



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MS NADA TARBUSH, FIRST SECRETARY, MISSION OF THE STATE OF PALESTINE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEMS 138: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES AND 141: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT, AT THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE MAIN PART OF THE SEVENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(New York, 13 November 2019)**

Mr. Chair,

1. I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Group wishes to thank Mrs. Megayla Ulana Austin, Chair of the Committee on Conferences (COC) and Ms. Julia Maciel, Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee for Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), for introducing their respective reports. We also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Mr. Movses Abelian, for introducing the report of the Secretary-General, and Inspector Gopinathan Achamkulangare for introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system”.

2. The Group would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to Mrs. Megayla Ulana Austin of Guyana, for her able leadership as the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences for 2019.

Mr. Chair,

3. The Group of 77 and China commends the Committee on Conferences for the work undertaken during its substantive session in 2019 and for the quality of its report, which will greatly benefit the consideration of this agenda item by the Fifth Committee. Similarly, we are of the view that the proposed draft resolution will serve as a framework for the consideration of this item.

4. The Group is aware of the liquidity challenges that the Organization faces and the austerity measures enforced as a result. Notwithstanding this situation, the Group continues to call for the delivery of quality conference services in accordance with the equal treatment of the six official languages of the United Nations, particularly in support of the work of the intergovernmental and expert bodies of the Organization. In this context, matters related to the utilization of conference services and resources, documentation and publication, translation and interpretation and the calendar of conferences and meetings are all equally crucial for the effective and efficient functioning of the Organization.

Mr. Chair,

5. The Group commends the efforts of the Secretariat to address underutilization of conference servicing resources and facilities by UN organs. The Group notes that the overall utilization factor for all calendar bodies in the four main duty stations was 82% in 2018 and thus met the established benchmark of 80%.

6. We note as well the continued increase in the number of non-calendar meetings, which place constraints on the resources allocated to servicing otherwise mandated calendar meetings. We look forward to learning more about the implementation of a cost-recovery mechanism for meetings not related to the intergovernmental process in New York.

7. The Group notes with appreciation the updated administrative instruction concerning the use of space for meetings, conferences, events and exhibits at Headquarters in New York. We urge other conference-serving duty stations to follow suit and update their respective information circulars governing the use of United Nations premises, bearing in mind that all duty stations need to manage conference services in an integrated manner in the spirit of one United Nations. We will study the updated administrative instruction closely to see how it compares to the previous administrative instruction.

8. The Group welcomes the report of the JIU on the current status of accessibility for persons with disabilities to UN conferences and meetings.

9. The Group supports the idea of going beyond a dedicated policy on accessibility to conferences and meetings and establishing a comprehensive approach to addressing accessibility needs. We note that UN organisations likewise recognise the benefits that it brings to staff, visitors and beneficiaries with disabilities.

10. The Group is also looking closely at the recommendations that the Joint Inspection Unit has set forth in its report, and notes that the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management has already begun to implement accessibility measures for persons with disabilities since the start of the 74th session. We are also looking at the comments issued by the organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided by JIU.

Mr. Chair,

11. The Group continues to be concerned by the deteriorating conditions of the Nairobi conference center, which are severely hampering its capacity to provide conference services, especially for the regular calendar meetings of United Nations bodies headquartered in Nairobi. The Group welcomes the Secretary General's report which has been prepared within the context of the 2020 Programme in order to address the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the conference services facilities and it expects speedy and effective solution.

12. With respect to conferencing facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa, the Group notes with appreciation that the utilization and improvement of the conference facilities remained high in 2018. We also appreciate the efforts done to improve the carpeting and the podiums of the conference centre, and continue to call for regular renovations and urgent technological improvements to ensure that the Commission maintains its ability to provide cutting-edge conference services.

Mr. Chair,

13. With respect to staffing, the Group of 77 and China acknowledges the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in addressing the staffing challenges. We also commend the steps taken to enhance the recruitment of language professionals, including by increasing outreach to universities as a means to address the gap of qualified candidates from Africa and from the Latin American and Caribbean region.

14. In conclusion, the Group stands ready to engage constructively on this agenda item and looks forward to its timely conclusion.

I thank you.