



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR LYLE DAVIDSON, COUNSELLOR AT THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ON AGENDA ITEM 134: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENIUM 2016-2017: CONSTRUCTION AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT: PROGRESS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW OFFICE FACILITIES AT THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA AND UPDATES ON THE RENOVATION OF CONFERENCE FACILITIES, INCLUDING THE AFRICA HALL DURING THE MAIN PART OF THE SEVENTIETH SESSION OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 1 December 2015)**

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 134: proposed programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017, in particular construction and property management at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa.

At the outset, the Group of 77 and China would like to thank Mr. Stephen Cutts, Assistant Secretary-General for the Office of Central Support Services, as well as Mr. Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, for introducing their respective report on this agenda item.

The Group notes with appreciation the support of the people and Government of Ethiopia in support the work of the Commission and other regional and multilateral entities in Addis Ababa, including facilitating the construction and modernization of the facilities.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China would like to reaffirm the importance of the implementation of the capital projects at the Economic Commission for Africa, in particular the renovation and modernization of conference and other facilities, including the Africa Hall, to address health and safety concerns.

The Group notes with satisfaction the completion of construction of the new Office facilities, now renamed the Zambezi building, and its full occupancy by the middle of the year. We have also taken note of the substantive completion of the related ancillary works for the new facilities.

The Group notes the information related to possible claims and settlements related to the rectification of errors, omission and delays by contractors, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to take all necessary efforts to ensure all matters in this regard are settled amicably and in a timely manner. The Group expects that the Secretary-General will ensure that errors, omissions and deficiencies by contractors and managers in the implementation of other capital projects, in particular the Capital Master Plan, will be addressed and that all responsible entities, including managers, will be held accountable in line with established procedures.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to the renovation of the Africa Hall, the Group of 77 and China welcomes and supports the Secretary-General's proposal, including the estimated resources in the amount of \$56 million

for the modernization of the facilities and the development of the Visitor Centre to be implemented in phases over a period of ten years.

The Group stresses that, after setbacks in the renovation and modernization of the Hall and conference facilities in the Commission, it is a time for the project to begin and the Group will seek clarity during the informal consultations on the implementation strategies, including measures to shorten the duration of the project without undermining the scope and quality of work;

The Group further stresses that any change to the scope of the project must be presented to members states for their consideration and approval.

The Group notes the specific observations, comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee, as well as those of oversight bodies, on a number of elements, including those related to the use of contingency fund as well as the business case, and will deliberate further on these issues during the informal consultations.

The Group notes with concern recommendations on the use of the Visitor Centre as a revenue generator. The Group discourages any approach that aims to solely generate profit from the use of visitor centres, not only in Addis Ababa but also in all UN duty stations, as the Organisation is not a "for profit" entity. The Group believes that there are benefits to the visitor centre that cannot be measured by profit alone.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to the renovation of the Conference facilities, the Group of 77 and China recalls paragraph 3 Section III of resolution 65/259, and will seek clarity during the informal consultations on the planned activities related to renovation of other facilities, including conference room 1.

With regard to governance, oversight and accountability, the Group stresses the need for a clear chain of command, as well as commitment by the Secretary-General and all senior managers, both in headquarters and in Addis Ababa, so as to guarantee smooth project implementation. The Group also emphasises the need for effective oversight arrangements throughout the implementation phases.

In this regard, the Group would like to encourage the Secretary-General to continue to maintain the good relationship, and close consultation, with the host country, and other stakeholders in the region, so as to ensure the successful implementation of the project.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, the Group would like to assure you of our readiness to engage constructively on this important agenda item with the aim of concluding in a timely manner.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.