

**STATEMENT MADE ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP BY MR. BROUZ
RALPH COFFI, COUNSELLOR AT THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE
REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM
137: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES, IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE
MAIN PART OF THE 66TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(New York, 12th October, 2011)**

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group on Agenda item 137: Pattern of Conferences. The Group wishes to thank the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management Mr. Shaaban Mohammed Shaaban for introducing the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/66/118.

2. The African Group also thanks Mr. Collen V. Kelapile, Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative Questions (ACABQ) and Ms. Woinshet Tadesse Woldegiorgis, Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences for introducing the reports of their respective Committees.

3. From the outset, the African Group fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Argentina on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 137: Pattern of Conferences.

Mr. Chairman,

4. The African Group commends the quality of the work of the Committee on Conferences (COC). The report of the Committee concluded at its most recent substantive Session, contained in document A/66/32 is well balanced. The Group believes that the draft resolution on Pattern of Conferences submitted by the COC provides a good basis for negotiations on this item.

5. The Group attaches great importance to the issue of Conference Management and welcomes the adoption of the draft revised Calendar of Conferences and Meetings for the United Nations for 2012. The effective delivery of quality conference services is critical to the work of the intergovernmental bodies and contributes to the overall achievement of the organization's goals.

6. On the issue of utilization of conference services, the Group notes that overall utilization for 2010 was 85 per cent, a percentage point below the 2009 rate of 86 per cent. Whereas the utilization rate is above the established benchmark of 80 per cent, it is desirable that improvement is realized every subsequent year. The Group is concerned that utilization at United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) has continued to decline from 100 per cent in 2008 to 90 per cent in 2009, and was at 88 per cent in 2010. Something clearly needs to be done to reverse this trend.

7. Members may wish to recall that for 2008 and 2009, the utilization rate of the Conference Centre at the Economic Commission for Africa stagnated at 76 per cent, well below the 80 per cent threshold. In 2010, the situation deteriorated even further, with the utilization rate declining to a low of 70 per cent. This is despite the fact that the General Assembly had

previously called on the Secretary-General to pursue a more proactive and innovative approach to marketing the conference centre. The Group would like to know what measures have been undertaken to address the problem and what needs to be done going forward. The Group will also seek more information on the construction project related to Africa Hall and conference room 1 at the Economic Commission for Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

8. The African Group attaches great importance to the timely issuance of documents and the quality of documentation. We therefore commend the work done so far by the interdepartmental Task Force on documentation.

9. We welcome the indications of an increase in the timely submission of documents, which reached 87 per cent for the first five months of 2011, up from 78 per cent and 73 per cent for 2010 and 2009 respectively. We commend the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management for ensuring that all documents submitted on time and within the word limit were processed within four weeks. We urge that no effort should be spared to sustain this positive trend and urge all author departments to ensure they submit their documents within the allotted time frames.

Mr. Chairman,

10. The African Group stresses the importance of achieving the highest standards of quality in translation and interpretation. The high number of language staff who are projected to retire is a matter of concern especially considering that over the years, language services have experienced high vacancy rates across the four main duty stations, more so in Nairobi. The problem is compounded by the lengthy recruitment process for language staff. Implementation of a proactive succession planning programme, whose major components are outreach to Universities and streamlining of the competitive examinations for language services, is therefore imperative.

11. It will be recalled that during the consideration of this agenda item at 65th Session, the Africa Group noted that only one memoranda of understanding was signed by the United Nations with Universities in Africa in the context of the outreach programme. The Group will therefore be seeking an update on the current status in the course of our deliberations. We will also be seeking too an update on the progress of the Africa Project.

12. With regard to UNON, it has been the long-standing position of the African Group that every effort should be made to ensure parity of UNON to the other three main United Nations duty stations. In this context, the Group welcomes the Secretary-General's proposal to upgrade eleven language posts at UNON from P-4 to P-5. This is in conformity to the General Assembly resolution 66/245. It is the Group's expectation that the Secretary-General will look into other areas and ensure that all initiatives to strengthen UNON are realized.

Mr. Chairman,

13. Finally, in view of the foregoing and taking into account all the work that remains to be done, the African Group looks forward to dialogue with other delegations on this important agenda item.

I thank you.