

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

General Assembly Seventieth session
Fifth Committee, 8th formal meeting
Agenda item 137. Pattern of conferences
Introduction and general discussion
Wednesday, 21 October 2015
Formal meeting - 10 a.m., CR 3

**Statement of Mr. Tegegnetwork Gettu
Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly
and Conference Management**

Distinguished Chair,
Distinguished Vice-Chairs,
Distinguished delegates,

1. Before you today are the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/70/32), the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/70/122) and its supplementary information, and the corresponding report by the ACABQ (A/70/432). The report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences, which I am introducing to you today, was discussed by the Committee on Conferences during its substantive session for 2015, from 8 to 14 September. Before focusing on the Secretary-General's report, I would like to share with you some observations regarding the Department's work in general that you may find useful in your deliberations.

2. Overall, we have made tremendous progress through internal improvements, advance planning, management changes, focused activities in critical areas, prioritization and efficiency gains. During the reporting period, our work with the General Assembly and its Committees was very successful. Against the backdrop of the increase in the numbers of meetings, the Department continued to provide high-quality conference services to Member States. This includes technical secretariat services and procedural support, as well as the entire spectrum of conference management and language services.

3. For the high-level segment of the 70th session of the General Assembly, DGACM co-organized and serviced the main events of the high-level week, including the Pope's visit (25 September), the United Nations summit for the adoption of the the post-2015 development agenda (25 to 27 September) and the general debate (28 September to 3 October). In addition, we serviced the high-level meeting of the Security Council that was also held that week.

4. From 21 September to 3 October, 780 multilateral meetings were held. Of those, 226 were held with interpretation. 202 interpretation teams were programmed and 187 were used. 551 meetings were held without interpretation.

5. DGACM serviced 1,687 bilateral meetings from 25 September to 3 October, compared with 1,396 in 2014 and 1,235 in 2013, reflecting an increase of 21 per cent and 37 per cent,

respectively, during the high-level periods of the General Assembly for the past three years. To accommodate all the bilateral meetings, 40 temporary booths were provided, while for the regular meetings 24 rooms were utilized.

6. The Interpretation Service ensured that all high-level meetings that requested interpretation (mandated as well as ministerial meetings by regional groups and Member States) were successfully covered. The meetings were serviced by 176 interpreters (permanent staff, staff loaned from other duty stations and freelancers) providing interpretation in all official languages. We anticipated a surge in demand for interpretation capacity and planned with potential excess capacity. The utilization rate was 93 per cent. Interpretation coverage was provided from 8 or 9 a.m. to midnight. All the interpreters worked during the weekends.

7. International sign language interpretation was provided for the summit proceedings at the request of the President of the General Assembly, on short notice.

8. Nearly all morning meetings of the general debate continued well beyond 1 p.m. and several beyond 3 p.m., meaning that afternoon meetings themselves were delayed. DGACM staff serviced meetings, translated documents and provided interpretation from 9 a.m. to beyond 10 p.m. so as to accommodate speakers, in particular Heads of State and Government, who wished to leave for their capitals.

9. Over the past three sessions of the General Assembly, we have seen a marked rise in the number of meetings and events programmed during the high-level period. For the 67th session we programmed 219 meetings, for the 68th session 326 and for the 69th session 402, an increase of 84 per cent in the services provided. For this session, we saw a further increase in the demand for meetings and events.

10. In the four months leading up to and including the general debate, from 1 June to 30 September, the Documentation Division translated a total of 44.3 million words, which is 17 per cent more than the same period last year. The documents helped to frame many of the issues discussed during the general debate.

11. In preparation for the current session, 328 reports were slotted for processing in New York for consideration by the plenary of the General Assembly and its Main Committees. As at 12 October, DGACM had received 304 documents for processing, for a total of 3,408,650 words. Of those, 205 were reports of the Secretary-General and were 99 non-Secretariat reports.

