic voting system.

6.4 The exclusion of online participation from secret ballots, and open voting that does not use an official electronic voting system, is consistent with the UPU arrangement in Abidjan. The reason for this exclusion is simply the ability to manage the integrity and security of such a process to the complete and reasonable satisfaction of all parties.

6.5 The amendment to the APPU Congress RoP applies only to the period of the APPU Congress (i.e., from 29 August until its conclusion).

7. Conditions for online participation

7.1 The following conditions apply to online participation. It should be noted that these are the main requirements. It is possible that members may have particular circumstances that are not referred to in the current material. Quite simply, in this new area of activity (i.e., online participation in a Congress) there is limited experience from which to construct a comprehensive list of conditions.

- (i) Online participants must be named in credentials documents.
- (ii) Only accredited delegates can participate online. In other words, if a person is not an accredited representative, they cannot participate online.
- (iii) A delegation can comprise delegates physically present at the Congress and delegates participating online. There is no restriction in this regard. There is no requirement to specify in credentials who is physically present and who is participating online.
- (iv) If a member is only participating online (i.e., they are not physically represented at the Congress), they are included in the quorum number for respective Plenary sessions.
- (v) If a member is only participating online (i.e., they are not physically represented at Congress), they can only vote in open (i.e., non-secret) voting situations where an official electronic system is used (if this is supplied).
- (vi) Participation in secret ballots, and in open voting (i.e., non-secret) using show of hands or roll-call is restricted to members who are physically attending Congress.
- (vii) A member who is only participating online (i.e., they are not physically represented at the Congress) can give its proxy for a secret ballot (or for other voting that is show of hands or roll-call) to a member who is physically present. **However, during the sessions when these proxies are to be used by a member physically present, the online participant must be disconnected from the Congress communications system.** This is because credentials (i.e., authority to attend Congress (physically or online) and proxies (authority

for another party to represent) cannot co-exist. The online participant will be advised by the meeting secretariat when reconnection can take place.

- 7.2 If, through the process of inquiry and discussion prior to Congress, there are other points that arise, these will be advised to members.

8. Requirements and options for credentials and proxies

- 8.1 Table 2 sets out the position for credentials and proxies.

Table 2: Credentials and proxies

Line	Participation Style	Credentials Requirement	Proxy Requirement
1	Physical only	As already advised (ref para 4.1)	Not applicable
2	Physical and online	As already advised (ref para 4.1) There is no need to identify who is attending physically and who is attending online.	Not applicable
3	Online only	As already advised (ref para 4.1) There is no need to specify that attendance is online only.	If an “online-only” member wishes to give its proxy for secret ballots (and for any other non-electronic voting) to a member physically present, then they must complete a Proxy as set out in paragraph 8.2 below.

- 8.2 In relation to Line 3 of Table 2, the template wording used in the UPU for online-only participants giving their proxy to members physically present is as follows.

“I, the undersigned,, of (name of country), authorise by these presents, in pursuance of article 105, § 2 of the General Regulations of the Asian-Pacific Postal Union, the Delegation of (name of country authorised) to represent (name of country) at the 13th Congress of the Asian-Pacific Postal Union from 29 August to 2 September 2022, and to take part in its deliberations and vote on behalf of (name of country).

This proxy instrument shall be **automatically** revoked from the moment (name of country) takes part in Congress; nevertheless, the same proxy shall be reactivated with immediate effect in the event that secret or non-electronic ballots are held at Congress.

In witness whereof these presents have been issued for whatsoever legal purpose they may serve.”

9. Timing considerations

- 9.1 As was the case for the 2021 UPU Abidjan Congress, those members who cannot be physically represented at the 2022 APPU Bangkok Congress need to assume that the amendment to the APPU Congress RoP (at Appendix 1) will be approved in the first Plenary session of the Congress on Monday, 29 August.
- 9.2 Once the amendment to the RoP is approved, then the secretariat will open authorised links for online participants to connect to the Congress. At the same time, online-only participants will be registered as attending and included in the quorum numbers.
- 9.3 Online-only participants will need to have prepared credentials (as per para 4.1 of this document), and proxies (as per para 8.2 of this document) on the assumption of the change in

RoP being approved. These documents would need to reach the Bureau prior to Congress commencing.

- 9.4 In view of the assumption in paragraph 9.3 and the need for online-only participants to prepare modified proxies, it is important for Congress 2022 Doc 24.8 to be circulated and discussed, where possible / appropriate, as soon as can be arranged.

10. Approval of online participation

- 10.1 While Thailand and the Bureau have held discussions and made some necessary decisions, it is clear from paragraph 9 that this matter is not being managed in the ideal sequence issue / discussion / possible solution / proposal / approval decision. It is also clear that from the UPU experience (and now our own) that the ideal sequence of events is not possible due to the overall circumstances.

- 10.2 Notwithstanding paragraph 10.1, Thailand and the Bureau share the following views.

- (i) Any arrangements, statements or decisions contained in Congress 2022 Doc 24.8 are in anticipation of online participation in the Congress being approved. Such arrangements, statements or decisions have been necessary to enable online participation to be available as soon as Congress makes that decision.
- (ii) Congress approval of the amendment to the RoP (as documented in paragraph 6 and Appendix 1) is the point at which online participation will be approved. Prior to that happening, members may seek clarification, offer opinions and views, propose alternatives, etc.

11. Technical and implementation aspects

- 11.1 Congress 2022 Doc 24.8 only addresses enabling aspects of an immediate nature.
- 11.2 There will be other matters that require planning, testing, documenting, etc so that the online option will function efficiently and meet the interests and needs of all members. Such matters will be the subject of a separate programme of work organised by the Bureau in conjunction with Thailand.

