

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement of Ms. Carolina Popovici, Chair, Committee on Conferences
at the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly
on 23 October 2012 at 10 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, which covers its work in 2012 and was adopted under a silence procedure following its recently concluded substantive session from 3 to 10 September 2012. The report, as contained in document A/67/32, together with a draft resolution in annex I and the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 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/67/127), which was issued six weeks before the beginning of its substantive session in accordance with the mandated time frame and was within the 8,500 word limit for reports originating in the Secretariat. Statistical data were presented as supplementary information. The Committee again conducted its substantive session in a paper-smart fashion. All official pre-session, in-session, information and reference documents were posted on a dedicated website. The Secretariat provided laptops on loan and technical support in the meeting room, in addition to print-on-demand services as requested.

Mr. Chair,

The Committee's report reflects comprehensively the discussions on all items in its annotated agenda (A/AC.172/2012/1) As you know, the Committee's substantive session affords Member States an opportunity to engage actively with the leadership and staff of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management on all matters relating 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, on organizational matters, you will note from the Committee's membership in 2012 that one member from the Latin American and Caribbean States and one member from the Asia-Pacific States are to be appointed, leaving one seat from the latter group for the position of Vice-Chair vacant.

Chapter II deals with the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013. In paragraph 16 of its resolution 66/233, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to propose, at its sixty-seventh session, a comprehensive review of conference servicing highlighting any duplications and redundancies, with a view to identifying innovative ideas, potential synergies and other cost-saving measures, without compromising the quality of its services. In response to that request, in paragraph 15 of his report on the pattern of conferences, the Secretary-General proposed that the General Assembly invite the Economic and Social Council to reconsider the necessity of reviewing its provisional biennial calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields. In section I, paragraph 8, of its draft resolution, the Committee concurred with the observations made by the Secretary-General in paragraph 13 of his report in relation to the biennial calendar of meetings of the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Chair, distinguished colleagues,

In Chapter III A, on meetings management, the Committee reviewed the statistical data presented on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities at the four duty stations and at the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa. 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 2009 to 2011. Since the chairs of the Statistical Commission and the Commission for Social Development are not based in New York, I was unable to schedule a meeting with them. As in the past, 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 28 June. Various suggestions for improving the utilization factor included advising the Meetings Management Section in advance of foreseeable cancellations, reducing meeting time based on past patterns and 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 owing to the sensitive nature of the items discussed. For the next session, in 2013, the Committee will tentatively cancel interpretation services for eight of their meetings during the final week of the session, when the Committee is mainly engaged in drafting.

Again, in response to paragraph 16 of its resolution 66/233, for the first time the average utilization factor for ten years of those bodies that consistently underutilized conference resources were identified in the report of the Secretary-General. In this context, the Committee urged those intergovernmental bodies to take that factor into account when planning their future sessions in order to achieve the benchmark of 80 per cent.

Concern was expressed regarding the zero growth in the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa, which remained at 76 per cent in 2011. While noting the Commission's ongoing promotional efforts, the Committee recommended that the Secretary-General should continue to explore additional means of increasing the utilization of the conference centre, among others with partners such as the African Union, and to encourage the heads of United Nations system entities to use the conference centre as a matter of priority, when applicable, to ensure greater utilization of the conference facilities

Chapter IV contains the Committee's discussions on issues relating to integrated global management. In section III, paragraph 1, of its draft resolution, the Committee noted 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).

In section III, paragraph 2, the Committee requested the Secretary-General to complete the

internal reviews concerning accountability mechanisms and the clear delineation of responsibility between the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and the directors-general of the United Nations offices at Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna for conference management policies, operations and resource utilization.

In section III paragraph 15, the Committee reiterated its request to the Secretary General to redouble his efforts to include in his next report on the pattern of conferences the information regarding the financial savings achieved through the implementation of the integrated global management projects as requested through previous resolutions of the Committee, including in its resolution 66/233, section III paragraph 14.

The Committee welcomed the proximity rule as an efficient approach to servicing meetings away from duty stations and in that regard requested the Secretary-General to rigorously apply it to applicable meetings without jeopardizing the quality of services. It also remarked, however, on the lack of information in the Secretary-General's report on financial savings. That information was subsequently provided.

Mr. Chair,

Chapter V deals with documentation and publication-related matters.

On the issue of timely submission of documentation by author departments, the Committee through its recommendations in paragraphs 16 and 17 of section IV of 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: "Lessons learned from the application of paper-smart meetings on a trial basis". As I mentioned at the outset, the Committee conducted its session in a paper-smart fashion for the second time. Other duty stations have also been engaged in developing the paper-smart model. For example, the United Nations Office in Nairobi has been servicing meetings held under the auspices of the United Nations

Environment Programme in a paper smart way since 2008. In Vienna, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space has been pioneering the use of digital audio files to record the contents of debates. In Geneva, the tremendous backlog of summary records of the Human Rights Council requires feasible solutions and alternatives to written official records .

The Committee held lengthy discussions on the statements by the duty stations and the proposal made by the Secretary-General in the conference room paper on paper-smart meetings following the lessons learned of servicing the Rio+20 conference in paper-smart mode. Recalling paragraphs 23 and 24 of its resolution 55/285 of 7 September 2001 and section IV, paragraph 23, of its resolution 66/233, , the Committee requested the Secretary-General to elaborate the scope of the paper-smart concept so that it would become a more comprehensive concept based on the use of modern technology in order to better serve Member States, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its sixty-eight session.

Mr. Chair, distinguished colleagues,

Chapter VI deals with translation and interpretation-related matters. Under this agenda item, Committee had a question and answer session on the Secretariat's outreach and training initiatives. It noted with appreciation the measures taken by the Secretary-General to address the issue of the replacement of retiring staff in the language services and also noted that recent efforts had led to the signing of two memorandums of understanding and two collaboration agreements with two universities in Africa, and one memorandum of understanding with a Latin American institution.

The Committee requested the Secretary-General to make further concerted efforts to promote outreach programmes, such as traineeships and internships, and to introduce innovative methods to increase awareness of the programmes, including through partnerships with Member States, relevant international organizations and language institutions in all regions, in particular to close the wide gap in Africa and Latin America.

Also, the Committee reiterated its request to the Secretary General to provide at all duty stations, adequate staff at the appropriate level, with the view to ensure appropriate quality control for external translation, with due consideration of the principle of equal grade for equal work.

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 that 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. Graisse, Acting Head of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, Mr. Baumann, Assistant-Secretary-General, the Secretariat of the Committee and all the staff of the Department, in addition to 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 revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013, for your consideration and recommendation to the General Assembly.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.
