



STATEMENT DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR. XOLISA MABHONGO, CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES, PERMANENT MISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AT THE MEETING OF THE INFORMAL WORKING GROUP OF THE PLENARY ON MANAGEMENT REFORM: PROGRESS REPORT ON REVIEW OF MANDATES (New York, 25 January 2006)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the question of Secretariat and Management Reform. We thank Assistant-Secretary-General Robert Orr for the progress report on the exercise to review the mandates of the Organisation.

The Group of 77 and China at the outset wishes to express its appreciation to the two Co-Chairs for the transparent and unbiased manner in which you have guided the work of this Informal Working Group of the Plenary. It is clear from your progress reports that we have made some considerable progress in 2005 on the "Group A issues". We have also had very useful interaction with the Secretariat on some of the "Group B" issues. We believe that it is only through an open and ongoing dialogue that Member States will be able to reach agreement on reform matters, which are of importance to the entire membership of the Organisation.

General comments on the progress report and work plan

Before turning to the mandate review exercise, the Group wishes to make a few preliminary comments on the progress report and work plan outlined in the letter of the Co-Chairs.

The Group of 77 and China has been participating very actively in the negotiations on the "Group A" issues. We have supported the creation of an Ethics Office, the development of a whistleblower policy, the strengthening of the internal auditing and investigation capacity of the Organisation, and the evaluation and review of the oversight structures and accountability framework of the Secretariat. We also ensured that the Secretary-General received the resources that he requires to implement the World Summit decisions, as well as to continue to implement the numerous other important mandates that we have bestowed on the Organisation.

Against this background, the Group in December 2005 was faced with a very difficult decision when some threatened to either withhold their dues or not adopt a two-year budget unless we agreed to place a cap on the expenditure of the Organisation in 2006. The Group, however, in spite of our serious reservations, decided not to call for a vote on the appropriation resolution because we did not want to risk placing the Organisation in a financial crisis and undermine our reform efforts. We also made it very clear that we do not recognise any link between the extraordinary decision to introduce a spending cap and our collective efforts to reform the Organisation. We still maintain that the General Assembly should automatically lift the spending cap when the Secretary-General indicates that he requires the remaining funds, as we were assured that the intention was not to harm the Organisation.

I am recapitulating these recent events because we believe that the membership should move beyond the events of 2005 and approach the reform efforts in 2006 in a more constructive spirit. We do not believe that any divisions are in the interest of our collective efforts to strengthen the Organisation.

The Group of 77 and China, therefore, wishes to make the following observations with regard to the work plan and progress report outlined in the letter of the Co-Chairs:

- Firstly, we wish to thank the Co-Chairs for what we believe is a good attempt to provide a fair summary of the views expressed by Member States during the previous meetings of the Informal Working Group of the Plenary on Management Reform. The guiding principles identified by the Co-Chairs provide a good basis for our consideration of these important matters.
- Secondly, we wish to reiterate the position of the Group that the mandate review exercise is political in nature and should be considered at the level of the Plenary. The Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions should consider the remaining elements of the Group B issues. This also applies to the remaining elements of the Group A issues, which the Fifth Committee will have to revert to in the course of 2006. We trust that the Co-Chairs and the Bureau of the Fifth Committee will continue to liaise throughout the coming weeks and months to ensure that the respective programmes of work of the Fifth Committee and the Informal Working Group are reasonably coordinated and not overlapping so as to enable smaller delegations to fully participate in both settings.

- Thirdly, the Group of 77 and China believes that it is important to state unequivocally that the recent emerging tendency to hold negotiations in small groups or exclude some portions of the membership of the Organisation goes against the spirit of the Charter and is clearly not conducive to achieving our collective resolve to strengthen the United Nations. We believe that the voice of each and every Member of this Organisation is crucial and should be heeded notwithstanding our different levels of contribution. We trust that the Co-Chairs and the President of the General Assembly will ensure that the negotiating process in the remaining nine months remain open, transparent and inclusive.
- Fourthly, regarding "Group A" issues, the Group would like to draw the attention of the Co-Chairs and the Secretariat to the letter by the Chairman of the Fifth Committee addressed to the President of the General Assembly as contained in document A/60/611, in which it is reflected that consensus was reached among Member States on some of the "Group A" issues. We intend to pursue these further in the context of the Fifth Committee.
- Fifthly, the Group B issues will require a great deal of consultations between Member States and with our capitals. The Group, therefore, expects that the Co-Chairs and the Bureau of the Fifth Committee will propose a reasonable programme of work for our consideration of the relevant "Group B" issues. In this regard, we view the timeline of 30 June 2006 proposed in the letter of the Co-Chairs as indicative in nature. We also trust that the Secretariat will submit timely, detailed and well-thought out proposals, which will facilitate and expedite the consideration of the reform issues and decision-making by Member States.

