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

Estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council

ACABQ reports: A/67/604 and Add.1 and 2;

Reports of the Secretary-General: A/67/346 and Add.1-7

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to introduce the Advisory Committee's report (A/67/604) on the Secretary-General's proposals for the 32 special political missions for 2013, as contained in his reports A/67/346 and Add.1-5. In addition, in its reports A/67/604/Add.1 and 2, the Committee has made recommendations regarding the proposed budget for the Office of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria (A/67/346/Add.6), and the Secretary-General's proposal concerning the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) (A/67/346/Add.7), respectively.

I will highlight just a few points made by the Advisory Committee in its reports in relation to the proposals presented by the Secretary-General.

An overview of the proposed resource requirements for the biennium 2012-2013 is contained in section II of the report of the Advisory Committee (A/67/604). The Committee notes that the overall resource requirements for the 33 missions for 2013 are estimated at \$567 million, compared with the approved budgets of \$631.2 million for 32 missions in 2012. Should the General Assembly approve the resources requested for 2013, and taking into account the projected overexpenditure of \$1.1 million for 2012, additional requirements, amounting to \$125.3 million over the approved appropriation of \$1,083 million for the biennium, would need to be appropriated by the Assembly.

The Advisory Committee notes the measures taken to reduce resource requirements for 2013. While the Committee welcomes the steps taken to streamline activities and achieve efficiencies, it is of the view that related information provided in the Secretary-General's reports lacks clarity as to what extent the reductions are made possible through better planning and budget management, including abolition of long-vacant posts, or through sustainable efficiency gains. The Committee stresses that reductions and measures aimed at achieving efficiencies should be implemented in a manner that would not put at risk fulfilment of the mandated activities or compromise the safety and security of mission personnel and premises.

In section III of its report (A/67/604), the Advisory Committee has made general observations and recommendations on cross-cutting issues pertaining to all missions. The Committee is of the view that the Assembly should request the Secretary-General to further improve the presentation and content of future budget proposals for special political missions, by presenting cross-cutting issues in a format similar to that of the overview report on the financing of peacekeeping operations.

Specific recommendations on resource requirements for the three thematic clusters, as well as UNAMA and UNAMI are provided in section IV of the report of the Advisory Committee.

As for cluster I, the Advisory Committee notes that, compared with the appropriation for 2012, the estimated resources proposed for 2013 reflect an increase of approximately \$4 million, primarily owing to the inclusion of the provision for the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Yemen (\$3.7 million, or 91 per cent), as the initial requirements of the Office were funded through the unforeseen and extraordinary mechanism available to the Secretary-General. The Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's staffing proposals for 16 new positions and 1 reclassification, except for the position of an Administrative Assistant in the Office of the Special Adviser on Yemen based in New York. The Committee also recommends that a 10 per cent reduction be applied to the proposed requirement of some \$1 million under official travel for the Office of the Special Adviser on Yemen.

Turning to cluster II, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the staffing changes proposed by the Secretary-General, which include 3 new positions and 1 abolition.

With respect to cluster III, the Advisory Committee notes that the provision for 2013 reflects an increase of \$3.39 million, compared with the approved budget of 2012. The increase is mainly due to additional staffing requirements for UNSMIL, partially offset by staffing reductions for UNIPSIL and BNUB, as well as reduced requirements for UNPOS.

The cluster III staffing changes proposed by the Secretary-General include 37 new positions; 55 abolitions; transfer of 20 positions to a peacekeeping mission; 4 reclassifications; 5 reassignments; and 2 redeployments. With a few exceptions outlined in its report, the Advisory Committee has no objection to the Secretary-General's staffing proposals. The Committee, however, stresses that the standard classification criteria for positions should be applied with uniformity across all missions.

The Advisory Committee notes the efforts made by BINUCA and BNUB to rationalize their support services by transferring non-location specific support functions to the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, as well as the transfer of 20 positions from UNPOS to UNSOA resulting from the merging of support functions for the two missions. The Committee expects that the staffing changes will be implemented in a manner that will not jeopardize the fulfilment of the mandates of the respective missions.

Mr Chairman,

The Advisory Committee is recommending approval of the Secretary-General's proposals for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which include closure of nine provincial offices, accompanied by significant reductions in budgetary requirements and staffing levels. The Committee considers, however, that effort should have been made to present a more transparent and better organized proposal. It reiterates its earlier recommendation that future budget submissions should contain more detail on the resource requirements to meet the mandated objectives, irrespective of whether the proposal is for additional resources or for reductions.

Concerning the Secretary-General's proposal for the establishment of a Joint Operations Centre at UNAMA, the Committee is of the view that a more complete justification should have been presented. It therefore recommends that the Secretary-General be requested to provide in his next report, details on the organizational structure, reporting lines, functions, staffing, operating costs and expected benefits of the Centre, as well as an assessment of its first year of operation.

With regard to the closure of the nine provincial offices, the Advisory Committee is not convinced that a realistic assessment of the security situation was made or lessons learned from prior experience were properly applied before the original decisions were taken to expand the mission's presence and implement security upgrades to mission premises. It recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to ensure that future decision-making on expansion of field presences, particularly in volatile and fluid environments such as in Afghanistan should be properly informed by a realistic security assessment.

Mr. Chairman,

Turning to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's proposals. It takes note of the reported improvements in the security posture of the Mission which have allowed the return of national staff based in Amman and closure of that office. The Advisory Committee also welcomes the developments with regard to the integrated headquarters compound in Baghdad, including the change of scope of the project and the allocation of the Diwan/D-2 compound for use by the United Nations. The Committee emphasizes the need for close supervision and oversight over the implementation of the project in order to bring it to a successful conclusion.

While not objecting to the Secretary-General's proposals for the expansion of the Kuwait Joint Support Office, the Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretary-General be requested to provide further information in his next report on the organizational structure, functions, reporting lines, staffing and activities of the Office. It further recommends that a cost-benefit analysis of the Office be conducted, including identification of the efficiency gains and benefits realized.

Office of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria (A/67/604/Add.1)

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to the Office of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, the request for resources for the one-year period ending 31 December 2013 (A/67/346/Add.6), submitted separately from the requirements of the other 32 special political missions, amounts to \$12,261,800 net. The Committee notes that the Office, initially established in Geneva in February 2012, is in the process of transferring its headquarters to Cairo, with the establishment of a presence in Damascus. The Committee supports the request for resources, apart from the establishment of two Administrative Assistant positions. If approved by the General Assembly, the Office would comprise of 77 civilian personnel. Given the evolving nature of the situation on the ground, the Committee indicates that the mission should monitor the overall staffing levels and keep the deployment to different locations under close review.

United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (A/67/604/Add.2)

Mr. Chairman,

Coming to the Secretary-General's request for additional requirements in the amount of \$31,700 in relation to the upward reclassification of the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau (A/67/346/Add.7), the Advisory Committee recognizes the unique circumstances in the country, as well as the Secretary-General's need for a high-profile personality at the rank of either a former Head of State or equivalent to help resolve the political stalemate. The Committee has therefore recommended acceptance of the request.

Mr Chairman, I thank you for your attention.