



United States Mission to the United Nations

799 United Nations Plaza

New York, NY 10017

www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov

Statement by Cherith Norman,

Minister Counselor for United Nations Management & Reform

At the First Resumed Session of the Fifth Committee

69th General Assembly

On Agenda Item 132: Program Budget 2014-2015 - Standards for air travel

March 4, 2015

Mr. Chairman,

The United States would like to thank the Director of the Office of the USG for Management, Christian Saunders for introducing the Secretary General's report on air travel and the Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), Carlos Ruiz Massieu, for introducing the Committee's report on the subject.

We commend the Secretary General for his leadership in this area of air travel and for the proposals he made in his report to the General Assembly in the sixty-seventh session on utilizing air travel resources more effectively and efficiently. We appreciate the Secretary General's swift implementation of the changes adopted by member states in the sixty-seventh General Assembly through the issuing of a revised administrative instruction in 2013. However, Mr. Chairman, we are disappointed that the momentum for change brought forth from the decisions taken two years ago has not been carried forward to its full extent. Specifically, the report before us does not provide comprehensive data on air travel expenses from June 2012-2014; it does not provide clear analysis of the impact of and savings attributable to the decisions taken two years ago; and it does not propose measures to further improve air travel policies and strengthen controls and accountability. Nearly three quarters of a billion dollars spent on travel over two years warrants close scrutiny and continuous improvement.

Mr. Chairman, I will elaborate on a few points in this statement. First and foremost, the United States is deeply concerned by the lack of consolidated and comprehensive data on air travel expenditures. The General Assembly has asked for this data year after year. While we understand that tracking of costs will improve with the implementation of Umoja, travel represents one of the most significant categories of expenditure for the Organization and member states are owed, at a minimum, reliable figures on the total expenditure and a breakdown of basic categories -- such as number of trips, frequency, purpose and class of travel -- that enables us to understand the major cost drivers in air travel. During the 2010-2011 biennium, the Office of Internal Oversight Services estimated travel expenditures to be \$769 million. We note that this was only an estimate and that it required piecing together scattered information. The current report does not provide us with even an estimate of the total expenditure for the 2012-2014 period. As the ACABQ report notes, without such data, it is not clear how the United Nations monitors expenditures or holds managers accountable.

Second, the United States shares the concern voiced in the ACABQ report regarding the increase in the number of exceptions granted for business class travel by the Secretary General, especially for the category of prominent travelers, which represent 70 percent of the exceptions authorized for the UN and its affiliated agencies during the two year period under review. The 68% increase in the number of exceptions approved for business class travel is counterproductive to the positive changes that the Secretary General proposed and that the General Assembly adopted two years ago.

The United Nations has a number of generous policies governing the benefits afforded to its staff and representatives. While we have made incremental progress in reversing some of these practices, there is much more progress to be made on the policies in which we have started to make changes, such as lump sum payments, and on policies where the status quo must be re-examined, such as the categories of UN personnel and member state travelers who are still eligible for first and business class travel. On lump sum payments for home leave, family visit and education grant travel, while we applaud the 5% percent decrease in entitlement from 75 percent to 70 percent, we continue to believe that further recalibration of lump sum payment policies is necessary to better align with best practices and would lead to significant savings, as already demonstrated by the savings of 6.7% at United Nations Headquarters. We look forward to a thorough analysis on the impact of the 5 percent decrease as well as proposals for further modifying the lump-sum policy in line with best practices, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, which reduces its lump-sum provision to 55 per cent of the full economy class fare.

Mr. Chairman, the United States reiterates the importance of the Secretary General's leadership on this issue and encourages him to continue to find ways to more judiciously utilize air travel resources. And we ask that member states be given clear and reliable information on the use of these resources. We look forward to working with colleagues to get the greatest value from limited travel funds.