

## The Universal Postal Union circulates a new international reply coupon (IRC)

The new illustration featuring on the international reply coupon (IRC) as from 1 July 2009 was chosen in Geneva during the 24th Universal Postal Congress.

A Luxembourg artist won the competition, organized by the UPU's International Bureau in order to find the new illustration for the IRC. The work by Rob van Goor, a graphic designer from the Luxembourg Post, was selected from amongst 10 designs presented by UPU member countries. The artist interpreted the theme of the competition, "The postage stamp: a vehicle for exchange" by depicting a globe being cradled by a hand, and the perforations of a stamp. All 169 countries present at the UPU Congress cast a vote in order to select the winning design.



International reply coupon (Front)

Dieser Schein kann in allen Mitgliedsländern des Weltpostvereins eingelöst werden. Sein Wert entspricht dem Mindestentgelt für den Versand einer gewöhnlichen Vorrangsendung oder eines gewöhnlichen Luftpostbriefes nach dem Ausland.

This coupon is exchangeable in any country of the Universal Postal Union for the minimum postage for an unregistered priority item or an unregistered letter sent by air to a foreign country.

هذه القسيمة قَابلة للاستبدال في كُل بلد من بلدان الاتحاد البريدي العالمي مقابل التخليص الأدنى على بعيثة عادية ذات أولوية أو رسالة جوية عادية مرسلة إلى الخارج. 本券可在万国邮联各会员国兑换寄往国外一件平常优先函

件或一封航空平信所需的最低邮资凭证。 Este cupón podrá canjearse en todos los países de la Unión Postal Universal por el franqueo mínimo de un envío prioritario ordinario o de una carta-avión ordinaria expedida al extranjero.

Этот купон обменивает \$ 100 км граница сапа-avon ordinaria expedida al extranjero. Этот купон обменивает \$ 100 км гранирного почтового союза на почтовые марки, представляющие минимальную стоимость оплаты простого приоритетного отправления или простого авиаписьма, отправляемого за границу.



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International reply coupon (Back)

The new IRC, known as the Nairobi model, went on sale on 1 July 2009, and the general public, collectors and philatelists will be able to exchange it until 31 December 2013. It replaces the current coupon, Beijing 2, which was issued on 1 July 2006 and remains valid for exchange until 31 December 2009.

The international reply coupon is a postal product **exchangeable in every UPU member country** for one or more postage stamps representing the minimum postage for an ordinary priority letter-post item or an ordinary airmail letter sent abroad for the reply. Around 2.2 million reply coupons are sold worldwide each

year by 121 designated operators of UPU member countries. While not all countries sell IRCs, all the postal operators of the UPU's member countries, and their territories, are required to exchange them.

More than a century after it first appeared in 1907, the international reply coupon remains a useful item. Aside from its traditional use for correspondence, two particular groups of IRC users have emerged: students, who use it as a means of registering and exchanging correspondence with universities and other academic institutions, and amateur radio enthusiasts, who use them when exchanging reply cards confirming radio links. In addition, the IRC remains an important product for letter-post communication among the populations of the industrialized, developing and least developed countries, as it avoids the need for payment when replying to a correspondent living abroad.

A new element of the Nairobi IRC is the possibility of featuring the national flag in colour on the front of the coupon. This feature is optional and subject to payment. So far, only a few countries have chosen to adopt it (Burkina Faso, Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mauritius, Morocco, Senegal and Ukraine); however, it provides added interest, particularly for collectors of the IRC which, is must be remembered, is regarded as a philatelic item by the FIP, which categorizes it as postal stationery.

The logo of the United Nations (UNEP) also appears on all IRCs, along with the slogan "Unite to Combat Climate Change".

Finally, it should be noted that an original and forward-looking printing innovation in the form of UV-visible security marking has been added to the many security features contained in the Nairobi IRC.

Since the reform of the IRC at the Beijing Congress, four "new format" IRCs have been issued:

- Beijing model 1 valid until 31 December 2006
- Standard Beijing model 2 valid until 31 December 2009
- Centenary Beijing model 2 valid until 31 December 2009
- Nairobi model valid until 31 December 2013

At the end of 2009, it will be useful to review the distribution of this product and to assess its public appeal.

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