12. Overall, 257 of the 304 manuscripts received were submitted by the authors in accordance with the agreed submission deadlines. This represents an 85 per cent submission compliance rate. Of those 304 manuscripts, 280 were translated and issued by DGACM in all official languages before the respective consideration dates. 223 of them (80 per cent) were issued at least six weeks before their consideration date.

13. Of the 205 reports of the Secretary-General, 40 were over the word limit, resulting in an excess of 475,083 words.

14. Of the 99 non-secretariat reports, 40 were over the word limit, resulting in an excess of 773,284 words. There is clearly a need for more concise drafting and fewer exceptions to the word limits.

15. Many author departments sought exceptions to the word limits. More than one million words could have been reduced had the established word limits been strictly followed by the author departments. We in DGACM periodically remind all author entities to strictly adhere to the slotting schedule, avoid excessive length and refrain from surprise requests. We are working hard, in cooperation with others, to enforce stricter compliance with the relevant rules, starting from the current slotting exercise for 2016. With the support of the Management Committee, DGACM intends to reduce waivers – that is, exceptions to mandated timelines and word limits.

16. In addition to meetings, documentation and other related services, the Department provides secretariat support to a wide range of intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and most of their subsidiary bodies, as well as their respective Chairs and Presidents. We provide technical, procedural and substantive support to the meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, which meets during the resumed part of every session.

17. To improve the timeliness of documentation for the Fifth Committee, we are following a multi-stakeholder approach, as instructed by the General Assembly. This means that all stages of a document's life cycle – from its preparation by the author department until its issuance by DGACM in all official languages – are coordinated by DGACM with the main author entities and the secretariats of the Fifth Committee and ACABQ. This approach already brings good results. Earlier submission of manuscripts to DGACM will help to gain precious processing time and result in more timely availability of reports to facilitate deliberation.

18. However, we foresee extremely late issuance of Fifth Committee documents in December. We realize that some of the issues are systemic in nature. The Human Rights Council, for example, remains in session until early October. Its resolutions are analysed by the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, which will then issue statements of programme budget implications. Consequently, the report will be large and late. DGACM has been trying to negotiate with the Department of Management to advance the submission of some documents, given that even a few days would help tremendously. The delegates will be predictably and legitimately unhappy if they receive the documents in all official languages only on the day of their consideration.

19. Our cooperation with ACABQ is excellent, and we are very grateful for it. It will be very important to sustain this level of coordination in the context of the major challenge of processing ACABQ reports emanating from its main session. Given that the reports are not predictable, it is nearly impossible for DGACM to plan capacity for them. Instead, the reports have to be treated as extremely urgent jobs whenever they arrive. Although DGACM turned them around in an average of 2.5 days during the main part of the sixty-ninth session, the fire-fighting mode of working is unsustainable and will not be considered the norm.

20. Now allow me to briefly introduce the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences. I should like to mention the good cooperation and excellent working relationships that we had with the Committee on Conferences and its Chair. In addition to this report, there is supplementary information containing many useful details. My colleagues and I are ready to answer any questions that you might have.

21. On **meetings management**, I am pleased to report to you on the progress achieved in the **global utilization** of conference-servicing resources in 2014. Our comparative analysis indicates that the utilization factor of the conference-servicing resources provided to hold parliamentary meetings at the four duty stations, as contained in the report, rose from 82 per cent in 2013 to 86 per cent in 2014. During the past year, we in DGACM have actively sought the cooperation and depended on the disciplined approach of presiding officers of meeting bodies in our efforts to increase the utilization factor. The positive response by the client bodies has helped to achieve these encouraging results. In 2014, fewer meetings were cancelled and less time was lost owing to late starts and early conclusions of meetings. Unused interpretation resources from cancelled meetings were also reassigned at a higher rate.

