



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MS. KAREN LOCK, PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 117: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 2006-2007 (RENOVATION TO THE RESIDENCE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL), IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 31 October 2006)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 117, in particular on the renovation to the residence of the Secretary-General.

2. The Group of 77 and China wishes to thank Ms. Katrina Nowlan of the Programme Planning and Budget Division, and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, Mr. Rajat Saha, for their respective introductions of the reports of the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee on this matter.

3. The report of the Secretary-General highlights the necessity of undertaking renovations that seems to be long overdue. In this context, it is stated that since the last significant renovation of the residence in 1950, the ageing of the building and obsolete mechanical system have resulted in severe malfunction, requiring frequent emergency repairs by the United Nations and posing safety hazards. Since acquiring ownership of the property, the United Nations, aside from routine maintenance work and repairs, has not undertaken any comprehensive renovations in the past 15 years.

4. The report sketches a bleak picture, which clearly should have been addressed sooner, in order to avoid cost escalations and to ensure that the Secretary-General and his family live in a comfortable and safe environment. The Group of 77 and China supports the proposal for additional resources amounting to \$4,490,400 under the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007. We are concerned by indications that security gaps have not been addressed and will require a clarification from the Department of Safety and Security thereon.

5. The Group notes that the Advisory Committee has proposed that favourable consideration be given to the proposal to report on the expenditures in the context of the second performance report for the biennium 2006-2007. We would appreciate further clarification on paragraph 13 of the report of the Advisory Committee, as we will require assurances that attempts to absorb the additional resource requirements will not lead to any delays in alterations, improvements and major maintenance work for projects that the General Assembly has approved under section 32 of the programme budget for the current biennium. Thereby leading to further cost escalations for the Organisation in the longer term.

6. We concur that it is imperative to ensure that the renovation work is completed within the envisaged time schedule so as to avoid cost escalations and not to cause any inconvenience to the Secretary-General. The Group also concurs that the bidding procedures should be open, transparent and accountable with the caveats highlighted in paragraphs 10 to 12 of the ACABQ report.

7. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the Group looks forward to an early decision by the Committee on this long overdue request.

I thank you.

