

Statement by the representative of Indonesia, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, on agenda item 117, Pattern of Conferences, before the Fifth Committee of the 53rd session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York, 23 October 1998

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 117, Pattern of Conferences.
2. The Group of 77 and China would like to express its appreciation to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, Mr. Kohji F.X Yanagiwa of Japan for presentation of the report of the Committee contained in document A/52/32. We commend the Committee on Conferences for the successful conclusion of their work during the last meeting.
3. We would also like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, Mr. Jin Yongjian for introducing the reports of the Secretary-General on this item.

Mr. Chairman,

4. The Group of 77 and China notes with satisfaction that the overall utilization of the United Nations conferences services in New York during 1997 exceeded the benchmark of 80 percent along with similar improvement in the utilization of such services in Geneva and Vienna. We would also like to express our appreciation for the inclusion of meeting statistics on Nairobi for the first time in the 1998 report. Nevertheless, the Group considers it absolutely necessary that the Chairman of Committee on Conferences should continue his consultation with the Chairmen of the bodies that had utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure in 1997, with a view to encouraging them to take appropriate measures to improve the utilization of conference resources.
5. We also recognize the fact that 81 percent of the request for interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groups of Member States had been met, representing a marked increase against past reporting. However, at the same time, we are disappointed by the fact that 19% of the requests for interpretation services made by the regional and other major groupings of Member States could not be met. In the context of the United Nations being a multicultural milieu, the Group of 77 and China requests the Secretariat to make every effort to ensure provision of conference services to regional and other major groupings.

Mr. Chairman,

- 6 The Group of 77 and China takes note of the Secretariat's effort to develop a cost-accounting system for conference services and endorses the request of the Committee on Conferences to the Secretariat to provide preliminary estimates of the expenditures necessary to establish a permanent system as well as a time frame for each phase of the project, once approved by the General Assembly. The Group concurs with the ACABQ in paragraph 10 of its report that the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/257) does not provide sufficient information at this point to allow for endorsing the full-fledged development of a cost-accounting system. The Group also shares the caution of the ACABQ that cost-accounting is expensive, and endorses the Committee's recommendation that the Secretary-General address the weaknesses outlined in the report of the ACABQ concerning cost-accounting, refine his proposals and resubmit them to the Fifth Committee. Therefore, we agree to the view expressed in paragraph 38 of the report of the Committee on Conferences

that a consultative mechanism between representatives of the Secretariat and Member States should be established to consider the issue of cost accounting.

7. The Group of 77 and China welcomes the improvement in the utilization rates of the conference facilities at Nairobi between 1996 and 1997 and encourages the Secretariat to utilize all available resources to improve the utilization rate. We support the appeal made in paragraph 51 of the Report of the Committee on Conferences encouraging Member States, intergovernmental bodies and other major groupings to consider increasing their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi. In this context, we encourage all the subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, the Commission on Human Settlements and other United Nations bodies to hold their meetings at the United Nations Office at Nairobi to the extent possible.

8 We trust that the new organizational structure of conference services will allow more effective coordination among the four United Nations conference servicing centres. We take note of the efforts made to implement new technologies, particularly in the areas of remote interpretation and translation. However, the Group would like to emphasize that the use of remote interpretation must be confined to international conferences before introducing this practice in the United Nations system. Moreover, the Group is concerned at the excessive vacancy rate in language services at all duty stations. In this regard, we take note of the information provided by the Secretariat representatives, as referred to in paragraph 62 of the Committee's report, that no further budget reduction could be borne by conference services.

9. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the issues related to career development in language services. In this regard, we fully support paragraph 5 of the ACABQ's report in which the Committee recommended that the Secretary-General should prepare a special report analyzing the problems that may exist related to this matter. In addition, the Group concurs with the ACABQ that the numbers and grade levels of staff should be commensurate with the needs of the Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

10. With regard to the format of documentation and report, the Group of 77 and China notes with concern that the provision of paragraphs 24 and 25 of General Assembly resolution 52/214 B are not being fully implemented despite reiteration of this resolution in General Assembly decision 52/471. In this regard, we emphasize full implementation of the provisions of the General Assembly resolution. Moreover, the Group would like to seek clarification from the Secretariat on the reasons for non-compliance with the decision of the General Assembly.

11. The Group of 77 and China expresses its deep concern on the chronic problem of delay in the issuance of documentation and reiterates its position for compliance by the Secretariat with the six-week rule for issuance of documents. In this regard, we note the establishment of a system of focal points in substantive departments to monitor documentation.

12. Furthermore, the Group of 77 and China stresses the need to strengthen the capacity and the capability of the Document Distribution Section, so as to enable this Section to perform its functions better in serving the Member States.

13. The Group of 77 and China also expresses its concern on the poor quality of some documents and reports issued by the Secretariat. The Group urges that this problem be addressed.

14. We would like to express our deep concern for the suspension of some publications in all official languages and the continued high rates of self-revision during peak workload periods, which sometimes make it difficult for the delegates to work with maximum efficiency. We request the Secretariat to make efforts to

ensure timely delivery of documents in the six official languages.

Mr. Chairman,

15. With regard to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates (A/51/946), the Group of 77 and China concurs with the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) contained in its report A/53/16.

16. The Group of 77 and China notes with appreciation the effort that the Secretariat is making to develop electronic documentations, such as the ODS. However, we would like to draw the attention of the Committee to the fact that this new technological improvement should not compromise the commitment of the Organization to serve the Member States in an objective and equitable manner emphasizing on priority to traditional hard copy, and that these will not be used as a means to shift the cost of production of documents to Member States.

17. Finally, the Group of 77 and China would like to underline that the Secretary-General should issue public information material in all six official languages on the United Nations Web Site as soon as possible as requested in operative paragraphs 2 and 3 of General Assembly resolution 52/214. In this regard, we would like to receive information from the Secretariat on the implementation of these provisions.

Thank you.