



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR. ABDELHAKIM MIHOUBI, COUNSELLOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF ALGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 133: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES, IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE MAIN PART OF THE 67TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 23 October 2012)

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 133: Pattern of Conferences.
2. The Group of 77 and China wishes to thank Mr. Jean-Jacques Graisse, the Acting Head of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, for introducing the Secretary-General's report on Pattern of Conferences as contained in document A/67/127. The Group also wishes to thank Mr. Collen V. Kelapile, Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, for introducing the Advisory Committee's report contained in document A/67/523.
3. Further, the Group would also like to thank Ms. Carolina Popovici, the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences, for introducing the Committee's report as contained in document A/67/32.
4. We highly appreciate the work of the Committee on Conferences and wish to commend the Committee for the high quality of their report on their most recent substantive session. The Group welcomes the recommendations contained in the report for 2012 and believes that it will greatly facilitate the Fifth Committee's consideration of this agenda item. Similarly, the draft resolution on Pattern of Conferences submitted by the Committee, as part of their report, provides a good basis for our negotiations on this item.

Mr. Chairman,

5. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the effective delivery of quality conference services, particularly in support of the work of the intergovernmental and expert bodies of the United Nations. In this context, issues such as the utilization of conference services, documentation and publication related matters, translation and interpretation related matters and the calendar of conferences and meetings are all critical to the functioning of this Organization.
6. The Secretary-General indicates in his report that the overall utilization of conference servicing resources and facilities for 2011 in the four duty stations remained at 85 per cent, same as in 2010. Though the utilization factor was above the established benchmark of 80 per cent, we note that two of the duty stations recorded decreased utilization factors compared to the previous reporting period. The decrease in utilization factors is attributable to an increase in time lost during meetings rather than cancellation of meetings. We urge that efforts be enhanced to address the issues relating to conference services which give rise to underutilization, taking into account the unique nature and circumstances in which the various functions of the bodies of the organization conduct their work.

7. The Group further notes that the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa remained at 70 per cent in 2011, the same rate as in 2010. The low rate of utilization of the Conference facilities is attributable mainly to competition from other conference providers. It is indicated that the inauguration of the African Union conference complex in 2012 would increase the competition further. We remain convinced that with more innovative and proactive marketing, utilization rates at the conference centre at the ECA could be improved notwithstanding competition from other conferencing facilities in Addis Ababa or within the region.

Mr. Chairman,

8. The Group of 77 and China reiterates its position that the purpose of the integrated global management initiative was to integrate information technology into the management of the provision of conference services and documentation processing, thereby facilitating a balanced division of labour between the UN Headquarters and the other main duty stations. In harmonizing the methods of work, care must be taken to respect the unique aspects of each duty station and language group, and also to observe the principle of equal grade for equal work. The implementation of integrated global management must comply with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

9. Regarding the proximity rule, the Group notes that US\$ 1.1 million savings were realized during the biennium 2010/11 through the implementation of the rule. We take note of the information provided by Secretary-General that in applying the rule, other factors are taken into consideration such as whether the staff involved would have to be replaced, the cost of travel and the necessity of the expertise specific to the particular meeting. We therefore concur with the ACABQ on the need to develop a terminology that encompasses all the factors that are taken into consideration in servicing meetings held in venues other than at the four main duty stations.

10. The Group of 77 and China is of the opinion that the initiative called "Flex Time system" requires a deeper analysis before further implementation. In this context, we would like to reaffirm paragraph 16 of Section III of General Assembly Resolution 66/233, where it is stressed that the rules and regulations of the United Nations governing human resources should be uniformly applied. We would be interested on the results of the evaluation of the initiative mandated in the above-mentioned resolution of the General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman

11. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the timely issuance of documents and the quality of documentation to facilitate effective consideration by the intergovernmental bodies. We continue to support the work of the Interdepartmental Task Force on Documentation in addressing the problem of issuance of documents. The Group views the Task Force as one component of a multi-pronged approach to finding a lasting solution to the perennial problem of the late issuance of documents, especially to the Fifth Committee. The Group also emphasizes that author departments should comply with the format of reports as prescribed by General Assembly resolutions, particularly section IV, paragraph 7 to 8 of resolution 63/248, in which the Assembly reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to direct all departments to include in their reports a summary of the report; consolidated conclusions; recommendations; proposed actions; relevant background information; and actionable parts in bold print.

