

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, it 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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