



**STATEMENT MADE ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP
BY MR. BROUZ RALPH COFFI, COUNSELLOR AT THE PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE TO THE UNITED NATIONS,
ON AGENDA ITEM 133: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES,
IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE MAIN PART
OF THE 67TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(New York, 23rd October, 2012)**

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group on Agenda item 133: Pattern of Conferences. The Group wishes to thank Mr. Jean-Jacques Graisse, Acting Head of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management for introducing the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/67/127.
2. The African Group also thanks Mr. Collen V. Kélapilé, Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative Questions (ACABQ) and Ms. Carolina Popovici, Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences for introducing the reports of their respective Committees.
3. From the outset, the African Group fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 133: Pattern of Conferences.

Mr. Chairman,

4. The African Group commends the quality of the work of the Committee on Conferences (CoC). The report of the Committee concluded at its most recent substantive Session, contained in document A/67/32 is well balanced. The Group believes that the draft resolution on Pattern of Conferences submitted by the CoC provides a good basis for negotiations on this item.
5. The Group attaches great importance to the issue of Conference Management and welcomes the adoption of the draft revised Calendar of Conferences and Meetings for the United Nations for 2013. The effective delivery of quality conference services is critical to the work of the intergovernmental bodies and contributes to the overall achievement of the organization's goals.

6. On the issue of utilization of conference services, the Group notes that overall utilization for 2011 was 85 per cent, same as in 2010. Whereas the utilization rate is above the established benchmark of 80 per cent, it is desirable that improvement is realized every subsequent year.
7. Members States may wish to recall that the utilization rate of the Conference Centre at the Economic Commission for Africa has remained well below the 80 per cent threshold. In 2011, the utilization rate was 70 per cent, same as in 2010. The Secretary-General cites completion from other conferencing facilities including the African Union conference complex inaugurated in 2012 as being major factors in the low utilization rates. Further to the innovative marketing and outreach activities, the Group would be keen to know what measures have been undertaken to address the problem and what needs to be done going forward.
8. With regard to the initiative called "Flex Time system", the Group reiterates paragraph 16 of Section III of General Assembly Resolution 66/233, where it was stressed that the rules and regulations of the United Nations governing human resources should be uniformly applied. We look forward to receive during this session the report of the Secretary-General on the evaluation of the project as previously requested by the General Assembly resolution.

Mr. Chairman,

9. The African Group attaches great importance to the timely issuance of documents and the quality of documentation. We therefore commend the work done so far by the interdepartmental Task Force on documentation.
10. We welcome the indications of an increase in the timely submission of documents at the United Nations Headquarters, which reached 88 per cent in 2011, up from 78 per cent and 73 per cent for 2010 and 2009 respectively. The same trend was not evident in the other three main duty stations that recorded low rates; 74 per cent in Geneva, 43 per cent in Vienna and 0 per cent in Nairobi. We urge that no effort should be spared to improve the timely submission of documents and urge all author departments to ensure they submit their documents within the allotted time frames.

11. Concerning the concept of paper-smart meetings, the Group noted that the information requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 23 of Section IV of its resolution 66/233 was not fully provided by the Secretary General. Further details are needed on its implications when it comes to human resources, finances, proceedings of the intergovernmental bodies, transfers of costs to Member States, addressing the technological gap between countries and other implications. The Group also notes with deep concern that the provision of hard copies of documents upon demand by Member States were not fully met, which contradicts with General Assembly resolution 57/300.

Mr. Chairman,

12. The African Group stresses the importance of achieving the highest standards of quality in translation and interpretation. The Group has over the years supported the implementation of a proactive succession planning programme, whose major components are outreach to Universities and streamlining of the competitive examinations for language services.
13. While welcoming the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with a University in Egypt, the Group remains deeply concerned over the slow pace of outreach activities with African Universities that train language professionals. The Group therefore welcomes the second Pan-African Conference on the Training of Translators, Conference interpreters and Public Service interpreters held in Addis Ababa in May 2012. During the conference, we are informed that participants examined the draft administrative structure and budget of the African Universities consortium, which will be in charge of implementing a programme of assistance to Universities in Africa in the field of training of translators and interpreters. We hope that training of language professionals in Africa will alleviate the problem of high vacancy rates for language professional at UNON and ECA. It will also help address the organization's challenges in succession management for language staff.
14. With regard to UNON, it has been the long-standing position of the African Group that every effort should be made to reduce the vacancy rates and especially in language staff. The group is therefore deeply concerned at the current high vacancy rates of 35 and 30 per cent for translators and interpreters respectively. This high rate are very disturbing, especially in view of the fact that the vacancy rates for all regular budget posts at the same station is 3.1 per cent. The reasons advanced by secretariat in explaining this high vacancy rates are not acceptable as the issues raised would apply across the board and this does not seem the case. We will be looking to get more clarification from the secretariat on this matter during the informals.

15. Concerning the audio recording of meetings, the African Group wishes to stress that this should NOT substitute the Summary and Verbatim records that continue to constitute an important part of documentation used by the majority of Member States for the intergovernmental decision-making processes. In this regard, the Group recalls section IV, Paragraph 29, of General Assembly resolution 66/233, which emphasizes that the Secretary-General should provide a report during the 67th session on the evaluation of the pilot-project undertaken by the Committee on the peaceful uses of outer space at the United Nations Office in Vienna.

Mr. Chairman,

16. Finally, in view of the foregoing and taking into account all the work that remains to be done the African Group looks forward to constructive dialogue with other delegations on this important agenda item.

Thank you for your attention.