Mandate review

Turning to the mandate review exercise, the Group of 77 and China wishes to make the following preliminary remarks. In view of the briefing of Assistant-Secretary-General Orr of today, the Group may convey any further comments to the Secretariat through the Co-Chairs at a later stage, in particular with regard to the scope and timelines of the exercise.

Firstly, we believe that it is important to ensure that the objective of the review is clear and well-understood by the Secretariat and Member States alike. In this regard, the World Summit Outcome Document clearly stated that the review is intended to "strengthen and update" the programme of work of the Organisation. This is not a cost-cutting exercise and we should be ready to increase resources if needed in accordance with our undertaking in paragraph 161 (e) of the World Summit Outcome Document.

Secondly, the exercise is not intended to arbitrarily or selectively abolish any mandates. It is important to recall that mandates are established by a collective decision taken by Member States and can only be amended or abolished collectively. The lack of political support by a few Member States is not a valid criterion for the abolishment of a mandate. The programmes on the Question of Palestine, for example, were selectively being referred to previously by some delegations for termination. These pronouncements have been counter-productive to our reform efforts, and we urge our partners to follow a more constructive approach in 2006. Furthermore, the scope of the review has been set out clearly in the World Summit Outcome Document and should be respected. The Outcome Document has limited it to mandates that are older than five years and have not been reaffirmed or amended since.

Thirdly, the Group expects that the Secretariat will provide Member States with neutral, unbiased and transparent information aimed at facilitating the decision-making of Member States. The information should be presented in the form of "raw data". The Secretariat should therefore not be requested to pass value judgments on mandates by suggesting any for termination. The Group also expects that Member States will be able to interact with the programme managers that are overseeing the implementation of the mandates. We trust that the Co-Chairs will schedule several sessions for this purpose once the necessary information has been circulated to Member States. We should be careful not to set artificial timelines that will lead to a rushed and incomplete exercise.

Fourthly, we have been assured that the exercise is not cost-cutting in nature. We believe that at this stage of the review exercise Member States have to focus on the programmatic validity of a mandate without being influenced by the costs associated with it. We should first resolve the programmatic aspects before we review the resources and it is therefore undesirable at this stage to receive an indication of the amount of resources allocated to any given mandates. In addition, the format of the budget makes it impossible to provide an accurate indication of the amount of resources that have been allocated to any given mandate, in particular at the sub-programme level. The Secretariat will first have to develop an acceptable methodology that it will employ to accurately determine the amount of resources that have been set aside for a mandate. Member States furthermore will have to consider and approve the methodology before it is applied. Member States will also require an indication of the source of financing for each mandate and this aspect should be reflected in the methodology.

Previous delegations have referred to the issue of duplication of mandates. We believe that we should have a common understanding of what is meant by the term “duplication”. Some mandates require a concerted effort by more than one entity on more than one front. This, in our view, is not duplication and we will reflect on the comments by other delegations on this matter. The United Nations has many important mandates and activities that are older than five years and we should be careful before we arbitrarily accord priorities to mandates, with a view to releasing funds for new activities.

Fifthly, with regard to the proposed template, the Group wishes to thank the Secretariat for the proposal, which seems to be an improvement from the previous attempts to categorize the mandates according to the perceived priorities of Member States. The Group believes that the template should present clear and concrete information. The last column should be amended to indicate the status of implementation and reasons for either non- or less than full implementation. The template should also have a column listing the inter-governmental body that established and oversaw the implementation of the mandates.

Lastly, the Group wishes to propose that the Secretariat submits the information in hard copies and in an electronic database, which will enable Member States to analyze and access it from capitals. The information should be user-friendly and clear. Member States will require sufficient time to reflect on the information before engaging in consultations at the level of the Informal Working Group of the Plenary. We trust that the Co-Chairs will prepare a programme of work that will enable delegations to obtain instructions from their capitals if needed.

In conclusion, the Group wishes to assure the Co-Chairs and the Secretariat that it is approaching this exercise from a positive stand point. The exercise provides a good opportunity for Member States to reflect on the work of the Organisation and ways to enhance the effective implementation of mandates and strengthen the United Nations. It is therefore important that we embark on it without any preconceived political agendas or notions that we may realize savings by abolishing mandates that are still relevant.

I thank you.