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Fifth Committee
Agenda item 144: Pattern of conferences
9 November 2020
Virtual Meeting

**Statement by Mr. Moses Abelian
Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management**

Distinguished Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

1. During its 2020 substantive session the Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences contained in document A/75/89.
2. The report has been prepared pursuant to resolution 74/252 and responds to the mandates addressed to the Secretary-General. It also provides information on procedures and activities relating to the pattern of conferences in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2019.
3. In 2019, in spite of an increase in the number of meetings and despite the austerity measures implemented in response to the liquidity crisis facing the Organization, the Secretariat succeeded in delivering on all its core mandates in conference services. Over 245 million words were translated, including verbatim records, and more than 36,000 meetings were provided with meeting services. The number of meetings not related to the intergovernmental processes managed through the one-stop shop in gMeets has increased rapidly since its roll-out in March 2018, more than tripling to 8,384 in 2019.
4. All key performance indicators remained as high as in 2018 and in some cases even improved. Overall utilization of interpretation resources increased from 82 to 84 per cent; in documentation services, submission compliance rose from 90 to 93 per cent while processing compliance increased from 98 to 99 per cent. I am pleased to report that increased productivity in documentation was recorded at all duty stations, assisted by the increased use of eLUNa and modernization of the working methods.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

5. DGACM works as an integrated Department ensuring close collaboration with all its duty stations to ensure policy coherence. All duty stations continued to apply the integrated global management rule when assembling teams to service meetings away from headquarters. In 2019, notional savings of \$668,019 were achieved through integrated global management.

6. Tangible progress was made at all duty stations to improve accessibility services for meetings that are entitled to or have extra-budgetary provisions for such services, including by providing access to sign language interpretation, the provision of assistive devices, on-demand Braille printing and accessible seating. Internally, the architecture of eLUNa was restructured to provide full accessibility for visually impaired users.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

7. The challenges faced by the Secretariat during 2019 included the absorption of an increase in workload due to continuous budget constraints and austerity measures. The ongoing high proportion of non-calendar meetings has placed additional stress on the resources allocated to servicing mandated calendar meetings.

8. The Secretary-General's report, which was prepared in the spring of this year, took note of the impact of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic on conference management operations, but of course only in a very preliminary manner as it was not possible to capture the full impact at the time of its preparation. Its consequences had – and will likely continue to have - a significant impact on the programme of work. This includes the large number of meetings that have been postponed and will likely need to be rescheduled, as well as the establishment of capacity for virtual and hybrid meetings, which are no less laborious than in-person meetings and often more expensive.

9. Indirect ramifications of the pandemic are exemplified by difficulties experienced in the temporary recruitment of interpreters due to limited local freelance availability and international travel limitations for non-locals. The filling of language vacancies and the onboarding of successful candidates were already adversely affected by the recruitment restrictions imposed in October 2019, thus leaving the Department with unbalanced capacity among official languages. This is compounded by the negative impact of the higher vacancy rates on language services across the board and the contradiction of the mandatory vacancy rates and the simultaneous mandate to fill language posts expeditiously.

10. The combined effect of these crises and the additional resource constraints brought about by them will have a programmatic impact, such as lower compliance with the timeliness indicators for documentation.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

11. The Secretary-General's report remarks upon the fact that the response necessitated by the pandemic has brought to life new ways of working that may well continue to be in demand in the future. For example, one of the necessary elements of multilingualism, remote

interpretation and participation technologies, was not available at the time of the pandemic outbreak. Since then, remote simultaneous interpretation (RSI) platforms have been deployed at all duty stations. This mode of interpretation in the future can contribute to global workload sharing, resulting in better utilization of staff capacity at the duty stations and more cost-effective use of freelance interpretation. It also has the potential to enhance future sustainability and accessibility of conference servicing while providing an extra layer of business continuity.

12. We are indeed determined that our collective response to the pandemic will result in benefits that will endure long after the current crisis has passed. To this end, the conference management operations of the Secretariat will continue to focus on their core goals: ensuring the quality, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, multilingualism, sustainability and accessibility of the services provided in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi.

13. In pursuit of these objectives, our agreed vision as a global department remains unchanged, which is that full implementation of the mandates in the most economical way and at the required highest quality level can only be possible if we leverage cutting-edge technology and be innovative in adjusting our working methods.

14. My colleagues and I look forward to our interaction. Thank you for your attention.

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