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Statement by Stephen Lieberman, Minister Counselor,

On Agenda Item 133: Pattern of Conferences

Before the Fifth Committee

October 23, 2012

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The United States thanks the Chairman of the Committee on Conference, Ms. Carolina Popovici of the Republic of Moldova for introducing the Committee's report and Assistant Secretary-General for the Department of General Assembly Conference Management for introducing the report of the Secretary General on the pattern of conferences. We also thank Mr. Collen Kelapile, Chairman of the Advisory Committee for Administrative and Budgetary Questions, for introducing his Committee's report on this agenda item.

Mr. Chairman, my delegation commends the work that continues to be done in the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management and the Department's efforts to utilize resources in the best possible way, be it through better management of meetings and conference services or modernizing of printing practices.

In particular, we note with interest the efforts undertaken by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its Legal Subcommittee at the United Nations Office at Vienna to use digital recordings of meetings in the six official languages of the Organization that has proven to be a successful digital alternative to printed meeting records. We applaud this initiative and encourage efforts like this across the UN. We note the Secretary General will be reporting on results during the sixty-eight session on this subject. It was efforts like this that led my delegation to strongly support the Secretary General's proposal last year to eliminate antiquated summary records.

Additionally, we look forward to a report from the Secretary-General which elaborates the scope of the paper smart concept. When one looks at the volumes of paper that are printed for this committee alone, it is clear that we can find better ways to serve our needs without destroying forests. In that spirit, you may notice that I am delivering this statement from my tablet—without paper—and we have sent this statement to the Secretariat electronically.

The Committee on Conferences considered and concurred with many of the ideas put forward by the Secretary General in seeking to further rationalize meeting services and adjusting meeting services where necessary to better meet demands as well as deal with underutilization by some Committees. Regarding underutilization by some UN bodies, we request the Secretary-General to work with these entities to attain and eventually surpass the 80 percent utilization benchmark.

My delegation also supports of the flextime concept, which we believe not only better supports needs of the Assembly, but also well serves Secretariat employees. We look forward to provision of the Secretary General's report on the use of flextime in Vienna and the consideration in the report of further implementation at other duty stations.

Mr. Chairman, turning to a related topic, Mr. Chairman, my delegation has been puzzled by some recent statements in this room misrepresenting the agreement on recosting for the 2012-2013 regular budget resolution that was reached by all of us on December 24, 2011

OP 27 of Resolution 66/246 explicitly decides to “defer **consideration** of post-related recosting for inflation and exchange rate projections to the first performance report on the budget for the biennium 2012–2013” to ensure that any ultimate assessment would be in line with actual expenses, and in the hope and expectation that actual expenses would be as low as possible. All delegations agreed to this language with the mutual and clear understanding that the point of deferral was not a simple delay – which would be pointless – but rather to enable the Secretariat to take measures to find savings to both minimize and offset any recosting impact. As we all know, many variables can change up to the very last moment in the course of a two-year budget cycle, especially if managers seek new savings on an ongoing basis. The Secretary-General personally assured the General Assembly of this intention when, on the morning of December 24, he stated that:

“The task at hand is complete, but the imperative ‘to do more and better with less’ remains. That is why I give you my pledge: I will instruct all of my managers to continue finding new ways to make the most of our precious resources...one year from now I will return to you with greater cost savings. You can count on my commitment.”

My delegation supported the 2012/13 budget because of that explicit understanding. Should that understanding change, so too would our support for other aspects of the budget agreement. I note, Mr. Chairman, that embedded within the issue of conferences, as with many other issues we will consider in this session, there are in fact many programs and positions that were priorities for various delegations and groups. While we could of course reopen such issues, it would clearly be detrimental to the work of this Committee to retroactively unravel an agreement piece by piece. We therefore urge our colleagues to avoid advancing arbitrary and alternative interpretations of past agreements.

Mr. Chairman, I assure you of my delegation’s continued commitment to work with all delegations to find ways to improve how the UN supports conferences and delivers on all its mandates.

Thank you.