



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR. KARIM ISMAIL, FIRST SECRETARY, PERMANENT MISSION OF EGYPT TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 139: UNITED NATIONS PATTERN OF CONFERENCES, AT THE MAIN PART OF THE SEVENTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 1 November 2018)**

Madam Chair,

1. I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Group wishes to thank Mr. Nirmal Raj Kafle, Chair of the Committee on Conferences (COC) and Mr. Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Chair of the Advisory Committee for Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), for introducing their respective reports. We also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Ms. Catherine Pollard, for introducing the report of the Secretary-General.

2. The Group would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to Mr. Nirmal Raj Kafle, Deputy Permanent Representative and Chargé d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Nepal, for his able leadership as the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences for 2018.

Madam Chair,

3. The Group of 77 and China commends the Committee on Conferences for the work undertaken during its substantive session in 2018 and for the quality of its report, which will greatly benefit the consideration of this agenda item by the Fifth Committee. Similarly, we are of the view that the proposed draft resolution will serve as an excellent framework for a timely and successful conclusion of this item.

4. The Group continues to attach great importance to the effective delivery of quality conference services in accordance with the equal treatment of the six official languages of the United Nations, particularly in support of the work of the intergovernmental and expert bodies of the Organization. In this context, matters related to the utilization of conference services and resources, documentation and publication, translation and interpretation and the calendar of conferences and meetings are all equally crucial for the effective and efficient functioning of the Organization.

Madam Chair,

5. The Group commends the efforts of the Secretariat to address underutilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities by UN organs. The Group notes that the overall utilization factor for all calendar bodies in the four main duty stations was 81% in 2017 and thus met the established benchmark of 80%.

6. However, the most pressing concern for the Group continues to be the deteriorating conditions of the Nairobi conference center which are severely hampering its capacity to provide conference services. In a sharp contrast to the overall utilization factor, it is disconcerting to note that the utilization rate of conference facilities in Nairobi declined to 39 per cent in 2017 alone. As noted in the Secretary General's report, the current conditions at the conference centre pose an immediate risk to servicing of the main calendar events to be hosted in Nairobi. The Group will examine when

such issues came to the notice of the Secretariat, and we are puzzled why problems appear to persist without proposed solutions. The Group expects that these issues must be addressed expeditiously.

7. With respect to conferencing facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa, the Group notes with appreciation that the utilization and improvement of the conference facilities remained high in 2017 at 90 per cent. However, there is a need for regular renovations and urgent technological improvements to ensure that the Commission maintains its ability to provide cutting-edge conference services.

8. The Group also notes the significant increase in non-calendar meetings and events in Geneva, Vienna, and particularly in New York, and the additional workload it represents to meetings management services. The Group looks forward to the results of the study being conducted in New York regarding a cost reimbursement mechanism for cultural activities, meetings and events not related to the intergovernmental process.

9. The Group also acknowledges the initiatives related to accessibility of persons with disabilities in the area of documentation and conference services. Nevertheless, we believe that the concept of accessibility has evolved to encompass much wider considerations. We encourage the Secretary General to duly consider the breadth of issues associated with accessibility and to report annually and in a comprehensive manner on this important matter.

Madam Chair,

10. With respect to staffing, the Group of 77 and China acknowledge the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in addressing the staffing challenges. We further welcome the initiatives of the Department relating to innovations in meetings and documents management, and notes that the majority of the projects have been developed and implemented utilizing in-house capacity and expertise.

11. Lastly, the Group welcomes the harmonized conference management strategy. We look forward to receiving detailed information on the agreed delineation of responsibilities regarding conference management across the four duty stations, as well as future delineation in the delegation of authority and the assessment of individual capacities in conference management.

12. In conclusion, the Group stands ready to engage constructively on this agenda item and looks forward to its timely conclusion.

I thank you, Madam Chair.