

**PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Statement of Mr Marcelo Scappini Ricciardi, Chair, Committee  
on Conferences  
at the Seventieth session of the General Assembly  
on 21 October 2015 at 10:00am in Conference Room 3**

**Agenda item: Pattern of conferences**

Mr. Chair, distinguished colleagues,

It is my privilege to address the Fifth Committee to introduce the report of the Committee on Conferences, which covers its work in 2015 and was adopted at its substantive session held from 8 to 14 September 2015. The report, as contained in document A/70/32, together with a draft resolution in annex I and the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2016 and 2017 in Annex II, are being transmitted through the Fifth Committee and recommended for adoption by the General Assembly.

Mr. Chair,

The Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/70/122) together with the statistical data presented as supplementary information.

The Committee's report reflects comprehensively the discussions on all items in its annotated agenda (A/AC.172/2015/1/Rev.1). As you know, the Committee's substantive session affords Member States an opportunity to engage actively with the management of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management on all matters relating to conference and documentation services and to seek additional information and clarification as necessary in order to provide direction, guidance and support to the Secretariat in carrying out the mandates entrusted to it by the General Assembly. Allow me to highlight some of these issues.

In **Chapter I**, on organizational matters, you will note that the Committee now has full membership.

**Chapter II** deals with matters related to the calendar of

conferences and meetings. The Committee reviewed the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2016 and 2017 and recommended it for adoption by the General Assembly.

In **Chapter III A**, on meetings management, the Committee reviewed the statistical data presented on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities at the four duty stations and at the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa. I presented an oral report on the mandate of the Chair of the Committee on Conferences to hold consultations with those intergovernmental bodies that had utilized less than the benchmark of 80 per cent of their allocated resources for the past three consecutive years from 2012 to 2014. My predecessor as Chair of the Committee, Ms Imelda Smolčić of Uruguay, held consultations in May and June this year with the presiding officers of four New York-based bodies, and sent a letter to the President of the UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), based in Vienna, outlining possible measures to improve their respective utilization factors. Ms Smolčić met with the Chairs of the Special

Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and its Working Group, the Special Committee on the UN Charter, and the Committee on Information, and with the President of the UNICEF Executive Board.

I am very pleased to report that the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and its Working Group made considerable efforts ahead of its 2014 and 2015 sessions and, as a result, has made significant improvement by bringing its utilization factor up from 45 per cent in 2012 and 51 per cent in 2013 to 79 per cent in 2014 and to 83 per cent in 2015. I am also very pleased to report that the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations has improved its utilization factor from 41 per cent in 2012, 52 per cent in 2013, and 48 per cent in 2014, to a remarkable 91 per cent this year.

During their meeting, the Chair of the Committee on Information agreed that the Committee would make greater efforts to adjust the programme of work according to its need for formal sessions, doing more to anticipate and programme around those periods when interpretation would not be required.

The President of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund has agreed to raise with the Board's bureau the matter of a long standing pattern of cancelling the last meeting of each session on short notice in order to gain the bureau's support and awareness of the need for more efficient utilization.

Ms Imelda Smolčić, the previous Chair of the Committee on Conferences, wrote to the Chair of UNCITRAL in Vienna prior to the Commission's 2015 session in July suggesting several specific measures to consider in order to improve its utilization. I am pleased to report that subsequently, the Commission achieved a utilization factor of 92 per cent - an impressive improvement over its utilization factor of 76 per cent in 2012, 77 per cent in 2013, and 62 per cent in 2014.

In response to paragraph 16 of GA resolution 66/233, the Secretariat of the Committee on Conferences, again this year, provided utilization reports to the secretariats of each calendar body, before and immediately after each scheduled session, including

those bodies that consistently underutilized conference resources for the past 10 years, and made specific suggestions to the Secretariat of each body on how to improve its utilization. Client feedback is actively sought to help identify specific ways to improve the utilization factor. This is reflected in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences.

Concern was also expressed by the Committee on Conferences regarding the pace of improvements to the conference centre of the Economic Commission for Africa, and the Committee requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the improvement of the facilities, in particular the Africa Hall, is completed in a timely manner.

Mr Chair,

**Chapter III B** deals with the impact of the capital master plan on meetings held at Headquarters during its implementation. The Committee on Conferences noted that, with respect to conference services, the capital master plan had been successfully completed. The Committee re-emphasised the need for continued improvement

of the videoconferencing infrastructure at all four duty stations and at the regional commissions. The Committee also requested the Secretary-General to continue to address issues related to accessibility of conference facilities as a matter of priority.

**Chapter IV** contains the Committee's discussions on issues relating to integrated global management. In section III, paragraph 37, of its draft resolution, the Committee requested that the Secretary-General complete internal reviews concerning accountability mechanisms and the clear delineation of responsibilities between the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Directors-General of the United Nations Offices in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi for conference management policies, operations and resource utilization. In section III, paragraph 39, of its draft resolution, the Committee also requested the Secretary-General to continue to seek ways to promote workload sharing among the four main duty stations.

Mr. Chair,

**Chapter V** deals with documentation and publication-related matters. The Committee discussed digitization of older United Nations documents. The Department of Public Information provided the Committee with information regarding criteria for selection of documents, technology used and expertise required for the task. In section IV, paragraph 86, of its draft resolution, the Committee requested the Secretary-General to present a proposal for the digitization of older important United Nations documents, outlining, *inter alia*, the definition of important older United Nations documents, as well as the scope and estimated quantity, cost and time frame, to the General Assembly no later than the main part of its seventy-first session. The Committee also requested the Secretary-General to seek additional voluntary contributions for the digitization.

Mr. Chair, distinguished colleagues,

**Chapter VI** deals with translation and interpretation-related matters. The Committee reiterated its request to the Secretary-General



to make further concerted efforts to promote outreach programmes, such as traineeships and internships, and to introduce innovative methods to increase awareness of the programmes, including through partnerships with Member States, relevant international organizations and language institutions in all regions, in particular to close the wide gap in Africa and Latin America.

The Committee further requested the Secretary-General to continue to make every effort to enhance access to competitive examinations for applicants in all regions by bringing, to the extent possible, examination sites closer to their locations in order to allow the greatest number of potentially qualified candidates to participate in them.

Also, the Committee reiterated its request to the Secretary General to provide at all duty stations, adequate staff at the appropriate level, with a view to ensuring appropriate quality control for external translation, with due consideration of the principle of equal grade for equal work.

Before I conclude, Mr Chair, I would like to thank the Bureau and members of the Committee, as well as the observers, for participating actively and constructively during the Committee's session, which enabled the Committee to have meaningful and productive discussions in an open and friendly manner. I hope and believe that we can continue to work in the same spirit during the Fifth Committee's consideration of the item on pattern of conferences.

I also wish to express, on behalf of the Bureau and members of the Committee on Conferences as well as in my own name, our gratitude to Mr Tegegnework Gettu, Under- Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Ms Catherine Pollard, Assistant Secretary-General, the Secretariat of the Committee and all the staff of the Department, including the conference management staff at the other duty stations, for providing substantive and technical support to the Committee throughout the year, and especially during its substantive session.

To all my colleagues in the Fifth Committee, I wish to present

the report of the Committee on Conferences, together with the draft resolution and draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2016 and 2017, for your consideration and recommendation to the General Assembly.

I thank you, Mr Chair.

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