

Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

**Statement by Acting Head of DGACM Mr. Jean-Jacques Graise
at the 9th formal meeting of the Fifth Committee**

Agenda item: Pattern of Conferences
(Tuesday, 23 October 2012, 10 a.m., Room 3 NLB)

Good morning Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members,

Seven weeks ago, the Committee on Conferences held a very fruitful session. DGACM is privileged to have its own, small sized intergovernmental body, as it were, which allows it to have a direct dialogue with Member States; to report on the achievements and challenges; and to seek guidance and support for its work for the next year and beyond.

The report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127) is only 15 pages long (7,388 words, to be precise), which is once again below the 8,500 word-limit for reports originating in the Secretariat. I am mentioning this, because the sheer volume of documentation – and -- often late -- submission of manuscripts by author departments – is one of the greatest challenges for DGACM. By way of illustration: the documentation considered this autumn by the Fifth Committee amounts to 73 documents totalling 4,400 pages or 1,3 million words.

Volume is the biggest issue. Timeliness is another one. Manuscripts received late from author departments cause our best efforts to plan to fail.

I have noted concerns raised at the 4 October meeting of your Committee with regards to the perennial problem of lateness of the documentation for the 5th Committee. We would like to clarify that lateness of the documentation is not at all connected with such factors as reduction of resources allocated to nightshifts, weekend work and posts in the printing

services. The cost-saving measures taken by the Department did not create this bottleneck, which was observed during previous sessions before any of the above-mentioned measures had been taken. We are seized with the matter, much concerned with it, are working with other stakeholders to alleviate the problem, and would welcome it if calendars were less compressed, the output of the author bodies more predictable and even, and the length of Fifth Committee documentation closer to the prescribed 8.500 words.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members,

The Committee on Conferences, as in the previous year, opted to conduct its session in a PaperSmart fashion. This not only set an example for the progress of PaperSmart meetings but allowed DGACM to fine-tune the concept and to adjust it to the needs of actual users. The traditional videoconference with the four duty stations was entitled **“PaperSmart meetings; lessons learned from several trials.”** This theme resulted from a specific request of the General Assembly contained in its resolution 66/233 of 24 December 2011, in which it noted the “emerging” concept of “paper-smart” meetings and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly a report on its implementation. In section IV, paragraphs 23 and 24 of the resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on nine inter-linked aspects of the PaperSmart concept, including lessons learned from implementing the PaperSmart concept on a trial basis. In addition to the videoconference at which the Committee was briefed, it had before it a conference room paper (A/AC.172/2012/CRP.1).

Let me emphasize that the Secretariat does not see the PaperSmart concept as a fight against paper but rather a better, cheaper, faster and more sustainable way - in other words - a smarter way, to do business. It will also reduce the volume of printing and distribution operations at United Nations Headquarters in New York and elsewhere. And yes, we are of course aware that this concept can be fully implemented only subject to approval by Member States.

Thanks to the addition of several new electronic distribution tools, a switch to digital printing and overall demand reduction, the production of parliamentary documents has already been reduced significantly during the past three years and this trend continues. For example, in the first half of 2009, DGACM printed 136 million page impressions, while the corresponding figure for 2010 was 95 million, for 2011 it was 47 million and for 2012 a mere 32 million. For the whole of 2012, about 60 million page impressions are expected to be printed, amounting to less than half of the Secretary-General's projections for the current biennium – or a reduction of 76% since 2009.

As outlined in the Secretary-General's budget proposal for the current biennium, DGACM is moving from a high-volume, large-batch and resource-intensive printing operation to a high-speed, low-volume, small-batch and low-cost operation.

The overall objective of achieving additional efficiencies and quality gains through leveraging existing and emerging technologies remains high on the Secretariat's agenda and DGACM is at the forefront of these efforts. Working in cooperation with other parts of the Secretariat, DGACM implements the PaperSmart approach on a trial basis. We also explore other innovative solutions.

For example, in the area of translation, in accordance with section V, paragraphs 7 and 8, of GA resolution 66/233, we have initiated a global project called **gText**.¹ The strategic business purpose of gText is to streamline the documentation workflow by maximizing the automation of key processes. Its goals are to increase the efficiency and quality of translation and related processes, and to facilitate remote working arrangements. The project will develop and implement a system that will provide internal and contractual translators at all four DGACM duty stations with a complete and uniform suite of Internet-based language tools, as well as seamless access to background information

¹ The PoC draft resolution in III (1) *Notes with appreciation* the efforts of the Secretary-General in the context of the integrated global management initiative to establish and implement in the four main duty stations common performance indicators and single information technology systems (such as gData, gMeets, gDoc and gText) ...”

necessary for quality translation.

