



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MS. KAREN LOCK,
PERMANENT MISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 121:
PATTERN OF CONFERENCES, IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New
York, 17 October 2006)**

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 121: Pattern of conferences.

2. The Group of 77 and China wishes to thank the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences, Ms. Nonye Udo, for presenting the report of that Committee. We also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Mr. Chen Jian, and the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Mengesha, for their introduction of the reports of the Secretary-General, as well as the Chairman of the ACABQ, Mr. Rajat Saha, for introducing the report of the Advisory Committee. We appreciate the contribution made by the Under-Secretary-General during his term and we are saddened to hear that this may be his last appearance before this Committee in his present capacity. We wish him well in his future endeavors.

Mr. Chairman,

3. The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to this agenda item. We are highly appreciative of the work of the Committee on Conferences (COC) and wish to congratulate them for the quality of their report on the Committee's recently concluded substantive session. The Group also wishes to encourage the COC to continue to actively implement its mandate, particularly in monitoring and evaluating the performance of the Secretariat in the field of conference services.

4. We support the recommendations of the Committee and believe that they will facilitate the consideration of the Fifth Committee of this item. The proposed draft resolution recommended by the COC provides a good basis for the Fifth Committee to work on, and the Group looks forward to an early and successful completion of this item.

Mr. Chairman,

5. The Group notes that the overall utilization of conference resources at all duty stations has increased in 2005. This is mainly due to improved utilisation at the Headquarters in New York, which had surpassed the benchmark of 80 per cent for the first time. We share the view of the ACABQ that it is important to ensure a more precise measure for identifying what constitutes time lost for conference-servicing so as to ensure a more accurate and proper calculation of the utilization factor. The Group also appreciates the efforts of the Chairperson of the COC, acting on behalf of the Committee, to consult with the eight inter-governmental bodies that had utilised less than the applicable benchmark percentage of their allocated resources for the past three years. We trust that future Chairpersons will continue with this initiative and build on the three-pronged approach identified by the Chairperson.

6. The Group is encouraged by indications that there has been improvement in the utilization of the facilities and services at the United Nations Office in Nairobi. We, however, remain concerned by the fact that the Office is the only duty station that has to rely on extrabudgetary resources for nearly half of its funding of conference services. It is also the only duty station that has to fund central planning and coordination functions exclusively from extrabudgetary resources. This practice is contrary to the Assembly's recognition that all duty stations should be treated equally. We trust that Member States will be willing to consider adopting concrete measures to address this unfair situation in future budget discussions.

7. The Group of 77 and China appreciates indications that the use of conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa has improved considerably since 2005. We wish to commend the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management for the efforts undertaken to increase utilization of the conference facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa, as well as for visiting the duty station in Nairobi.

Mr. Chairman,

8. The General Assembly has consistently recognized the importance of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for the smooth functioning of the sessions of intergovernmental bodies. The Assembly, in paragraph 8, Section II A of its resolution 60/236 B, also requested the Secretary-General to explore innovative ways to improve the provision of services to those meetings and to report to the General Assembly through the

9. The Group remains concerned by the recent practice whereby interpretation services to such meetings are only provided on an ad-hoc basis and depending largely on cancellations of meetings by calendar bodies. This clearly does not provide a lasting solution bearing in mind the Assembly's request to calendar bodies to improve their utilization factor. Whilst we welcome indications that the percentage of meetings of regional and other major groupings that have been provided with interpretation services had slightly increased in 2005, we remain concerned by indications that the actual percentage is still far below the levels achieved four years ago.

10. We noted the two proposals made by the Secretary-General to overcome this problem. The Group looks forward to receiving further elaborations of the proposals, in particular with regard to the option of earmarking specific resources and programming the meetings in the calendar so as to provide more predictable servicing, which is a course of action that we would support.

Mr. Chairman,

11. The timely issuance of documentation and improving the quality of documentation are one of the key targets of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management. Indications unfortunately are that this goal has not been met and the late issuance of documents remains a chronic problem that negatively affects the legislative process. Whilst recognizing that the overall responsibility for resolving this problem lies with the Department, we urge the Secretary-General to hold author departments accountable for the late submission of documents, which ultimately undermine the ability of DGACM to comply with the six weeks rule. We note that the COC did not provide recommendations on the issue of developing a clear accountability mechanism within the Secretariat for the submission, processing and issuance of documentation as requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 6 of section III of its resolution 60/236 B. We acknowledge that the shortage of time that the COC faced prevented it from such consideration, and we hope that the COC will embark on this important mandate as soon as possible.

12. On the issue of page limits of documents originating in the Secretariat, the Group recalls the guidelines set by the General Assembly in resolutions 52/214 and 57/283. The Group wishes to reiterate that these guidelines should be implemented with some flexibility and that they should not adversely affect either the quality of the presentation or the substantive content of the documents. We also wish to stress that these guidelines do not apply to reports of inter-governmental bodies.

13. With regard to simultaneous distribution of documents, the Group reaffirms the need to ensure adherence to the rules governing the simultaneous distribution of documents in all official languages, both in the distribution of printed copies, as well as the posting of parliamentary documentation on the Official Document System of the United Nations and the United Nations web sites, in accordance with section III, paragraph 5, of resolution 55/222. We note with concern that this rule is not adhered to in many cases, including a report that will shortly be introduced to this Committee, and we would appreciate receiving an explanation of such breaches.

Mr. Chairman,

14. The Group would like to stress the importance of summary and verbatim records, as they constitute the institutional memory of the Organization. We note with appreciation the improvement of the issuance of these records following implementation of a pilot project whereby a timeframe for their issuance was set. The Group would appreciate receiving further details during the informal consultations on this option.

15. The vacancy situation in language sections at different duty stations, in particular in Nairobi, is a matter of concern for the Group of 77 and China. Since the establishment of the Arabic interpretation section in Nairobi, it has always had a high vacancy rate. The Group of 77 and China expects that more concrete action will be taken to solve this longstanding problem, including through the assistance of Member States in advertising and facilitating the conduct of competitive examinations to fill these language vacancies. We recall the offer made by Member States of the Group of 77 and China to assist to this end.

16. The Group stresses the importance of achieving the highest quality of translation and interpretation, and in this regard we equally stress that cost savings should not be pursued at the expense of quality when recruiting short-term staff for the language services.

Mr. Chairman,

17. Turning to the Integrated Global Management project, the Group is looking forward to considering the final assessment of the Secretariat on this project to be provided to the General Assembly for its consideration and decision.

18. Finally, the Group supports the recommendations of the COC regarding the impact on meetings held at Headquarters during the implementation of the Capital Master Plan, strategy IV (phased approach).

I thank you Mr. Chairman.

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