



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA
BY MS. SONDR CHEONG, FIRST SECRETARY OF THE PERMANENT MISSION
OF GUYANA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ON AGENDA ITEM 141: PROGRAMME
BUDGET FOR 2021: CONSTRUCTION AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT:
PROGRESS IN THE RENOVATION OF THE AFRICA HALL AND CONSTRUCTION
OF THE NEW OFFICE FACILITIES AT THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION OF AFRICA,
AT THE FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE MAIN PART OF THE SEVENTY-FIFTH
SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

(New York, 19 November, 2020)

Mr. Chair

1. I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 141: Proposed Programme Budget for the Biennium 2021, Progress in the Renovation of the Africa Hall and the Construction of the New Office Facilities at the Economic Commission of Africa.
2. At the outset, At the outset, the Group wishes to thank the Secretary General for his report contained in document A/75/319. We also thank Mr. Abdallah Bachar Bong, Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) for its related report.
3. The Group of 77 and China also express its gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia for the continued support to the Economic Commission of Africa and other UN Offices residing in Addis Ababa. We trust that the Secretary General will take necessary steps to further strengthen engagements with the host country for the successful completion of the project and beyond.

Mr. Chair,

4. The Group reiterates the historical significance of the Africa Hall and the importance to conserve the heritage of the landmark site. It is critical to renovate the building in a manner that respects the original design and appearance while ensuring compliance with best practices with respect to current international building standards.
5. The Group notes with satisfaction, the signature of the two agreements in December 2019, one with the City of Addis Ababa and the other with the Government of Ethiopia, for the use of parcels of land adjoining the Economic Commission of Africa compounds in Addis Ababa. This agreement would enable ECA to build a visitor's parking lot of an area of 3000 m² at no additional cost to Member States. The Group greatly appreciates the support of the host country for the success of the project.

6. With respect to the visitor center, the Group reiterates that the admission option should be aligned with the need to ensure accessibility for students, academics, residents and tourists regardless of their capacity to pay.
7. With regard to the business case for the visitors' center of the Economic Commission for Africa, we commend ECA for coordinating the business case with local developments and opportunities. We hope that further collaboration with the Host country will result in an even better prospect to increase visibility of the Africa Hall.
8. The Group of 77 and China attach great importance to project accountability and take note of the fifth annual audit conducted by Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) of the Africa Hall renovation. The Group stresses the importance of effective governance, oversight, internal control and accountability to ensure that the project is implemented within the approved budget and in the revised project schedule. In this regard, the Group will be interested to learn more during the informal consultations about steps taken to implement the OIOS recommendations including the financial impact of the delays on the Africa Hall renovation project schedule.
9. In line with the OIOS report, the Group further encourages the project team to introduce deliberate mechanisms to enable the utilization of local knowledge, material, technology and capacity. In this regard, the efforts of the ECA to coordinate with the African Union Commission and the Government of Ethiopia should be continued.
10. The Group notes the concerns of the ACABQ in connection with the ability to cope with the challenges encountered to remain in budget. In this regard the Group commends the Secretary-General for the commitment as well as the efforts to stay within budget despite the delays in implementation faced in the previous two years. We are also encouraged by the commitment of the ECA to carry out some of the tasks on its own with the aim of saving costs and ensuring effective delivery of the tasks. In this regard we find the addition of a contract's manager at a P3 level a reasonable demand.
11. With respect to risk management, the Group takes note of the third Monte Carlo simulation for the renovation project facilitated by the independent risk management firm conducted in June 2020. In this regard, during the informal consultations, the Group will be interested to learn more about the Covid-19 related risks and what measures have been put in place by the project team and the Global Asset Management Policy Service to monitor these risks.

Mr. Chair

12. In conclusion, the Group of 77 and China supports the budget proposed by the Secretary General for project activities in 2021.
13. The Group would like to assure you of our readiness to engage constructively in the consideration of this agenda item with a view to reaching a conclusion in a timely manner.