

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement of Ms. Woinshet Tadesse Woldegiorgis, Chair, Committee on Conferences
at the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly
on 12 October 2011 at 10:00 a.m. in Conference room 3 (NLB)**

Agenda item: Pattern of conferences

Mr. Chair, distinguished colleagues,

It is my privilege to address the Fifth Committee to introduce the report of the Committee on Conferences covering its work in 2011 and adopted by silence procedure following its recently concluded substantive session from 6 to 12 September 2011. The report as contained in document A/66/32, together with a draft resolution in Annex I and the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2012-2013 in Annex II, are being transmitted through the Fifth Committee and recommended for adoption by the General Assembly.

The Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/66/118) which was issued six weeks before the beginning of its substantive session in accordance with the mandated timeframe and was within the 8,500 word-limit for reports originating in the Secretariat. Statistical data was presented as supplementary information. For the first time, the Committee conducted its substantive session in a “paper-smart” fashion following a proposal made by the Secretariat at the organizational session of the Committee in April this year, drawing on the experiences and best practices of paper-smart meetings of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations in New York, and similar practices at other duty stations. All official pre-session, in-session, information and reference documents were posted on a dedicated website. The Secretariat conducted a live-demo at a meeting of the Committee in June and during the briefing one week prior to the session. The Secretariat also provided laptops on loan and technical support in the meeting room, and print-on-demand services as requested.

Mr. Chair,

The report of the Committee reflects the breadth and depth of discussions on all items in its annotated agenda (A/AC.172/2011/1) and is within the word guideline for reports not originating in the Secretariat. As you know, the Committee’s substantive session is an opportunity for Member States to engage actively with the leadership and staff of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management on all matters related to conference management, and to seek additional information and clarification as necessary in order to provide direction, guidance and support to the Secretariat in carrying out the mandates entrusted to it by the General Assembly. Allow me to highlight some of these issues.

In Chapter I: Organizational matters, you will note from the Committee’s membership in 2011 that one member from the Latin American and Caribbean States is to be appointed.

Chapter II deals with the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2012-13. Paragraph 5

proposes the inclusion of all relevant information in new legislative mandates. Specifically, drawing from the lessons learned in the past, the Secretariat is requesting the inclusion of dates, duration, modalities and documentation requirements when new meetings and conferences are being proposed in draft resolutions, in order to assess the capacity of DGACM (and other servicing departments) to provide meetings, interpretation, documentation and other services. The Committee was of the opinion that, both Member States and the Secretariat should strive to make meetings planning a collaborative exercise, whereby predictability was ensured and resources were utilized as efficiently as possible. The Committee therefore recommended in Section I, paragraph 5 of its draft resolution that the General Assembly **invite Member States to include in new legislative mandates adequate information on the modalities for the organization of a conference or a meeting; and in paragraph 6, recall rule 153 of its rules of procedure and to request the Secretary-General to include the modalities of conferences in resolutions involving expenditure, with a view to mobilizing conference services and documentation in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible.**

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates,

In Chapter IIIA: Meetings management, the Committee reviewed the statistical data presented on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities at the four duty stations and in the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa. Under this agenda item, I presented an oral report on my mandate as Chair to hold consultations with the three intergovernmental bodies that had utilized less than the benchmark of 80 per cent of their allocated resources for the past three consecutive years from 2008 to 2010. However, since two of those bodies: the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization, and the Statistical Commission, were able to increase their utilization factor above the established benchmark this year, no formal meetings were held with the Chairs of those bodies. As per past practice, the Secretariat of the Committee on Conferences notified the Secretariats of those bodies and provided suggestions for improvement.

I am pleased to report to you on my meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Contributions on 7 October which could not be held earlier due to scheduling conflicts. Various suggestions for improvement of the utilization factor included advising the Meetings Management Section in advance of foreseeable cancellations, reducing meeting time based on past pattern, and by starting meetings on time. The Chair of the Committee on Contributions welcomed the suggestions and explained that the work of the Committee was often conducted in informal meetings over late and long hours due to the sensitive nature of the items discussed. 2012 would be a scale year and deemed to be more difficult than previous years due to the current economic crisis. The Chair understood the mandate of the Committee on Conferences in addressing underutilization of allocated resources and agreed to bring this matter to the attention of the Bureau and Members before the next session. Possible measures for improvement included, examining the programme of work more closely and in advance so that changes could be communicated to the Meetings Management Section as early as possible which would enable reassignment of conference services.

In this context, the Committee recommended to the General Assembly in paragraph 8 of Section IIA of its draft resolution the Secretary-General's proposal contained in paragraph 12 of A/66/118 that it **reiterate its request to intergovernmental bodies to review their meeting**

entitlements and to plan and adjust their programmes of work on the basis of their actual utilization of conference-servicing resources in order to improve their efficient use of conference services.

Concern was expressed regarding the decrease in the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa from 76 per cent in 2009 to 70 per cent in 2010. Therefore, while noting the Commission's ongoing promotional efforts, the Committee recommended **that the Secretary-General continue to explore means to increase the utilization rate of the ECA (paragraphs 13 and 14 of section IIA of draft resolution.)**.

