



Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2012
518th meeting
Tuesday, 4 September 2012
10:00 a.m./Room 5 (NLB)

Statement of Acting Head of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management Mr. Jean-Jacques Graisse

Madam Chair,
Distinguished Members of the Committee on Conferences,
Distinguished Observer(s),

I am pleased to address you in my capacity as Acting Head of the Department before we begin another busy period, leading up to the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly, with a high-level plenary meeting during the General Debate and several high-level events and meetings of the Secretary-General already scheduled.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Members of the Committee on Conferences and to the Observer from Senegal, and to congratulate the distinguished representative of Moldova Ms. Carolina Popovici on her election to the position of Chair. DGACM will be looking forward to working with you, Madam Chair, as well as with the other members of the Bureau (Ms. Maria Angela Holzmann, Vice-Chair (Austria); Ms. Carmen Avila, Vice-Chair (Panama); and Mr. Felix Datuwei, Rapporteur (Nigeria).

The annual meeting of the Committee provides the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) with an opportunity to continue a direct dialogue with the Member States; to report on the achievements and challenges; and to seek guidance and support for its work for the next year and beyond.

You will have noted that the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127) is only 7,388 words long. This is once again far below the 8,500 word-limit for reports originating in the Secretariat, and the report was issued on 24 July, sufficiently in advance of today's opening meeting. The annexes of the report are available as Supplementary Information and can be accessed on the Committee's website. In order to facilitate the Committee's deliberations, DGACM programme managers will be available to answer your questions and to provide any further information which delegates consider necessary or helpful.



I would like to congratulate the Committee for again welcoming the PaperSmart concept introduced at the Committee's organizational session in 2011, and for conducting its substantive session in a PaperSmart fashion, thus setting an example for the progress of

PaperSmart meetings and allowing DGACM to fine-tune the concept, in consultation with the stakeholders, and to adjust it to the needs of actual users. As we announced at the briefing last week, the theme for this year's videoconference with the four duty stations is **"PaperSmart meetings; lessons learned from the application of PaperSmart meetings on a trial basis"**. The theme is related to a specific request of the General Assembly contained in its resolution 66/233 adopted on 24 December 2011, in which it noted the "emerging" concept of "paper-smart" meetings and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly a report on its implementation. In section IV, paragraphs 23 and 24, of the resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on nine inter-linked aspects of the PaperSmart concept, including lessons learned from implementing the PaperSmart concept on a trial basis.

In addition to the videoconference at which the Committee will be briefed, the Committee has before it a conference room paper (A/AC.172/CRP.1) on the same subject. Since the General Assembly requested the Secretariat to report on lessons learned, it would not have been practical to include such information in the *Pattern of conferences* report which was scheduled to be issued shortly after the DGACM team returned from Rio. At that historic event, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June of this year, the PaperSmart mode of meeting servicing was piloted for the first time on a large scale.

During the course of the videoconference, the Committee will have the opportunity to interact with senior conference managers from the four duty stations on various matters related to the topic of the videoconference. The Director of the Department's Meetings and Publishing Division at Headquarters chairs a Secretariat-wide coordination group comprised of representatives from the Departments of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Management (DM), Public Information and Communication (DPI), and the Office of Information and Communication Technology (OICT), in addition to DGACM. In that capacity, he will make a presentation to the Committee on PaperSmart lessons learned at Rio+ 20 similar to one made on 27 June at the Executive Session of the International Annual Meeting for Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications. He has since received several requests from other international organizations to assist them implementing the PaperSmart mode of operations after its success in Rio.

Let me emphasize that the Secretariat does not see the PaperSmart concept as a fight against paper but rather a better, cheaper, faster and more sustainable way - in other words - a smarter way to do business. Yes, it will also reduce the volume of printing and distribution operations at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Thanks to the addition of several new electronic distribution tools, a switch to digital printing and overall demand reduction, the production of parliamentary documents has already been reduced significantly during the past three years and this trend continues. For example, in the first half of 2009 DGACM printed 136 million page impressions, while the corresponding figure for 2010 was only 95 million, for 2011 only 47 million and for 2012 only 32 million. For the whole of 2012, about 60 million page impressions are expected to be printed, amounting to less than half of the Secretary-General's projections for the current biennium.



In other words, for the first half of each of the past three years, output relative to 2009 fell by 30 per cent in 2010, 65 per cent in 2011 and 76 per cent in 2012. The Department feels that it must move from a high-speed, high-volume, large-batch and resource-intensive printing operation to a high-speed, medium-volume, small-batch and low-cost operation. The overarching strategy, as outlined in Section 2 budget proposal for the current biennium, is to establish a content-centric publishing operation that leverages digital printing technology and multi-channel publishing tools.

Madam Chair,

The overall objective of achieving additional efficiencies and quality gains through leveraging existing and emerging technologies remains high on the Secretariat's agenda and DGACM is at the forefront of these concerted efforts. Working in cooperation and consultation with other parts of the Secretariat, DGACM is not only implementing the PaperSmart approach on a trial basis, but also exploring other innovative solutions in the area of conference management.