By profoundly changing the working methods in the multilingual documentation processing chain, the gText project will allow us to do more and better with the same, or perhaps even with less, by contributing to the reduction of capacity requirements in some support processes.

In designing gText, DGACM carefully considered alternative options, such as utilizing commercially available computer-assisted translation and machine translation applications. Instead, we firmly opted for the development of a customized, in-house system which would both guarantee the purity of data - a necessary condition for upholding the highest quality of translated United Nations documents as demanded by Member States – and at the same time provide the most cost-effective set of capabilities to meet our very specific United Nations needs.

On the meetings side, the Secretariat is actively exploring a new approach piloted by the International Telecommunications Union – multilingual meetings with remote participation. This initiative responds to section III, paragraphs 2 and 5, of the above-mentioned Assembly resolution 66/233, where among other things, the Assembly noted with appreciation the efforts of the Secretary-General, using in-house capacity, to improve the utilization of conference services.

This new initiative would make United Nations meetings more accessible and greener, and would allow the Organization to work around certain physical and cost limitations, such as meeting facilities, travel, accommodation, administrative support etc. It is important to note that at ITU, the new meeting format was accepted by interpreters and, in fact, one of our colleagues has just come back from an on-site inspection of the system.

The Department recognizes that the satisfaction of Member States is a key performance indicator of conference management and it continually seeks feedback through the global

e-survey and informational meetings on language-related issues at all four duty stations. Providing the Secretaries for all meetings of the General Assembly, the First, Fourth, Second and Third Main Committees, as well as the Assembly's subsidiary bodies and organs, DGACM relies on Member States' feedback and input in its quest to improve the ways in which it provides support to the intergovernmental process. It is therefore a disappointment that, despite the Department's varied efforts, the response rate for the survey is still low. During the CoC meeting, we explored ways of enhancing feedback since language services chiefs are keen to discuss language issues with Member States on a permanent basis. However since the participation in the two annual mandated informational meetings has been low, we welcome the CoC's recommendation (in paragraph III (13) to mandate only one meeting instead of the earlier two annual informational meetings.

The Committee will recall that for the past several years the Department has faced challenges in the recruitment of competent language staff, in particular translators and interpreters in certain languages. Vigorous measures were taken to avoid a disruptive shortage of applicants in language career fields and those measures are starting to bear some fruit. Overall, our analysis shows that the Department may already be over the hump as far as replacement of the retirees is concerned. I must emphasize, however, that if member States wish the Department to continue its outreach and training efforts and to expand and mainstream its traineeship programme, then dedicated resources need to be made available. Without them, the Department will struggle to balance the imperative to secure future services with the more immediate requirement to deliver timely conference services. We cannot sustain our vigorous and successful efforts in an emergency mode without a dedicated outreach budget, a matter we plan to address in the next biennial budget.

Responding to paragraph 16 of section II of General Assembly resolution 66/233 of 24.12.2011, the Pattern of Conferences report contained recommendations related to meetings management. Firstly, paragraphs 11 and 12 identified six intergovernmental bodies whose average Utilization Factor has been below the benchmark of 80 per cent for the past ten years. Secondly, in paragraphs 14 and 15, attention is drawn to the provisional biennial

calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields with a view to considering the necessity of preparing this calendar for review by the Economic and Social Council. The draft PoC resolution addresses these concerns in paragraphs II A 20 & 21.

The requirement of enhanced cost-effectiveness has created new challenges for DGACM to conduct its business with a much-reduced budget, while continuing to deliver high-quality and timely services to Member States. As you are aware, DGACM's budget has been cut by USD 42 million for the current biennium and the Secretary-General committed to achieve additional savings. Among other things, this means that covering some costs within existing resources can no longer automatically be taken for granted. This includes the provision of conference services, especially for parallel meetings and on weekends, and here I would like to draw your attention in particular to the high-level segment in September when the General Assembly decides on the holding of several high-level meetings close to the general debate. This situation requires further improvement in the coordination of the scheduling of such high-level meetings, as stipulated in resolution 66/294. We are working with all stakeholders to modernize our practices and operations, to adapt them to changing requirements, and yet to maintain the highest possible quality in our services. The support and guidance of the 5th Committee in this endeavour is greatly valued.

I thank you for your attention.
