FOLLOW-UP OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ORGANIZATION INTO A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

(d) Acronym of the World Tourism Organization

Note by the Secretary-General

In this document the Secretary-General submits to the Council a proposal for the modification of the English acronym of the World Tourism Organization.
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1. It is evident that the identification of the World Tourism Organization suffers from the confusion of acronyms that exists in English with the World Trade Organization. This is a problem that we did not engender and that we are not responsible for. In fact, at the end of the Uruguay Round, when the possibility of the transformation of the former GATT into a new institution emerged, we made enquiries, in a timely manner, into the risk that this nascent organization might adopt an acronym that would generate confusion with ours.

2. Initially, we approached the World Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva, which informed us that we were fully protected against any initiative coming from the private sector, but not against those issuing from another international organization. There are precedents in this area, albeit not precisely concerning an organization's acronym. For example, the European Union adopted the same flag and the same anthem—although the latter can be considered part of the heritage of humanity—as the Council of Europe, which deeply lamented the fact.

3. We then approached the Director-General and the Legal Adviser of the GATT, who assured us in writing that everything would be done to avoid creating confusion in terms of the respective acronyms of the two institutions.

4. However, it was during the last negotiating session of the Uruguay Round that the conversion of the GATT was agreed, after the United States of America, which had been reluctant for a long time, finally came round. And it was at the proposal of the U.S. delegation that the name "World Trade Organization"—and therefore the acronym "WTO"—was adopted, without the Director-General and Legal Adviser of GATT being able to intervene. Many other names giving different acronyms had been suggested in order to avoid this confusion, but unfortunately they were not taken into consideration.

5. It should be noted that the confusion caused by having identical acronyms occurs in the English and Russian languages, but not in Spanish or French. Nevertheless, for obvious reasons, the issue that arises in English is determinant. It should also be noted that, among national tourism administration officials and tourism industry actors, the WTO is perfectly identified and the acronym is perfectly understood to refer to our Organization. But this is not the case in other sectors, for example, among the press, public decision-makers or economic leaders in general.
6. Diverse suggestions have been put forward in order to remedy this drawback, including attaching the French or Spanish acronym to the English acronym thus distinguishing between "WTO/OMC" and "WTO/OMT". Another suggested approach, one that is used in practice by the United Nations Secretariat, is to write "WTO (Trade)" and "WTO (Tourism)". These solutions do not seem to fully address the problem at hand, since it would be difficult to expect the World Trade Organization to refer to itself using either of the above methods. It is equally unlikely to expect the press, which is now extremely familiar with the acronym "WTO" as referring to the World Trade Organization, to change their practice.

7. In light of these circumstances, in order eliminate this confusion, and although it may not seem logical or fair for our Organization to be the one to have to make an effort in this respect given its precedence, it seems that the only possible solution is for the WTO to modify its English acronym. There is no need to change our Spanish and French acronyms. The Russian acronym would be the transcription of "UNWTO" in Cyrillic characters.

8. The transformation of the World Tourism Organization into a specialized agency, insofar as it strengthens our relationship to the United Nations system, allows us to consider resolving the issue by referring to ourselves using the acronym "UNWTO". It should be pointed out that the World Trade Organization also belongs to the United Nations system in a broad sense, but only has the status of a "related agency", which was the same status held by the World Tourism Organization prior to its own transformation.

9. The Secretary-General therefore submits this proposal to the Council for consideration. He believes that it has the advantage of highlighting the new link—one that is more patent than that of the World Trade Organization—with the United Nations itself. This solution would be equivalent to that those adopted by some seventy-five other United Nations bodies or organs, such as "UNESCO", "UNIDO", "UNCTAD", "UNDP", "UNEP", etc.

10. We understand from the opinion of the Legal Adviser of the United Nations regarding this subject (attached to the present document), that there would be no objection to us using the acronym "UNWTO" in English. Out of courtesy, however, the Secretary-General felt that, before proceeding with any other initiative, the WTO/OMC should be approached in order to learn its opinion regarding the adoption of the acronym "UNWTO". The WTO/OMC has informed us that it would be very grateful if we could carry out this change in our acronym and thus free both organizations from the drawbacks resulting from the current confusion in their names.

11. If the Council agrees on this point, the corresponding authorization will have to be requested from the United Nations Secretary-General, in accordance with the opinion of the Legal Adviser of the United Nations.
ANNEX

Note to Mr. Rafeeuddin Ahmed

Subject: Use of the Acronym for the World Tourism Organization

I am writing with reference to a question raised by you during our telephone conversation on 6 February 2004. You referred to the difficulties experienced by the World Tourism Organization in using the WTO acronym since the World Trade Organization has the same acronym. In this regard, you inquired as to whether it would be possible for your organization to put the letters "UN" at the beginning of its acronym, at least in English, so that the acronym would then read "UNWTO".

In response to your inquiry, please, be advised that the use of the name of the United Nations and of its abbreviations is regulated by resolution 92 (I) adopted by the first session of the General Assembly on 7 December 1946. Pursuant to paragraph (a) of that resolution "the name of the United Nations and of the abbreviations of that name through the use of its initial letters" can be used by other entities only with the express authorization of the Secretary-General. Under the resolution Member States of the United Nations are required to take such legislative or other appropriate measures, as are necessary, to enforce the provisions of this resolution. In accordance with the established practice, responses to requests regarding the use of the name of the United Nations and of its acronym are being given on behalf of the Secretary-General by the Legal Counsel.

If follows from the foregoing that should your organization decide to use the letters "UN" in its acronym, it should forward such a request to the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations for consideration. Given the fact that the World Tourism Organization has obtained the status of a specialized agency, and that the letters "UN" are used in the acronyms for two specialized agencies, namely UNESCO and UNIDO, I strongly believe that such a request will receive favorable consideration.

(signature)
Ralph Zacklin
20 February 2004