

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Ms Aba Ayebi-Arthur,
Vice-Chair, Committee on Conferences, on behalf of H.E. Katalin Bogyay,
Chair, at the Seventy-first session of the General Assembly
on 28 October 2016 at 11:00am in Conference Room 3**

Agenda item: Pattern of conferences

Madame Chair, distinguished colleagues,

I have been asked, in my capacity as a Vice-Chair of the Committee on Conferences to step in to introduce the Report of the Committee, on behalf of the Chair, Ambassador Katalin Bogyay of Hungary, who could not attend the meeting today.

It is my privilege to address the Fifth Committee to introduce the report of the Committee on Conferences, which covers its work in 2016 and was adopted at its substantive session held from 6 to 13 September 2016. The report, as contained in document A/71/32, together with a draft resolution in annex I and the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2017 in Annex II, are being transmitted through the Fifth Committee and recommended for adoption by the General

Assembly.

Madame Chair,

The Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/71/116) together with the statistical data presented as supplementary information.

The Committee's report reflects comprehensively the discussions on all the items in its annotated agenda (A/AC.172/2016/1/Rev.1). As you know, the Committee's substantive session affords Member States an opportunity to engage actively with the management of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management on all matters relating to meetings and documentation services and to seek additional information and clarification as necessary in order to provide direction, guidance and support to the Secretariat in carrying out the mandates entrusted to it by the General Assembly. Allow me to highlight some of these issues.

On organizational matters, you will note that there are two

vacancies in the Committee's membership, both in the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. Both its organisational and substantive sessions were also attended by Member States that were interested in the work of the Committee as observers.

On matters related to the calendar of conferences and meetings, the Committee reviewed the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2017 and recommended it for adoption by the General Assembly. The Committee also discussed the length of the Fifth Committee's second resumed session and whether the session should be formally extended in light of its past trends in conference-servicing usage. After extensive discussion, the Committee did not reach agreement on the proposal and consequently several delegations reserved their right to raise the issue in other intergovernmental bodies.

On meetings management, the Committee reviewed the statistical data presented on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities at the four duty stations and at the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa.

During the substantive session, the Chair of the Committee on Conferences presented an oral report on her mandate to hold consultations with those intergovernmental bodies that had utilized less than the benchmark of 80 per cent of their allocated resources for the past three consecutive years from 2013 to 2015. Consultations were held in the first half of this year with the representatives of three New York-based bodies outlining possible measures to improve their respective utilization factors, encouraging each to identify and adjustment their programme of work based on previous patterns of recurring agenda items and timely cancelations, with a view to making improvements in their utilization factors.

The Committee on Conferences continues its efforts aimed at improving the utilization of conference-servicing resources through consultations, either in person or in writing, with the Chairs of intergovernmental bodies that have underutilized their conference-servicing resources. As well, the Committee supports the Secretariat's proposal to monitor and report on the utilization

statistics for a six-year period, and to continue to provide feedback to all intergovernmental ‘calendar’ bodies, in particular the long-time under-utilizers.

Indeed, all intergovernmental bodies are urged to review their meeting entitlements and to plan and adjust their programmes of work based on the actual utilization of conference-servicing resources in order to improve their efficient use of conference services. As in previous years, in response to paragraph 16 of GA resolution 66/233, the Secretariat of the Committee on Conferences provided utilization reports to the Secretariat of each calendar body, before and immediately after each scheduled session, and made specific suggestions to the Secretariat of each body on how to improve its utilization, giving particular additional attention to those bodies that chronically underutilized conference resources. Client feedback is actively sought to help identify specific ways to improve the utilization factor.

By providing guidance and encouragement, and by suggesting methods for improvement, we can hopefully significantly diminish

the list of meeting bodies which under-utilize conference-servicing resources in the future.

Madame Chair,

On documents management, the Committee received from the Secretariat information regarding external factors leading to the recurrent late submission of documents by author departments and measures to improve their compliance with the deadlines for submitting slotted documents. , The Committee noted that compliance with submission deadlines had improved over the past years as a result of the inclusion of 90 per cent submission compliance as a performance indicator in the annual compacts between senior managers and the Secretary-General and thanks to the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

The Committee also discussed digitization of older United Nations documents. The Department of Public Information provided the Committee with a briefing on the current status of the task, and a tour of the digitization operation and archive. In section

IV, paragraph 82, of its draft resolution, the Committee reiterated its request for the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to present a proposal for the digitization of older important United Nations documents at all four duty stations, outlining, inter alia, the definition of important older United Nations documents, as well as the scope and estimated quantity, cost and time frame, to the General Assembly not later than the main part of its seventy-second session. The Committee also requested the Secretary-General to seek additional voluntary contributions for the digitization.

Madame Chair,

On staffing, the Committee reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to make further concerted efforts to promote outreach programmes, such as traineeships and internships, and to introduce innovative methods to increase awareness of the programmes, including through partnerships with Member States, relevant international organizations and language institutions in all regions, in particular to close the wide gap in Africa and Latin America.

The Committee also requested further updates on the pilot project related to outposting to Vienna of translators from the French Translation Service in New York, including on the quality of services, a cost-benefit analysis, information on workload-sharing and lessons learned.

Madame Chair, distinguished colleagues,

On improvement of facilities and accessibility, the Secretariat informed the Committee that extra-budgetary resources were required to provide accessible services, and that sign-language interpretation was provided under the regular budget only to sessions of two bodies related to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, hearing and visually impaired persons could borrow equipment from the Accessibility Centre in New York. The Committee requested the Secretary-General to continue to address issues related to the accessibility of conferences facilities as a matter of priority.

Before I conclude, Madame Chair, I would like to thank the Bureau and members of the Committee, as well as the observers, for participating actively and constructively during the Committee's

session, which enabled the Committee to have meaningful and productive discussions in an open and friendly manner. I hope and believe that we can continue to work in the same spirit during the Fifth Committee's consideration of the item on pattern of conferences.

I also wish to express, on behalf of the Chair, the rest of the Bureau, and members of the Committee on Conferences as well as in my own name, our gratitude to Ms Catherine Pollard, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Mr Movses Abelian, Assistant Secretary-General, the Secretariat of the Committee and all the staff of the Department, including the conference management staff at the other duty stations, for providing substantive and technical support to the Committee throughout the year, and especially during its substantive session.

To all my colleagues in the Fifth Committee, I wish to present the report of the Committee on Conferences, together with the draft resolution and draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings

for 2017, for your consideration and recommendation to the General Assembly.

I thank you, Madame Chair.
