



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY
AMBASSADOR CONROD HUNTE, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM
121: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES, IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING
THE MAIN PART OF THE 63RD SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(New York, 31 October 2008)**

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 121: Pattern of Conferences.
2. The Group of 77 and China wishes to thank Mr. Shaaban Muhammad Shaaban, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, for the introduction of the Secretary-General's report on Pattern of Conference as contained in document A/63/119, and wishes to thank Ms. Susan Maclurg, Chairperson of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, for the introduction of the Committee report.
3. The Group would also wish to thank Mr. Patrick Chuasoto, Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, for the introduction of the Committee's report as contained in document A/63/32, as well as his efforts that lead to the success of the work of the Committee, and wishes to thank Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Deputy Director of Internal Audit Division in OIOS, for the introduction of the OIOS report.
4. The Group would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Yohannes Mengesha, Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, for his efforts and hard work during his long years of service at the United Nations seeking to improve the services of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management. The Group wishes him well for his retirement.

Mr. Chairman,

5. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the quality of conference services and supports the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2008, which would greatly facilitate the Fifth Committee's consideration of the item and that the draft resolution on the pattern of conferences submitted by the Committee on Conferences would provide a sound basis for the Fifth Committee's work.
6. The Group notes the overall utilization of conference services have remained above the established benchmark of 80 per cent, and remained at 83 per cent in 2007, the same as in 2006, which is a 2 per cent points lower than the factor in 2005. The Group hopes that improved coordination between planning officers and technical secretariats would lead to a further rise in the overall utilization factor in 2009. We note with satisfaction the utilization rate of 100 per cent recorded in Nairobi and the marked increase from 64.13 per cent in 2006 to the current rate of 69.34 per cent recorded by the United Nations Conference Centre at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa. In this regard, we hope that the positive trend would continue.

Mr. Chairman,

7. Pursuant to its terms of reference, laid down in General Assembly resolution 43/222 B of 21 December 1988, the Committee on Conferences advises the Assembly on

- (1). all matters pertaining to the organization of conferences in the United Nations;
- (2). plans and coordinates conferences and meetings in close consultation with the Secretariat and all relevant bodies in the preparation of the draft calendar;

The Committee on Conferences examines the proposals of the Secretary-General on the draft calendar prepared on the basis of the Secretary-General's budgetary proposals and recommends to the Assembly a draft calendar of conferences and meetings designed to meet the needs of the United Nations and to ensure the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources. With respect to any proposed departures from the approved calendar of conferences and meetings that have administrative and financial implications, the Committee acts on behalf of the Assembly in conformity with the budgetary process in force and with full respect for the mandates of other bodies. In this regard, further clarifications is sought on the initiative of the Secretary-General to invite the G-8 to convene its forthcoming meeting in the United Nations and whether this initiative was put for concurrence of the Committee before it's announcement.

Mr. Chairman,

8. As mentioned in the report of the Committee on Conferences, the Group would like to express serious concern about the use of the United Nations premises by a few States for activities that neither maintained the impartiality of the Organization nor were in line with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. The Group stressed that the issue required particular attention since it created the perception of possible misuse of the UN premises. In this regard, we would like to ask the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management for clarification concerning the administrative arrangements on the use of United Nations premises for meetings.

Mr. Chairman,

9. In its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly recognized the importance of the meetings of regional groupings. It also recognized that the provision of interpretation services was necessary for the smooth functioning of those meetings. The Group notes with appreciation the improvement in the percentage of such meetings provided with interpretation services at the four main duty stations. The Group welcomes the initiative to put in place a strategic reserve of three additional meetings per week to accommodate meetings of "as required" bodies. Furthermore, and notes that this strategic reserve accounts is the reason why more meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States were provided with interpretation services in 2007 than in 2006. While the Group welcomes this development, we also underline that there should be a proper and stable mechanism to provide all meetings of major groupings with those services on a permanent basis.

10. Regarding the integrated global management initiative, the Group would like to reiterates that the purpose of integrated global management was to ensure a balanced division of labour between Headquarters and other duty stations, with the goal of increasing the quality of interpretation and translation in all official languages at all duty stations. In harmonizing methods of work, care must be taken to respect the unique aspects of each duty station and language group and to observe the principle of equal grade for equal work. All integrated global management initiatives must comply with the resolutions of the General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

11. The Group would like to stress that the implementation of the accelerated capital master plan 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 Group requests the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management to take appropriate measures to ensure the smooth continuation of its services during the implementation of the capital master plan.

Mr. Chairman,

12. The Group would like to express serious concern about the persistently late submission, processing and issuance of documents in all six official languages, in contrary to the relevant General Assembly resolutions. Regrettably, the Fifth Committee faced challenges during its second part of the resumed session last May, when the late issuance of a significant volume of documentation had an extremely adverse effect on the substantive work of session. This is a long-standing problem that the Secretariat must address seriously. We note the improvement made during this main session on the issuance of documents, and in this regard we thank the Secretary of the Fifth Committee for the efforts in following-up with the author departments, but we would like to remind the Secretariat that the issuance of documents in this session is not in compliance with the six-week rule. We hope that, as the Secretary-General puts it, the strengthening of proactive management could result in timely issuance of documents, as well as improving quality and productivity.

13. The Group notes that the consideration of the agenda item before the Fifth committee is being introduced late in our programme of work due to the lack of the ACABQ report. In this regard, the Group would like to request the chairperson of the ACABQ to provide clarification concerning the delay in issuing the report of the Committee, despite the fact that the report of the Secretary-General had been issued on 15 August 2008.

14. The Group notes with concern the challenges presented by the demographic situation in the language services, as described in paragraphs 91 to 95 of the report of the Secretary-General. We concur with the Secretary-General in that there is a need to appropriately address the issue of the demographic transition in the languages services. We welcome the programme of outreach to universities and other training institutions, as well as to professional associations. The Group also views that the Secretariat should proactively put into place a long-term solution to tackle the critical issues of demographic transition and succession planning for the language services.

15. Finally, the Group would like to draw the attention of the Committee to an incident on 13 October 2008, when several members of the Group attempted to vote on a number of crucial resolutions in the Fourth Committee but were informed by the Secretariat that their votes could not be counted. This happened even though the General Assembly had already passed a resolution permitting them to vote for the duration of the 63rd session. We further note that the Secretariat did not seem to have been aware of this matter, and later tried to blame it on the voting machines.

This incident was also not reported in the summary records of the meeting. The Group considers this to be a serious matter as it concerns the ability of Member States to exercise their rights and privileges in the United Nations. We would therefore appreciate a clarification from the Secretariat.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.