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Statement by Ambassador Isobel Coleman
on
Agenda Item 134: UN HQ Long-Term Accommodations
Fifth Committee of the UN General Assembly
Tuesday 1 December 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My delegation would like to thank Mr. Yukio Takasu, Under-Secretary-General for Management, and Mr. Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Chairman of the Advisory Committee, for introducing their respective reports.

Mr. Chairman,

For several years now we have been considering the long-term accommodation needs of the Organization at Headquarters. Last year, the Secretary-General warned that the Organization would face a steep increase in rent costs in 2023, and presented ten options to avoid that result. Given the many demands currently being placed on the regular budget, we need a long-term accommodations plan that optimizes the use of existing resources. We asked the Secretary-General to return this session with further analysis comparing three options: continued commercial leasing; a new building on the North Lawn; and a new building just south of the campus, known as DC-5.

We thank the Secretary-General for a thorough report. After careful review, we concur with its conclusion that DC-5 is the most compelling option studied, both in quantitative and qualitative terms: it is almost \$1 billion better value than continued commercial leasing over the next half century, and it offers a unique opportunity to augment the existing campus. My delegation believes that DC-5 should be developed further: the next stage of design work and any necessary agreements should be finalized by next year so the costs of the project can be more clearly evaluated and the risk of future cost escalation can be minimized.

We must also bear in mind, however, that this evaluation is taking place while the UN is in the midst of a transformative reform agenda, including mobility, flexible workspace, and the implementation of Umoja and the Global Service Delivery Model, all of which should result in a smaller footprint in New York as functions are streamlined and in some cases relocated to more cost effective locations. The potential of these efforts still needs to be analyzed, but it is possible that substantial space outside of the Secretariat Building may not be necessary after these efforts bear fruit.

Still, given the projected steep increase in rent costs in 2023, and in anticipation of high commercial rents elsewhere in Manhattan and the limited availability of commercial space in the

Turtle Bay area, the UN must have a cost-effective plan for its long-term accommodations at Headquarters for space that is still needed. DC-5 is clearly a leading option in this plan. The UN should also continue to monitor the market, including options in the greater New York City and tri-state area, so the GA can be certain, if DC-5 is approved, that the best option was selected at the time a decision must be made.

To this point, and in closing, Mr. Chairman, let me be clear: financial prudence requires us to put a long-term accommodation plan in place, not simply to kick the can down the road and watch rents escalate. While we agree that more information is needed before a final decision can be made, we urge all member states to recognize that we will eventually have to make a decision, even with imperfect or incomplete information, because the cost of inaction is too high.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.