

Statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 123: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 in the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly

New York, 6 March 2002

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China expresses its deep concern on the note of the Secretary General that was sent to the Permanent Missions and issued as ST/IC/2002/13 regarding the intended support service reductions, due to the following reasons:

1. The measures described in that note are in contravention of resolution 56/254 by which the General Assembly approved the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, resolution 56/242 on pattern of conferences, the financial rules and regulations as well as all relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.
2. In those resolutions the General Assembly particularly rejected those proposals intended to cut back services directly affecting Member States and regional groups, in particular conference services, as well as the functioning of substantive departments, e.g., the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conferences Services.
3. The need for adequate conference services to meet the increasing demands of the work of the Organization has been a traditional priority of the Group of 77 and China, as it was the case during the negotiations on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, considering its direct impact not only on the Group but on other regional groupings as well.
4. The manner in which that note has been presented and the intended areas of reductions, which are mainly in services available to Member States, gives the impression that this is an inappropriate reaction to the cuts in the budget. Yet it appears that the decision of the General Assembly to reduce the level of resources for other specific operational requirements is being invoked to justify reductions in meeting services and other services vital to Member States.

Mr. Chairman,

5. Since the work of the General Assembly is carried out in its plenary as well as in its Main Committees, the Group of 77 and China cannot agree to any attempt by the Secretariat to draw a distinction between the work of the General Assembly plenary and the work of its Main Committees, as far as servicing those meetings is concerned. The Group believes that any failure in servicing the meetings of the Main Committees will have a compromising effect in the work of the General Assembly. In this context, the circular tries to create an atmosphere in which the functions of the General Assembly will be weakened vis-à-vis that of the other principal organ of the United Nations. This is totally unacceptable to the Group.
6. The Group of 77 and China also believes that the measures referred to disregard the validity and the importance of the current procedures and practice for the provision of conferences services, services to member states and other services as described in the note by the Secretary-General, to be provided to the Member States, the General Assembly and its Main Committees, as well as regional groups, which are vital for the efficient and successful work of those groups and bodies, so essential for the work of the Organization as a whole.
7. Those measures that have been put in place “with immediate effect” without the approval of the General

Assembly and in contradiction to the general desire of the membership of the Organization, have already resulted in reductions in meeting services as well as in the cancellation of several meetings of the Group of 77 and China, which are now being compelled to be restricted to regular working hours.

8. In addition, the Group of 77 and China continues to be concerned with the negative impact of arbitrary cutbacks in the fulfillment of all mandated programmes and activities of the Organization, due to the zero nominal growth (ZNG) and zero real growth (ZRG) policies. In the context of the negotiations on the budgetary resolution, the Group of 77 and China was the one supporting mainly the proposals of the Secretary General and opposed systematically to the exercise aimed at obtaining an arbitrary level of resources at any cost, aware of previous experience on its negative impact in the functioning of the Organization as well as in the implementation of all its mandates and activities. While not justified, the Group is aware that part of the current situation is a consequence of the outcome of that exercise.

9. If all this situation remains in place, the Group of 77 and China as well as other regional groups will be directly hampered and limited to contribute effectively in the work of the upcoming summits and meetings of the UN bodies, which is unacceptable taking into consideration the international and multilateral character of this Organizations and the equal rights of all Member States.

10. The Group of 77 and China urges a clarification on this matter by an appropriate authority from the Secretariat as a matter of priority, and requests that the cutbacks of all those services directly affecting Member States be reversed immediately. This will, inter alia, enable the Group to hold meetings in accordance with the current practice and relevant decisions of the General Assembly, and to allow the Member States as a whole to work in a healthy environment with the required minimum conditions.

11. Finally, the Group of 77 and China believes that this issue should be discussed further in informal consultations under agenda item 123 so as to take appropriate decisions on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.