12. We are, therefore, encouraged by indications that progress has been made in increasing the timely submission of documents at UN headquarters, which reached 88 per cent in 2011, for slotted pre-season documents, up from 78 per cent and 73 per cent for 2010 and 2009 respectively.

However, the overall submission rates in other three main duty stations, over the same period, were far from impressive. The rates were 74 per cent for Geneva, 43 per cent for Vienna and 0 per cent for Nairobi. It is imperative that the Secretary-General take appropriate measures to ensure that all author departments meet document submission targets.

13. In this context, the backlog created on timely issuance on documents calls for our attention on the fate of the investment authorized by the General Assembly for off-set printing. It seems obvious that only using digital printers does not cover the demand for all the documents to be printed.

14. Regarding the issue of the paper smart meeting, the G77 and China notes that the information requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 23 of Section IV of its resolution 66/233 was not provided in the Secretary Generals' report. Some aspects of the request were addressed in a conference room paper, presented to the Committee on Conference. That was not the mandate approved. Although we have witnessed a self-congratulation exercise on the part of the Secretariat regarding the paper smart initiative, we have no details on its real implications when it comes to human resources, finances, smoothness of the proceedings of the intergovernmental bodies, transfers of costs to Member States, closing the technological gap between developed and developing countries and other considerations. The G77 and China will call for clarifications around all these issues during the informal consultations.

Mr. Chairman,

15. The Group of 77 and China stresses the importance of achieving the highest standards of quality in translation and interpretation. In this regard, the implementation of a successful succession management plan in the language services is of critical importance and urgency. The Group reiterates its support for a proactive succession planning programme, whose major components are outreach to universities and streamlining of the competitive examination for language services. We continue to emphasize that outreach programmes should reach out to institutions from across all geographic regions which are ready to partner with the Organization.

16. The Group notes that the UN System Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB) has entered into new agreements with the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) and the International Association of Conference Translators (AITC). It is the expectation of this Group that the agreements will effectively facilitate short-term contracts for interpreters and translators, while guaranteeing delivery of the highest standards of service.

17. The Group reiterates its concern over the high vacancy rates for interpreters and translators in Nairobi. The Secretary-General has indicated that whereas the average vacancy rates have been brought to a low of 3.1 per cent at the duty station, the vacancy rates for interpreters and those for translators are 35 and 30 per cent respectively. The explanations given for these very high vacancy rates include perceived insecurity, lack of medical and educational facilities and lack of spousal employment. The categorization of Nairobi as a category B station is also cited as another factor.

18. Whereas the Group will be seeking clarification on these explanations, it is worth noting that factors cited are such that they would, if true, affect all staff, and not just those in the language services. We would therefore be seeking explanation on why these concerns are particularly critical to the language staff and not across the board.

19. With regard to the digital audio recording of meetings, the G77 and China recalls section IV, Paragraph 29, of General Assembly resolution 66/233, and stresses that written summary and verbatim records constitute an important part of the documentation used by all members of the

Group and other Member States.

Mr. Chairman,

20. The Group would like to reiterate its position that the accelerated implementation of the Capital Master Plan (CMP) must not have any negative impact on the quality and availability of conference services, or the equal treatment and working conditions of language services in all six official languages. The Department of General Assembly and Conference Management should institute appropriate measures to ensure the smooth continuation of its services during the implementation of the CMP.

21. The Group also reiterates the importance of adhering to the guidelines and procedures contained in the administrative instructions for the authorization of the use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits by Member States and the Secretariat, and emphasizes that such meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits must be consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

22. The General Assembly resolution 61/236 recognizes the importance of the meetings of the regional and other major groupings of member states and that interpretation is necessary for their smooth functioning. The Group is therefore concerned that only 92 per cent of requests for interpretation services for meetings of the regional or other major groupings were met in 2011, compared to 96 per cent in 2010. We will be seeking further clarifications on this issue during the informals.

23. Finally Mr. Chairman, I would like to reiterate the critical role that conference management plays in the smooth functioning of the United Nations. In this regard, the Group stands ready to work for its continued improvement. We look forward to fruitful discussions and assure you of the Group's constructive engagement during the discussions on this agenda item.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.