



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PETER THOMSON, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FIJI TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND CHAIR OF THE GROUP OF 77, ON AGENDA ITEM 137: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES, IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE MAIN PART OF THE 68TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 6 November 2013)

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 137: Pattern of Conferences.
2. The Group of 77 and China wishes to thank Mr. Tegegnework Gettu, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, for introducing the Secretary-General's report on Pattern of Conferences as contained in document A/68/122 and the report on the PaperSmart concept, document A/68/123.
3. The Group also wishes to thank Mr. Jean Christian Obame, Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, for introducing the Advisory Committee's report contained in document A/68/567.
4. Furthermore, the Group would also like to thank Ms. Chamithri Jayanika Rambukwella, the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences, for introducing the Committee's report as contained in document A/68/32.
5. We highly appreciate the work of the Committee on Conferences and wish to commend the Committee for the high quality of their report on their most recent substantive session. The Group welcomes the recommendations contained in the report for 2013 and believes that it will greatly facilitate the Fifth Committee's consideration of this agenda item. Similarly, the draft resolution on Pattern of Conferences submitted by the Committee, as part of their report, provides a good basis for our negotiations on this item.

Mr. Chairman,

6. The Group of 77 and China attaches 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 United Nations. In this context, issues such as the utilization of conference services, documentation and publication related matters, translation and interpretation related matters and the calendar of conferences and meetings are all critical to the functioning of this Organization.
7. The Group of 77 and China would like to refer to the overall utilization factor for meetings for all four duty stations. The Secretary-General states in his report that the overall utilization factor has remained constant, with 84 per cent in 2012 and 85 per cent in both 2011 and 2010. However, the Group is concerned on the utilization factor of New York which keeps decreasing to 79 per cent in 2012, as compared to 82 per cent in 2011 and 81 per cent in 2010. In New York in 2012, three intergovernmental bodies (the Committee on Information, Committee on Contributions, and the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund) had utilization factors below the benchmark

of 80% for three consecutive years. In this regard, the Group welcomes the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management as well as by the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences in order to improve utilization rates. We therefore await future efforts from the Secretary-General to improve this situation.

Mr. Chairman,

8. The Group of 77 reiterates its concern over the decrease in the utilization rate of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa, from 70% in 2011 to 62% in 2012. The Group welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Commission and by DGACM to try to reverse this trend. We remain convinced that with innovative strategies and by continually improving the centre's facilities, utilization rates at the conference centre at the ECA can be improved.

9. Concerning the use of the proximity rule to achieve the most efficient servicing package for meetings held away from their designated headquarters, the Group concurs with the Advisory Committee on the need to have a breakdown of the actual savings achieved in 2012 under the regular budget by using the proximity rule. We also note that the proximity rule includes but is not limited to minimizing travel costs by closest proximity. We therefore share the view of the ACABQ on the need to develop a more suitable terminology that includes all the factors that are taken into consideration when applying this rule.

Mr. Chairman,

10. With regard to the digitization of important older United Nations documents, the Group of 77 gives high priority to the importance of keeping the documents of United Nations as a source of data and of historic decisions. However, we have been informed by the Secretary-General that there are still 3.7 million documents which need to be digitized and that it would take approximately 20 years and would cost \$9 million to finish this important task. Concurring with the Advisory Committee that the lengthy digitization of United Nations documents may jeopardize the retention of historical knowledge and information, in view of their delicate state, and risk of breakage, the Group considers that the digitization must be prioritized and the Secretary-General should look for measures to accelerate this process.

Mr. Chairman,

11. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the timely issuance of documents and the quality of documentation to facilitate effective consideration by the intergovernmental bodies. And it is of the same view regarding timely document issuance of the documents of the Fifth Committee. However, we see in the report that for the main part of the Fifth Committee's deliberations during the sixty-seventh session, 22 documents were issued as mandated (6 weeks before their consideration); 11 documents were issued four weeks in advance, and 18 at least two weeks before being considered, but there were 26 documents issued less than two weeks before the respective meetings.

12. Furthermore, in the current session we have seen that the issuance of the Advisory Committee's First report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015, document A/68/7, was issued less than 2 weeks before its consideration by the Committee, putting high pressure on the work developed by Member States.

Mr. Chairman,

13. The Group of 77 cannot accept these kind of delays and will look for a thorough explanation

during the informal consultations and for the measures the Secretary-General will take to avoid this constant situation. The Group will not accept that while gaining the supposed efficiencies, there are not sufficient staff to translate and prepare the documents on time in order to allow Member States adequate time to prepare themselves for the meetings.

Mr. Chairman,

14. Regarding the issue of the paper-smart meeting, the G77 concurs with the Advisory Committee in the importance of making available paper documents, as needed, taking into account the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 57/300, in which the Assembly called for adequate internal capacity for the provision of hard copies requested by Member States. The Group of 77 will continue looking for clarifications on the implications related to human resources, finances, smoothness of the proceedings of the intergovernmental bodies, transfers of costs to Member States, closing the technological gap between developed and developing countries and other considerations.

Mr. Chairman,

15. The Group of 77 and China stresses the importance of achieving the highest standards of quality in translation and interpretation. In this regard, the Group considers it of high importance to know exactly the criteria whether a document should be translated by in-house staff, short-term staff or contractors, as well as the measures used to review the quality of the work done by contractors.

16. The Group expresses serious concern regarding the continuous delays in having the consolidated lists of individuals and entities subject to sanctions, according to the Sanctions Committees of the Security Council, translated into all six official languages, in spite of the existence of mandates.

17. The Group also reiterates the importance of adhering to the guidelines and procedures contained in the administrative instructions for the authorization of the use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits by Member States and the Secretariat, and emphasizes that such meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits must be consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

18. Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to reiterate the critical role that conference management plays in the smooth functioning of the United Nations. In this regard, the Group stands ready to work for its continued improvement. We look forward to fruitful discussions and assure you of the Group's constructive engagement during the discussions on this agenda item.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.