

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICA GROUP BY MR. MOHAMED TRAORE, COUNSELOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALI ON AGENDA ITEM 141: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 2021, 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 Africa Group on agenda item 141: Proposed Programme Budget for the Biennium 2021, Progress in the Renovation of the Africa Hall and the Construction of New Office Facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa as presented in the reports of the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, and the Office of Internal Oversight Services.
2. The African Group wishes to thank **xxx** and Mr Abdallah Bachar Bong, Chair of the Advisory Committee, for introducing their respective reports.
3. The African Group aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the distinguished representative of Guyana on behalf of the G77 and China and would like to make few additional remarks.
4. The African Group attaches great importance to the Renovation Project of the historic Africa Hall. The Africa Hall carries a major historical significance that demonstrates invaluable affiliation between the United Nations and the African continent. It is thus of utmost importance that the renovation of the building takes place in a manner that respects the original design and appearance of spaces whilst adhering to international standards.

Mr. Chair,

5. The African Group notes with appreciation the close coordination between the ECA and the Host country. In this regard, we note the continued implementation of the project specific agreement. We also recognize the conclusion of the additional land grant agreement and hand over of the land as an in-kind contribution by the Government of Ethiopia. It was also a year where the Host Country agreement of the ECA is renewed

and signed. These instruments will certainly facilitate the successful completion of the renovation project.

6. It is our sincere belief that the Secretary-General will continue to work with the host country to ensure the success of the renovation project.
7. The African Group would like to thank the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for its recommendations for the better progress of the project. The importance of project accountability cannot be overstated by the Group. The Group notes all of the recommendations of the OIOS are accepted and looks forward to learning the steps the Secretary-General intends to take to address the recommendations of the OIOS.
8. The Group also notes the concern of the ACABQ on the possibility of completing the project within the assigned budget. The delay in project implementation and the challenges with the lead contractor and the COVID-19 pandemic are bound to pose challenges. In this connection, the undertakings to carry out some of the tasks by the project team in order to save costs and remain in budget is commendable.
9. One of the recommendations of the OIOS is to strengthen recruitment of experts working on the project from the continent. The African Group, in agreement with the OIOS report, further underlines the need that the project team deploy all efforts to introduce the necessary mechanisms to enable utilization of local knowledge, material, technology and capacity in the renovation project. In this regard we commend the ECA for involving and holding consultations with Addis Ababa University, the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, and the African Union Commission. These and many other engagements are important and should be enhanced.
10. We also note the recommendation of the OIOS for the reinvigoration of the mandates of the Advisory Board and address the gaps in its coordination with the project owner. We encourage the project owner to take prompt measures to finalize the review of the terms of reference of the Advisory Board and take all measures that ensure effective coordination. The group also encourages the project owner to seek and apply best practices in this regard from similar other projects.
11. Furthermore, considering the fact that most of the art works in the Hall are of African origin and that there is a need to preserve the historical, cultural, and architectural integrity of the Hall, this OIOS recommendation is a critical matter that requires attention.

12. Regarding the visitor's center's business case for the Africa Hall, it indeed is necessary to explore options to strengthen outreaches for the promotion of the heritage. The Group thus wishes to reiterate that admission options should take into consideration accessibility to students, academics, residents and tourists regardless of the capacity to pay. In this connection, the Group welcomes cooperation between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the African union and the host country Government for defining specific themes for the proposed permanent exhibition spaces, especially for preservation of the historic and artistic component of the Africa Hall.
13. On the development of the visitor's center, we thank the Government of Mali for the voluntary donation of above fifty-two thousand USD for the restoration of an art work and that of the Government of Switzerland for pledging to contribute one hundred thousand Swiss francs and call on other states to complement these supports.
14. On the request of the ECA for the endorsement of an additional position of a contract manager (at a P3 level), the Group wishes to assert that the request is reasonable and necessary. Considering the renovation of the Africa Hall involves numerous consultancies, construction contracts, individual expert hiring and art restoration works. These pressing circumstances justify the need for a professional handling of the contracts by a dedicated contract manager. It is for this reason that the Group supports the endorsement of a P3 level contract manager position by the General Assembly.
15. In conclusion, the Group wishes to reiterate that the renovation of the Africa Hall is a priority project for the African Group as well as for the General Assembly who approved a budget of USD 56.9 million along the establishment of a multi-year construction in-progress account. The Group finds it imperative to build on progress achieved and supports the budget proposed by the Secretary General for project activities in 2021.
16. The African Group wished to assure you of our readiness to engage constructively for a successful and consensual outcome of this agenda item.

I thank you