



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA  
BY MS. SONDR CHEONG, FIRST SECRETARY OF THE PERMANENT  
MISSION OF THE COOPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS ON AGENDA ITEM 141: PROGRAMME BUDGET  
2021: CONSTRUCTION AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT- FLEXIBLE  
WORKPLACE AT THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, AT THE  
FIFTH COMMITTEE DURING THE MAIN PART OF THE SEVENTY- FIFTH  
SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**(New York, December 3, 2020)**

Mr. Chair,

1. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 141: Programme Budget for 2020, in particular the progress report on the implementation of a flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters.

2. At the outset, the Group of 77 and China would like to express its appreciation to Mr. Chandramouli Ramanathan, Assistant Secretary- General, Controller and to Mr. Abdalla Bachar- Bong, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, for their respective reports.

Mr. Chair,

3. The Group of 77 and China continue to recognize the impact of transformational initiatives of the Organization that contribute to the United Nations being more effective, adaptable and modern. The Group reiterates that such initiatives should be implemented in a manner that acknowledges the financial constraints the Organization faces, as well as its evolving work practices and the needs of staff.

4. The Group appreciates the update provided in the fifth report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the flexible workplace project at the United Nations Headquarters, and the steps that have been taken since the last progress report. The Group notes that as at August 2020, 21 floors of the Secretariat Building had been reconfigured to a flexible workplace,

accommodating a total of approximately 2,300 staff and that the project has resulted in an additional capacity of 1,234 to date, which exceeds the original estimate of 1,200 for all planned floors.

5. The Group is pleased to learn that the additional capacity has enabled the administration to reduce its lease portfolio over the period 2017 – 2020 which will result in savings for the organization in this regard. We look forward to discussing further, the status of the termination of leases in commercial buildings and the related impact of the reduction in rental obligations on the proposed resource level for the relevant section in the proposed programme budget for 2021.

Mr. Chair,

6. The Group regrets that the implementation of the project has been significantly affected by delays resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the financial liquidity challenges faced by the Organization. Accordingly, the Group notes that the project is now expected to be completed by the end of 2021 with an unchanged overall estimated project cost of \$54, 981, 400. As of 31 August 2020, \$47, 372, 400 has been incurred since the start of the project in 2015 and the estimated cost to complete the project schedule in 2020 and 2021 is \$7, 931, 700.

7. The Group acknowledges that the Secretary-General is requesting the estimated unspent balance of \$7,187,900 for commitment during 2021 and that the Secretariat will work closely with the contractors on scope review, scheduling and logistical coordination to avoid any cost increase. The Group reiterates the need for the Administration to closely monitor the conclusion of the project within the estimated cost.

8. As regards the Administration's commitment to a productive working environment in the flexible workplace, the group notes with appreciation the actions taken by the project team in addressing the recommendations resulting from the previous post- occupancy survey, with no pending recommendations. Regrettably, the next survey was deferred until the occupancy of the Secretariat Building would return to a level comparable with previous years.

9. The Group remains supportive of an independent evaluation of the project and recognizes the efforts of the Secretariat in approaching the Board of Auditors and the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. While being cognizant of the heavy workload of these two

entities, we encourage the Secretariat to continue engaging with them with a view of undertaking this important task by the end of the project.

Mr. Chair,

10. The Group reiterates that flexible workplace should never simply be a matter of space management, but a holistic arrangement of physical space, information and communication technology, human resources and other support programmes. The successful implementation of flexible workplace requires not only reconfiguration of workspace, but enhanced information technology support and revised human resources policies.

11. In closing, Mr. Chair, the G77 and China assures you of its commitment to engage constructively on this agenda item while considering it against the backdrop of all construction projects amid the current financial constraints and the Covid-19 pandemic.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.