

Pattern of Conferences

Statement by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the Fifth Committee

(ACABQ report A/66/397; Secretary-General's report A/66/118)

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to introduce the Advisory Committee's report (A/66/397) on the pattern of conferences, which covers a number of issues connected with the delivery of conference services.

Section II of the report deals with issues relating to **meetings management**, mainly the progress regarding the new meetings planning system and the Secretary-General's proposal to include in new legislative mandates all relevant information in respect of meetings and documentation in order to enable the Secretariat to fully assess conference servicing needs. The Committee recognizes this necessity and is of the opinion that the proposal should be considered by the General-Assembly, bearing in mind the provisions of rule 153 of its rules of procedure.

With regard to the utilization of conference-servicing resources, the Committee is concerned by the negative trend in the utilization of the facilities allocated to intergovernmental bodies. It supports for the Secretary-General's proposal that intergovernmental bodies review their meeting entitlements and plan their work programmes based on actual utilization of conference-servicing resources.

The Committee also welcomes the additional measures proposed by the Secretary-General to improve the overall utilization of conference resources.

Section III of the report discusses the **integrated global management**, particularly the proximity rule as a means for efficient utilization and allocation of the resources allocated to the Department. The Advisory Committee fully supports the application of the proximity rule as an efficiency mechanism. However, the Committee is of the view that the information provided in the Secretary-General's report is not detailed enough to enable it to determine the efficiencies realized. The Committee is also concerned that not enough effort has gone into ensuring that travel arrangements are made with a view to achieving savings.

With regard to the review of efficiency and accountability mechanisms across the four main duty stations, the Advisory Committee supports the comprehensive review being undertaken by the Secretary-General in this regard. The Committee has underscored its previously stated opinion that the Under-Secretary-General for DGACM should have the authority and accountability for the management of all the resources under section 2 of the budget, including conference services at United Nations Offices in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. In this regard the Advisory Committee supports the ongoing review of the relevant Secretary-General's bulletins on the organization of the three offices in order to delineate and codify the dual responsibility of the Under-Secretary-General and the respective Directors-General in relation to conference management at the three Offices.

On the related issue of client surveys, the Secretary-General has reported a low response rate to the global surveys undertaken to elicit feedback from Member and observer States about the quality of conference services. The Advisory Committee underscores the importance of client surveys as a means to determine whether the Department's objectives of delivering quality services are being met.

Section IV of the report deals with **documentation and publications**, especially the progress made in the implementation of the slotting system. The Secretary-General indicates that, while the overall submission rate of pre-session documents continues to improve, there is still a significant variation in submission rates by author departments. In the opinion of the Advisory Committee, this matter should be examined further. On a related issue, the Secretary-General proposes to amend the documents submission and issuance rules from the 10-4-6 to a 10-6-4 time frame to allow more processing time and facilitate the automation of document processing. The Advisory Committee recognizes the benefits outlined by the Secretary-General, but it underscores the importance of the time required by representatives of the Member States to review documents.

Section V of the report addresses matters relating to **translation and interpretation**, with particular focus on the shortage of language staff and measures being implemented by DGACM to meet the challenge of attracting and retaining sufficient language staff to ensure delivery of language services. The Advisory Committee has made a number of observations and comments with regard to the measures being implemented.

The Committee welcomes the review of the competitive examination process being undertaken in consultation with OHRM and the introduction of a more robust and automated initial screening procedure. With regard to off-site translation, the Committee welcomes the ongoing consultations between the International Association of Conference Translators and the UN System aimed at incorporating the practice into the updated agreement, so that translation services could be provided by freelancers working from anywhere in the world, at substantial savings in terms of travel costs.

One of the main pillars of the Secretary-General's strategy is the university outreach programme to attract new talent from learning institutions in order to create a stream of young professionals to fill vacancies as they arise. The Advisory Committee has welcomed the outreach efforts, but remains concerned about the lack of dedicated resources for the internship programme and for language training activities. In this connection, the Committee reiterates its call that extra-budgetary funding be explored.

On the proposal for the production of **summary records** in the original language only (English or French), complemented by supplemental systems, the Advisory Committee reiterates the view it expressed in the context of its report (A/66/7) on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013 that the proposal be considered by the General Assembly taking into account the opinions of the bodies entitled to such records. Regarding the proposal that Member States be requested to respect the word limit for treaty body reporting, the Committee also reiterates its opinion that this is a matter for the General Assembly to decide.

Lastly, with reference to the provision of conferences services to UN funds and programmes – which the Advisory Committee also addressed in its report on the proposed programme budget (A/66/7) – the Committee supports the proposed “pay-as-you-go” arrangements. If approved by the General Assembly, this will translate into reduced requirements of approximately \$8 million in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