13th CONGRESS

Rules of Procedure of Congresses – Proposal

19.1.91 [Rev 1](#)

[AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, THAILAND](#)

Create the following new Article 1 bis:

Article 1bis

Exceptional definitions and procedures associated with online participation in Congress

1. Any reference in these rules to “take part”, “participate”, “represented”, “attending” and “vote” shall be understood as also including the possibility of online participation of Union member countries (and other observers) by electronic means, i.e., via web/video/audio conferencing facilities made available by the Bureau and / or the host country to ensure active participation, including voting, in Congress meetings.

2. The possibility of online participation referred to above shall not apply in the event of: i) any secret ballot; or ii) any non-secret vote that does not use an official electronic voting system, in which case Union member countries availing themselves of the online participation possibility shall not be counted for the purposes of article 9 of the present Rules, nor be entitled to vote or give notices of representation to other Union member countries (as provided for in article 4, paragraph 4 of the present Rules).

3. An online participant can only take part in a secret ballot, or in voting that does not use an official electronic voting system, by giving its proxy to a member who is physically present at the Congress.

Reasons – See Congress 2022 Doc 24.8. The proposal to create new article 1bis is aimed at including the possibility of online participation in the 13th APPU Congress, while limiting that possibility to open votes conducted via an official electronic voting system (if such a system is supplied).

Date of entry into force: From 29 August 2022, and solely for the duration of the 13th APPU Congress; immediately abrogated thereafter.

ONLINE PARTICIPATION IN 13TH APPU CONGRESS: OFFICIAL ELECTRONIC VOTING SYSTEM FOR ONLINE-ONLY PARTICIPANTS

(Document prepared by the Bureau, in conjunction with Thailand)

1. Subject Informing Congress on: - the interpretation of “official electronic voting system” that facilitates the fuller inclusion of online-only participants in Congress proceedings - how the interpretation aligns with text of proposal 19.1.91 (permitting online participation at the 13th APPU Congress) - the use of Zoom by online-only participants as the official electronic voting system - a favourable risk and impact assessment	References/paragraphs § 1 § 3.1 § 3.2 § 4
2. Decisions expected Congress is asked to: - note the use of Zoom as an official electronic voting system for online-only participants at the 13th APPU Congress - note the favourable risk and impact assessment	§ 3.2 § 4

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document is drafted as supplementary information regarding online participation in the 13th APU Congress.
- 1.2 It is drafted in anticipation of online participation being approved by the Congress i.e., proposal 19.1.91.
- 1.3 Congress 2022 Doc 24.8 Add 1 outlines an interpretation of “official electronic voting system” for use in open voting by online-only participants.

2. Background

- 2.1 The amendment to the APPU Congress Rules of Procedure (i.e., proposal 19.1.91, as set out in Congress 2022 Doc 24.8 Appendix 1) is as follows.

“Article 1bis

Exceptional definitions and procedures associated with online participation in Congress

1. Any reference in these rules to “take part”, “participate”, “represented”, “attending” and “vote” shall be understood as also including the possibility of online participation of Union member countries (and other observers) by electronic means, i.e., via web/video/audio conferencing facilities made available by the Bureau and / or the host country to ensure active participation, including voting, in Congress meetings.

2. The possibility of online participation referred to above shall not apply in the event of: i) any secret ballot; or ii) any non-secret vote that does not use an official electronic voting system, in which case Union member countries availing themselves of the online participation possibility shall not be counted for the purposes of article 9 of the present Rules, nor be entitled

to vote or give notices of representation to other Union member countries (as provided for in article 4, paragraph 4 of the present Rules).

3. An online participant can only take part in a secret ballot, or in voting that does not use an official electronic voting system, by giving its proxy to a member who is physically present at the Congress."

- 2.2 At the time of drafting Congress 2022 Doc 24.8 and proposal 19.1.91, it was made clear that the documentation did not necessarily cover every possibility or operational condition. In this regard, a comment was included in paragraph 7.2 of Doc 24.8:

"7.2 If, through the process of inquiry and discussion prior to Congress, there are other points that arise, these will be advised to members."

- 2.3 One such matter has arisen i.e., open voting by online-only participants.

3. Open voting permitted for online-only participants

- 3.1 Proposal 19.1.91 includes the following text as a description of the electronic means used by participants:

"i.e., via web/video/audio conferencing facilities made available by the Bureau and / or the host country to ensure active participation, including voting, in Congress meetings."

- 3.2 Congress will link to its online participants using Zoom. It is a highly reliable service in very wide usage internationally. For online participants this will be the official electronic voting system whereby voting will be the sending of a Yes / No / Abstain message using the system's Chatbox.

4. Risk and impact assessment

- 4.1 The likelihood of an open vote taking place is not great. Seldom does a Congress follow an open voting procedure. The emphasis is on consensus.
- 4.2 Notwithstanding the fact that open voting is unlikely to occur, a key benefit for the Union is inclusion of those who are unable to be present in Bangkok. The arrangement has the effect of making the online participants potentially more involved in the proceedings.
- 4.3 The issues on the current agenda that the Congress will decide on (by consensus, or possibly through open voting) are not significant in financial terms, nor are there any areas of sensitivity that would give rise to controversy at intergovernmental level.
- 4.4 Secret ballots are not affected by the classification of Zoom as an official electronic voting system.
- 4.5 The conditions for proxies (reference paragraph 8.2 of Congress 2022 Doc 24.8) are not impacted by the classification of Zoom as an official electronic voting system.