For example, in the area of translation, in accordance with section V, paragraphs 7 and 8, of the above-mentioned resolution 66/233, we have initiated a global project known as *gText*. The strategic business purpose of *gText* is to streamline the documentation workflow by maximizing the automation of key processes. Its goals are to increase the efficiency and quality of translation and related processes, and to facilitate remote working arrangements. The project will develop and implement a system that will provide internal and contractual translators at all four DGACM duty stations with a complete and uniform suite of Internet-based language tools, as well as seamless access to background information necessary for quality translation.

By radically improving the working methods in the multilingual documentation processing chain, the *gText* project will allow us to do more and better with the same, or perhaps even with less by contributing to the reduction of capacity requirements in some support processes.

In designing *gText*, DGACM carefully considered alternative options, such as utilizing commercially available computer-assisted translation and machine translation applications. Instead, we firmly opted for the development of a customized, in-house system which would both guarantee the purity of data - a necessary condition for upholding the highest quality of translated United Nations documents as demanded by Member States - and at the same time provide the most cost-effective set of capabilities to meet our very specific United Nations needs.

On the meetings side, the Secretariat is actively exploring a new approach piloted by the International Telecommunications Union - multilingual meetings with remote participation. This initiative responds to section III, paragraphs 2 and 5, of the above-mentioned Assembly resolution 66/233. Among other things, the Assembly noted with appreciation the efforts of the Secretary-General, using in-house capacity, to improve the utilization of conference services, and requested him to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session on other efforts to that end. This new initiative emerged after the "Pattern of conferences" report had been finalized, and the Department is prepared now to provide more detailed information about this prototype technological solution should the delegations require it at this preliminary stage. In addition to making United Nations meetings more accessible and greener, wherever feasible this approach will allow the Organization to work around certain physical and cost limitations, such



as meeting facilities, travel, accommodation, administrative support etc. It is important to note that at ITU, the new meeting format was endorsed by interpreters.

Another new development I would like to mention is a comparative review of summary records and press releases produced by DGACM and DPI. In order to ascertain that there are no duplications and redundancies between the preparation of summary records by DGACM and press-releases by DPI - which in many cases report on the same meetings - the two Departments have reviewed existing practices and identified possible options for the further optimization of reporting workflows. Should the Committee wish to consider these preliminary options and provide its guidance as to the desirability of changing current practices, we can provide further details.

Related to both papersmart and written meeting records is the implementation of the pilot project undertaken at Vienna to use digital recordings of meetings in the six official languages of the Organization. Initial evaluation is that the project is successful both as a digital alternative to written meeting records and as a cost-saving measure. Data show an increasing use of the system by the secretariat and delegates, and feedback is collected on a continuous basis.

Madam Chair,

The Department recognizes that the satisfaction of Member States is a key performance indicator of conference management and it continually seeks feedback through the global e-survey and informational meetings on language-related issues at all four duty stations. However, despite the Department's varied efforts, the response rate for the survey is still disappointingly low. The Department therefore continues to appeal to Member States who have encouraged us to conduct the surveys and hold informational meetings to participate in these initiatives. Language chiefs are keen to discuss language issues with Member States on a permanent basis, however participation in the two annual mandated informational meetings has also been low. Therefore, the General Assembly may wish to scale back to one meeting the mandate now requiring the Department to hold two annual informational meetings.

Madam Chair,

The Committee will recall that for the past several years the Department has faced challenges in the recruitment of competent language staff, in particular translators and interpreters in certain languages. Vigorous measures were taken to avoid a disruptive shortage of applicants in language career fields and those measures are starting to bear some fruit. Overall, our analysis shows that the Department may already be over the hump as far as replacement of the retirees is concerned. I must emphasize, however, that if member States wish the Department to continue its outreach and training efforts and to expand and mainstream its traineeship programme, then dedicated resources need to be made available. Without them, the Department will struggle to balance the imperative to secure future services with the more immediate requirement to deliver timely conference services. We cannot sustain our vigorous and successful efforts in an emergency mode without a dedicated outreach budget.



Madam Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

In response to paragraph 16 of section II of General Assembly resolution 66/233, the Secretariat has made two recommendations related to meetings management. In paragraphs 11 and 12, six intergovernmental bodies whose average Utilization Factor is below the benchmark of 80 per cent for the past ten years have been identified with a view to urging them to making adjustments to their programmes of work at the planning stage in order to improve their utilization of conference services. In paragraphs 14 and 15, the Committee's attention is drawn to the provisional biennial calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields with a view to considering the necessity of preparing this calendar for review by the Economic and Social Council.

The requirement of enhanced cost-effectiveness has created new challenges for DGACM to conduct its business with a much-reduced budget, while continuing to deliver high-quality and timely services to Member States. **In order to carry out the mandates of the General Assembly, the Department will be grateful for the Committee's support of its initiatives, as outlined above and contained in the recommendations of the report of the Secretary-General.**

I thank you for your attention and wish the Committee a successful and productive session.