22. The reassignment of interpretation teams from cancelled meetings to other meetings in New York has supported, in part, the provision of interpretation services to meetings of bodies entitled to meet “as required”. In New York in 2014, 1,075 “as required” meetings received interpretation services, which is 97 per cent of the requests received that year. In 2013, 899 meetings (98 per cent) of the 921 requests received were provided with interpretation services. In comparison, only 687 requests were received in 2012, of which 664 meetings (97 per cent) were provided with interpretation services. This was despite the large increase each year in the number of requests received, and services were being provided without any increase in resources. The number of “as required” meetings provided with interpretation in 2014 rose by 20 per cent, mainly owing to an increase in Security Council meetings – from 540 in 2013 to 651 in 2014. The Fifth Committee added 37 meetings with interpretation to its programme during the main part of the sixty-ninth session, compared with only five in 2013. ACABQ added 24 meetings with interpretation in 2014, compared with 18 in 2013.

23. Performance in terms of **timely issuance of documents continued to improve**. In 2014, more than 98 per cent of the documents submitted on time and within the word limits were processed in a timely manner by DGACM in New York. As a result, 75 per cent of all pre-session documents issued in New York met the mandated timely issuance benchmarks, up from 71 per cent in 2013.

24. 2015 is a very challenging year for DGACM. During the period from 1 January to 12 October, DGACM received 21.6 million words for processing, representing a total workload of 103.7 million words in all languages, an increase of 23 per cent over the same period of 2013 (a comparable budget year). In addition, every six years, the Fifth Committee takes up three key items together, namely the scale of assessments, the regular budget and the financing of peacekeeping operations. 2015 is one such year.

25. We are now also actively addressing challenges with **simultaneous issuance of documentation in the mandated languages in Geneva** – the second largest conference

operation funded through section 2 of the budget. We are confident that we will overcome these challenges.

26. The Department has experienced an **increase in the expected and unexpected documentation workload**, which it has been absorbing through the fine-tuning of managerial practices and efficient use of the financial resources at its disposal. In 2014, more than 230 million words were translated at the four duty stations. In terms of documents, this equated to more than 27,000 documents received for processing, an increase of 3 per cent from 2013 and of 4 per cent from 2012. This trend has its limits, however, and, after the proposed reductions in the budget for 2016-2017, further increases may become difficult to absorb. In addition, our translation capacity continues to be limited by shortages of qualified professionals in certain language combinations, which I will elaborate on shortly. It is against this backdrop that the Department is making an extra effort to ensure the timely delivery of high-quality services.

27. To ensure that the areas of document processing and meetings management are supported in the best way possible within our resources, the Department has invested in a series of initiatives to enhance succession planning, implement global IT projects, streamline business models and harmonize workflow processes. All these strategic areas of work represent the substance of the **integrated global management** of the conference services located in New York and the three main duty stations. Let me briefly update you on the work being done in these focus areas:

- A number of initiatives have been launched to increase the yield from the language competitive examinations. These include outreach to potential candidates through the network of universities and training institutions that have signed memorandums of understanding with DGACM; extensive use of social media to publicize the examinations and to provide useful information, including tips on how to prepare; identification of those candidates who narrowly missed the pass mark and who can be recruited for temporary assistance and as trainees; and the piloting in June-July 2015 of computer-based examinations for English translators and English editors.
- To **expand the pool of language professionals** available for recruitment as temporary assistance (TAM) or as external contractors, the Department is reaching out to professional bodies such as the International Association of Conference Translators (AITC) and the Canadian Association of Legal Translators and to organizations such as the International Organization of la Francophonie to identify credentialled language practitioners.
- We continue to assist in the training of university students, a number of whom later passed the language competitive examination or internal freelance tests, thereby adding to the overall capacity of the language services. Given the acute shortage of French translators, in particular, it is proposed that a senior French reviser be sent on a six-week training course to the University of Buea, in Cameroon, to conduct training workshops and later to identify through testing potential candidates for traineeships at Headquarters.

