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Statement by Cherith Norman
On Agenda Item 134: the Strategic Heritage Plan
At the
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70th UN General Assembly
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Thank you Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank UNOG Director-General Michael Moller for introducing the report of the Secretary-General which contains a thorough progress report on the Strategic Heritage Plan as well as helpful detailed information and proposals on financing the project. We also thank the Chair of the ACABQ, Mr. Carlos Ruiz Massieu, for presenting the ACABQ's comments and recommendations.

Mr. Chairman,

We recognize that the proposed renovations to the Palais des Nations are necessary and that an improved UN campus in Geneva will be of great benefit not only to the UN officials who work there, but also to the thousands of Member State delegates who depend on the UN's facilities for major international conferences and assemblies each year.

But as this is a major renovation project that follows on the heels of the recently completed Capital Master Plan, the United States continues to focus on the cost of the project which comes at a time of unprecedented financial demands on the UN system. We thank the Swiss government for its offer of a no-interest loan, which will help ease the initial financial burden to Member States. However, we note that the loan principle must nonetheless be repaid using Member State assessments. Thus, project financing methods continue to be of particular interest.

We note that to date, the Secretariat has undertaken no serious, systematic feasibility studies of **alternative financing mechanisms**, including, but not limited to, public-private partnerships, nor has it applied any of these mechanisms to the financing alternatives outlined in its report. This is a matter of great concern to us. Although we support the project overall, until we have greater clarity on alternative project financing to implement mechanisms that will reduce the cost of the project to Member States, whether through public-private partnerships, land sales, voluntary contributions from public and private sources, and rental income as noted by the ACABQ, we are not in a position to approve the financing of this project at this time. We must see **specific, timely, and actionable proposals** before taking a financing decision.

In addition, we must reiterate our position that no money appropriated to the project through Member State assessments should be charged negative interest rates. Doing so will have an adverse effect on our ability to continue funding the project. We expect that both UNOG and the Swiss government will develop solutions to this issue before any Member States are assessed.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, we note with concern the ACABQ's observation that flexible workspace strategies have not yet been incorporated into the design of both the proposed new building, as well as the existing structures. The Secretariat should continue to define a more robust long-term vision and roadmap for how the organization will maximize space utilization while maintaining staff efficiency and productivity, taking into account the potential impact of Umoja, the Global Service Delivery Model, and other management initiatives, as mentioned in the ACABQ's report. Efforts currently underway in New York to implement cutting-edge flexible workspace programs could provide context and best practices to the Strategic Heritage Plan.

We look forward to working our colleagues and the Secretariat now and in the future to ensure the successful completion of this project.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.