



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR BOUBACAR DIALLO, G-77 COORDINATOR OF THE
PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUINEA TO THE UNITED
NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 141: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR 2021,
STANDARDS OF ACCOMMODATION FOR AIR TRAVEL, AT THE FIFTH
COMMITTEE DURING THE FIRST RESUMED PART OF THE SEVENTY-FIFTH
SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(New York, 11 March 2021)**

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 141: Programme budget for 2021- Standards of accommodation for air travel.

2. The Group would like to thank Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary General for Human Resources, for introducing the report of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel and Mr. Abdallah Bachar Bong, Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for introducing its related report.

Mr. Chairman,

3. The Group has carefully examined the report of the Secretary General as well as the related report of the advisory committee, and would like to highlight a few points in this regard. The Group notes that global travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have had a tremendous impact on Air Travel since the first quarter of 2020, and are most likely to continue to have an impact on United Nations travel in the near future including on the programme budget for 2021.

4. However we are assured that as an Organisation with a mandate to uphold, the Secretary General will ensure business continuity in the best way possible. The Group of 77 and China notes that the pandemic has made it difficult to ascertain the most recent statistical trends and allow comparisons to pre-pandemic data, and therefore looks forward to further updates and analyses on the standards of accommodation for air travel in the near future as the world prepares towards normalcy.

5. The Group welcomes the continued decreasing trend of exceptions of standard of accommodation of air travel authorized by the Secretary General. While noting that the eminent and prominent persons category comprises the largest share of exceptions in recent times, the Group is also cognisant of the importance and stature of the work and office of persons in this category. We therefore see merit in the

argument to make the administrative process for the official travel of eminent and prominent persons more effective, and look forward to engaging closely in this regard.

6. With regards to adherence to the Advance purchase policy, the Group reiterates its disappointment with its low compliance rate. During the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw significantly lower travel volumes, the compliance rate nonetheless is said to have increased slightly, to 40 per cent from 38 per cent in the previous period. The Group recalls that the General Assembly, on a number of occasions, has expressed concern regarding the low rate of compliance with the advance purchase policy. The Group reiterates that stronger efforts are required, in particular in areas where travel can be better planned, such as entitlement travel and travel for training. Most official travel is not carried out for the purpose of emergency situations or unforeseen requirements, therefore the rate of compliance across all travel categories can be improved, taking into account the patterns.

Mr. Chairman,

7. The Group attaches great importance to ensuring that the procurement process for all air travel management services contracts is conducted in full compliance with general procurement principles as set out in financial regulation 5.12, namely, **(a)** best value for money; **(b)** fairness, integrity and transparency; **(c)** effective international competition; and **(d)** the interest of the United Nations, and to ensure that the procurement process includes the option of awarding a contract to multiple vendors to allow for greater competition among selected vendors.

8. With regard the Proposal to establish a single threshold for the use of business class by staff below the level of Assistant Secretary-General, the Group notes that the present proposal of the Secretary-General has reduced the previously proposed single threshold of 10 hours by 30 minutes, to 9.5 hours. The Group continues to be of the view that more information on the effectiveness, cost efficiencies, impact on the productivity and the physical and mental health of staff of such a proposal is required. The Group therefore looks forward to discussing this further during informal discussions on this subject matter.

9. In closing, Mr. Chairman, the Group of 77 and China reiterates that any policy changes or new formulations in the area of standards of accommodation for air travel remain the exclusive prerogative of the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly. To this end, we reiterate our readiness to engage constructively in the upcoming discussions, with the aim of concluding this agenda item in a timely fashion.

I thank you.