



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR. SAED KATKHUDA, SENIOR ADVISOR, MISSION OF THE STATE OF PALESTINE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ON AGENDA ITEM 135: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 2020, PROGRESS IN THE RENOVATION OF THE AFRICA HALL AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW OFFICE FACILITIES AT THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION OF AFRICA, AT THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE MAIN PART OF THE SEVENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 6 December 2019

Mr. Chair,

1. I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 135: Proposed Programme Budget for the Biennium 2020, Progress in the Renovation of the Africa Hall and the Construction of the New Office Facilities at the Economic Commission of Africa as presented in the SG's and ACABQ Reports A/74/328 and A/74/7/Add.19 respectively.

2. The Group would like to thank Mr. Pedro Guazo, Director, Finance Division, Office of Programme Planning, Finance and Budget, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, and Ms. Julia Maciel, Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, for introducing their respective reports on the Renovation Project of the historic Africa Hall.

3. At the outset, the Group would like to express its gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia for its continued support to the Economic Commission for Africa and other UN Offices residing in Addis Ababa. We trust that the Secretary-General will continue to strengthen his engagements with the host country, the Stakeholders Committee and the Advisory Board to facilitate the successful completion of the Africa Hall renovation.

Mr. Chair,

4. The Group notes with satisfaction the culmination of the construction of the New Office Facilities (Zambezi Building) project and the remaining components of the Ancillary Works, including the car ramp, and the electrical and sanitary works, which resulted in the issuance of the completion certificate in October 2018. We believe that ongoing engagements between the ECA Renovation Team and the specialized contractors, as well as consultants, is helpful in their risk management efforts.

5. The Group recognizes the progress in the implementation of the renovation of the Africa Hall in the present report. This historic heritage project needs the utmost care and dedication of the team at the site and coordination at the Headquarters level, including stronger partnership with all stakeholders. The renovation work requires multidisciplinary expertise. In this regard, we note ECA's

efforts to engage with external experts such as exhibition curators, and those who work on artwork restoration and information technology. However, the hiring process for communication services and resource mobilization experts lacks clarity and the Group will seek explanation during the informal session. The Group further encourages the Secretary General to utilize local knowledge, material, technology and capacity in both the construction and operation of the renovation project.

6. The Group stresses the critical importance of effective governance, oversight, transparency and accountability to ensure that the project is implemented within the approved budget and timetable. We note the fourth annual audit conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) earlier this year, and wish to highlight the recommendations of the OIOS as well as Board of Auditors (BOA) on the need to expedite the activities of the project and avoid any delays in the implementation. We hope to receive a better understanding, during the informal consultations, of the plan of the Secretary General on steps being taken to accommodate the above mentioned recommendations.

7. Avoiding the proliferation of owner-directed changes, and improving the procurement process for the project remains a priority of the Group. In this regard, further confirmation on the planned activities will be sought during the informal. Given the slight decrease in the level of confidence and the delay in delivering the project, we request the Secretary General to strengthen efforts for the timely implementation of the main works package. The Group wishes to hear from the project management team about their plan on how to avoid further delays and the resultant cost overruns.

Mr. Chair,

8. The Group underscores the historical significance of the Africa Hall and the importance to conserve this landmark heritage site. Accordingly, it is important that the renovation of the building takes place in a manner that respects the original design and appearance of spaces while ensuring compliance with international best practices.

9. We are pleased to learn that the planning and design development for the permanent exhibition area is at an advanced stage and is expected to be completed by the end of 2019. We hope that the involvement of the African World Heritage Fund, an official partner of UNESCO, will lead to the interactive exhibition wall being formally recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage.

Mr. Chair,

10. The Group would like to extend its appreciation to the Host Country and the ECA for signing a project-specific agreement setting out the operational arrangements for smooth and rapid customs processing and the timely importation of construction materials. We also have full confidence that the United Nations and the Addis Ababa City Administration will soon sign a lease agreement that would enable the ECA to build a vehicle parking lot at no additional cost to Member States for the parcel of land.

11. In conclusion, the Group would like to assure you of our readiness to engage constructively in the consideration of this agenda item with a view to reaching a conclusion in a timely manner.

I thank you.



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR. SAED KATKHUDA, SENIOR ADVISOR, MISSION OF THE STATE OF PALESTINE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 135: FLEXIBLE WORKPLACE AT THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, AT THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE MAIN PART OF THE 74th SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
6 December 2019**

Mr. Chair,

1. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 135, Programme Budget for 2020, in particular the progress report on the implementation of a flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters.

2. At the outset, the Group of 77 and China would like to express its appreciation to Mr. Patrick Carey, Director, Division of Administration (New York), Department of Operational Support, and to Ms. Julia Maciel, Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, for introducing their respective reports.

Mr. Chair,

3. The Group of 77 and China recognizes the impact of transformational initiatives of the Organization that contribute to the United Nations being more effective, adaptable and modern. Nevertheless, the G77 and China is convinced that such initiatives should be implemented in a manner that acknowledges the financial constraints the Organization faces, as well as its evolving work practices and the needs of staff.

4. The Group appreciates the update provided on the implementation of the flexible workplace project at the United Nations Headquarters, and the steps that have been taken since the last progress report. The Group notes that 17 out of the projected 26 floors of the Secretariat have been reconfigured as of August 2019, with an overall additional capacity of 994 staff and an estimated 374 remaining. We support the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and the Advisory Committee on the need for the Administration to closely monitor and conclude the project in 2020, within the estimated cost.

5. As this additional capacity increases, the Group looks forward to receiving more detailed information on the status of the termination of leases in commercial buildings, on the relocation of staff, the potential reduction in rental costs arising from the relocation and the related impact on the proposed resource level for the relevant section in the proposed programme budget for 2020.

6. The Group notes that the project is expected to finalize by the end of 2020 as previously envisioned in the Second Progress report, and with an overall projected cost that remains at \$54,981,400, of which over \$34 million were incurred during the period 2015–2018 and \$13,049,200 are estimated for the completion of the project schedule in 2019. The Group therefore acknowledges that the Secretary-General is requesting the remaining \$7,931,700 of the overall cost as an appropriation for the conclusion of the project in 2020, taking into account that there will be no rental savings in the course of that year.

7. However, the Group feels the need to reiterate that a well-substantiated, reliable, and predictable business case is essential for the Committee's consideration of costly major transformation initiatives, especially when expenses are planned to supersede the overall projected cost of the project, and self-financing options are not to be implemented. We are also concerned about the decline in the scores in productivity compared to the previous years, as reflected in the latest post-occupancy staff survey in May on flexible workplace strategies.

8. In this regard, while the Group remains supportive of an independent evaluation of the project, we will consider the utility of the evaluation being conducted by an external consultancy given that the project is in its final stage. We will also consider the merits of the use of in-house expertise, while being cognizant of the heavy programme of work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Board of Auditors

Mr. Chair,

9. The Group reiterates that flexible workplace should never simply be a matter of space management, but a holistic arrangement of physical space, information and communication technology, human resources and other support programmes. The successful implementation of flexible workplace requires not only reconfiguration of workspace, but enhanced information technology support and revised human resources policies.

10. The Group looks forward to discussing the lessons learned to date on the implementation of flexible workplace as well as the relation it has with flexible working arrangements, and in this regard recognizes the Secretary General's efforts in updating the Secretariat with the recent Bulletin and Information Circular on flexible working arrangements.

11. In closing, Mr. Chair, the G77 and China assures you of its commitment to engage constructively on this agenda item while considering it against the backdrop of all construction projects amid the current financial constraints.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.