- This initiative, as well as a programme for the training of Spanish translators prepared in collaboration with Cuba, is in line with paragraph 125 of General Assembly resolution 69/250, in which the Assembly emphasized the need to close the wide gap in Africa and Latin America in order to tap into the potential of those regions as sources of qualified language professionals for DGACM.
- In addition, we are currently considering a **proposal to outpost** to the United Nations Office at Vienna a number of staff of the French Translation Service at Headquarters, which has traditionally had a high vacancy rate due to high turnover and to the preference of French-language translators to be stationed in Europe rather than New York. The advantages of outposting would include lower staff costs due to lower post-adjustment rates, overnight processing taking advantage of the time difference between New York and Vienna, increased opportunities for geographical mobility for staff of the Service, and an opportunity to gain management experience for the reviser who will supervise the outposted staff.
- To ensure the gradual rejuvenation of the pools of the conference interpreters, an in-house training programme for Arabic interpreters was conducted in the summer, and a similar programme for French interpreters is being developed. Other sections of the Interpretation Service reach their succession planning goals through training of interns and outreach to the existing external interpretation schools and interpreters' associations.
- **Global IT projects:** Conference management software (gMeets, gDoc, gText and gData) is an integral part of DGACM conference management operation to plan meetings, schedule interpreter assignments, process and plan electronic document production, terminology and reference work, computer-assisted translation and statistical machine translation and management reporting.
- In the biennium 2016-2017, these systems will continue to be maintained and enhanced. Fit-gap analysis between these systems and enterprise solutions will be conducted to ensure alignment with the ICT strategy approved by the General Assembly and geared towards the defragmentation and centralization of IT resources Secretariat-wide. DGACM is working closely with OICT in the implementation of the ICT strategy, including in the harmonization of applications and the standardization of technology used in gMeets, gDoc, gText and gData, to ensure the compatibility of technologies and architecture of applications, bearing in mind usability, accessibility and multilingualism.

28. All the above achievements became possible thanks to your support for **DGACM internal initiatives** that are aimed at efficiency gains and to facilitate our work as we face the further decrease in resources proposed for the biennium 2016-2017.

29. In March 2015, a steering group, comprising senior managers of the four duty stations, was established with the goal of **optimizing the Department's document processing chain** and conference-servicing arrangements by reviewing structures, work processes and information technology systems across all duty stations. The ultimate goal is an optimized workflow in the processing of parliamentary documentation. The Steering Group is also reviewing the contractual

translation operations following the Department's decision to establish a common roster of external contractors to which managers at all four duty stations now have access. A common IT tool, the Contractor Management Application (CMA), will be used to manage all aspects of the workflow involving external contractors. In addition, a common methodology for performing quality control of contractual output across duty stations is being developed, as are common criteria for the inclusion and removal of contractors from the roster.

Distinguished delegates,

30. The **quality of our output** remains a top priority and we will not compromise on this. Quality is assured, first and foremost, by rigorous standards for the selection of both in-house and freelance staff. Less experienced language professionals are coached and mentored by more experienced staff and their work is always subject to revision. The Department regularly solicits feedback from Member States on the quality of its output through the annual language-specific informational meetings and the annual e-survey of users of its language services. Feedback received from the survey indicates that Member States regard the overall quality of conference services provided by the Department as "good" or "very good", albeit with a low response rate.

31. Even with our proactive measures in the areas of **outreach and training**, however, delays in a single language may still delay the simultaneous issuance of mandated documentation in all the official languages. The shortage of sufficient numbers of French translators in New York remains a challenge. As mentioned above, the outposting of staff to Vienna is being considered among other measures to ameliorate this situation.

32. From the Committee on Conferences report before you, you will notice that Member States are very interested in making sure that my appointment as the new Secretariat-wide **Coordinator of Multilingualism** will help to better organize our collective work in this area. I take this responsibility very seriously and intend to initiate consultations with multiple stakeholders. The Committee is of the view that multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, entails the active involvement and commitment of all stakeholders. We will do our best, inasmuch as the human resources available will allow.

33. My colleagues and I are looking forward to our interaction and dialogue during this morning's session. I thank you for your attention and wish you successful and productive deliberations.