Chapter IV contains the Committee's discussions on a number of issues related to integrated global management, notably, the lack of information in the Secretary-General's report on financial savings, which was subsequently provided, a request for updated information on the development of harmonized amendments to the Secretary-General's bulletins regarding the principle of accountability and shared responsibility between the Under-Secretary-General for DGACM and the Directors-General at the other three duty stations, on the measures to continue to seek the evaluation of Member States, and on the flex-time pilot project. The Committee made several recommendations in paragraphs 1 to 16 of section III of its draft resolution.

Mr. Chair,

Chapter V deals with documentation and publication-related matters.

The Committee held lengthy discussions on the proposal made by the Secretary-General in paragraph 48 of A/66/118 on the amendment of the rules governing document processing from a 10-4-6 to a 10-6-4 time frame, whereby manuscripts would be submitted to the DGACM ten weeks before a meeting and reports issued four weeks before their consideration. This change would allow for sequential processing, rather than parallel processing as is currently being done, thus ensuring cost efficiencies and enhanced quality of documentation.

Taking into account the prerogatives of the Fifth Committee and the fact that no consensus was reached on the Secretariat's proposed change in the current document processing schedule, the committee agreed to refer this question to the Fifth Committee for its consideration.

On the issue of timely submission of documentation by author departments, the Committee through its recommendations in paragraphs 16 and 17 of section IV its draft resolution **requested the Secretary-General to enforce the slotting system more rigorously and urged author departments to fully adhere to deadlines in meeting the goal of 90 per cent submission compliance.**

As part of the Committee's programme of work, a video conference was held with conference management staff at all four duty stations in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi on the theme: **"Paper-smart meetings; digital audio files as alternatives to written official records"**. As I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, the Committee conducted its session in a paper-smart fashion for the first time. However, other duty stations, for example: the United Nations Office in Nairobi, has been servicing several meetings of the United Nations Environment Programme in a paper-smart way. In Vienna, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space was pioneering the use of digital audio files to record the contents of debates. In Geneva, finding alternatives to written

official records was a matter of urgency since there is a tremendous backlog of summary records of the Human Rights Council.

After an interesting exchange of views on conducting paper-smart meetings, **the Committee requested the Secretary-General in paragraphs 23 and 24 of section IV of its draft resolution to submit a detailed timetable, including technological benchmarks, procurement and training needs, and to report to the General Assembly at its next session on lessons learned from the meetings that will implement the paper-smart concept on a trial basis with the full consent of the relevant intergovernmental bodies.** On the proposal contained in paragraph 71 of the Secretary-General's report (A/66/118), since it is closely interlinked with specific proposals in section 2 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013, it was felt that it would be more appropriate if the Fifth Committee would consider this proposal. It was also felt that the proposal must carefully consider and thoroughly analyze the diverse financial, human resources and legal implications prior to its implementation. **The Committee therefore made a recommendation to this effect in paragraphs 28 and 29 of section IV of its draft resolution.**

Mr. Chair,

Chapter VI deals with translation and interpretation-related matters.

Under this agenda item, the Committee had an extensive question and answer session on the Secretariat's outreach and training initiatives. While noting with appreciation the measures taken by the Secretary-General to address the issue of the replacement of retiring staff in the language services, concern was expressed about the shortage of qualified language applicants and that only two memorandums of understanding had been signed with universities in Africa, and no MOUs had been signed with Latin American institutions. **The Committee therefore recommended in paragraphs 12 to 17 of section V of its draft resolution that the Secretary-General makes further efforts to address the situation.**

Regarding the Secretary-General's proposal in paragraph 72 of A/66/118 on limiting the length of treaty body documentation following the decision of the chairs of the human rights treaty bodies, it was pointed out that the Committee on Conferences did not have a legislative mandate over human rights treaty bodies, and that the issue of the reinforcement of word limits required greater flexibility with regard to reports submitted by Member States and intergovernmental bodies as opposed to reports submitted by the Secretariat. **The Committee therefore recommended in paragraph 18 of section IV that the General Assembly reiterates its request to provide information on the waiver process.**

Before I conclude, Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the Bureau and members of the Committee, as well as the observers, for participating actively and constructively during the Committee's session which enabled the Committee to have meaningful and productive discussions in an open and friendly manner. I hope we can continue to work in the same spirit during the Fifth Committee's consideration of the item on pattern of conferences.

I also wish to express on behalf of myself, the Bureau and members of the Committee on Conferences, our gratitude to Mr. Shaaban, Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Baumann, Assistant-Secretary-General, to the Secretariat of the Committee, and to all the staff of the Department for

General Assembly and Conference Management, as well as the conference management staff at the other duty stations, for providing substantive and technical support to the Committee throughout the year, and especially during its substantive session.

To all my colleagues in the Fifth Committee, I wish to present the report of the Committee on Conferences, together with the draft resolution and draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2012-2013, for your consideration and recommendation to the General Assembly.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.
