



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

18 May 2021

Excellency,

Ahead of the informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly on COVID-19-related business continuity matters, to be held on Wednesday, 19 May 2021, at 3:00 p.m., in the General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters, I have the honour to circulate a letter dated 18 May 2021 from Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chef de Cabinet to the United Nation Secretary-General.

As requested by Member States during the informal plenary meeting on business continuity on 3 May 2021, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General has provided the attached non-paper on scenarios for increased services for intergovernmental meetings for Member States' consideration. It references the announcement by the State of New York on 17 May that fully vaccinated individuals can resume indoor activities without masking and distancing.

Given the importance of discussions on the topic, including decisions that need to be taken on how to apply the new guidelines to intergovernmental meetings, I encourage your active participation in this meeting.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Volkan Bozkir'.

Volkan BOZKIR

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

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EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
CABINET DU SECRETAIRE GENERAL

18 May 2021

Dear Mr. President,

I write further to my earlier letter dated 17 May 2021, regarding possible scenarios focused on enhanced *on-site* meetings and conferencing.

Following our submission, Governor Cuomo announced today that New York State would follow the recent recommendations of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention related to mask-wearing and social distancing for fully vaccinated individuals. While several details in the statement of Governor Cuomo have yet to be elaborated, based upon the available information, we have worked to adapt the scenarios in order to provide the best possible response to our need for organizing meetings and ensuring the participation of Member States.

With this in mind, the scenarios were revised last night and are hereby attached for transmission thorough your office for consideration by the General Assembly and its Member States.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Viotti'.

Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti
Chef de Cabinet

His Excellency
Mr. Volkan Bozkır
President of the General Assembly
New York

INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of improving pandemic conditions and easing of restrictions by local, state and federal authorities on travel, physical distancing and gathering of people, the Secretariat has developed plans to gradually increase conference servicing and related facilities in the near and medium term. As with the phased return to the premises, the gradual increase of services is also contingent on continuous risk assessments by the Secretariat with the understanding that services and facilities can be scaled back in case conditions so warrant. The preparations foresee the gradual increase of capacities by the opening of the UNGA76 by offering to implement increasing service options on June 1 and in mid-July. The gradual increase will allow for the procurement and installment of additional equipment by mid-July.

However, under current health guidelines from the Host Country, an increase in delegation size/attendance is only permissible at this time with confirmed vaccination status of attendees. As the Secretariat continues to map out various options for the 76th General Assembly (High-level Week) subject to prevailing health and travel guidelines at the time, it is actively considering various scenarios that would allow for a low-risk occupancy of the GA hall under the 1 + 1 per delegation concept. Under current guidelines/conditions, this occupancy is categorized as "high risk". The 1+1 concept can be implemented within two weeks at low risk, if and when, the current distancing (6 feet) and masking recommendations are withdrawn by the City of New York for vaccinated people, or the distancing requirement is reduced to 3 feet.

At present, unverified vaccination status of attendees also does not allow for a change in the risk assessment and risk rating of meetings. If guidelines change, this will also allow for different configurations of the conference rooms and allow for even more meeting space than outlined below. The Secretariat is examining the guidance issued on 13 May 2021 by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the adoption of this guidance by Governor Cuomo for NYS and will incorporate changes in the options below or develop additional options, if applicable, once the City of New York determines how they will implement the guidance.

The options below for the phased increase build on the Secretariat's existing suite of facilities and services that have been functioning well and will continue to be available. These include documentation processing, translation, electronic distribution, Protocol services, Journal of the United Nations, e-deleGATE Portal, WebTV, etc. Appropriate staffing levels will also be maintained with these changes.

In addition, the paper outlines additional services and facilities that are being added back within the health and safety guidelines.

Current Provision of Conference Services

- Three concurrent/parallel (mandated only) in person meetings with full service (GA Hall, CR1+2+3, ECO+SCC, TCC)
- Virtual/Hybrid meetings with remote simultaneous interpretation (RSI) support

Scenarios for additional conference services foreseen for the near- and medium-term, conditions permitting

1. As of June 1, increase the number of parallel meetings onsite to four instead of three with full services.

- This would allow:
 - **Two full membership meetings** in the GA Hall and CR1+2+3 (maximum 250 participants and UN personnel combined/meeting) with interpretation capability
 - **Two medium size meetings** in the SCC+ECO, and CR4 (maximum 80 participants and UN personnel combined/meeting) with interpretation capability,
 - or **two more small size meetings**, which can take place in any of the other rooms **TCC, 5, 6, 11, or 12**, (maximum 20 to 30 participants and UN personnel combined/meeting) without interpretation.
- In addition, interpretation capacity permitting, up to four virtual/hybrid meetings could be serviced with Remote Simultaneous Interpretation (RSI).
- This would be implemented under the current physical distancing requirements and mask use from the Host Country and keeping all relevant guidance for UN personnel and meeting participants in place.
- **Current Risk Rating: Low.** However, level to be assessed for each meeting request by OSH prior to the meeting.
- Interpretation capacity is also limited to three hours for onsite (fully in-person) and two hours for virtual and hybrid meetings.
- Interpretation capacity can be below the combined onsite and RSI meeting demand.

2. As of mid-July, increase the number of parallel meetings to six, including five with full services.

- This would allow:
 - **Two full membership meetings** in the GA Hall and CR1+2+3 and with interpretation capability
 - **Three medium size meetings** in SCC+ECO, TCC, CR4 with interpretation capability,
 - And one more meeting in another room (CR 5, 6, 7) without interpretation.
- In addition, interpretation capacity permitting, up to four virtual/hybrid meetings could be serviced with RSI.
- This would be implemented under the current physical distancing requirements and mask use from the State and the City of New York and keeping all relevant guidance for UN personnel and meeting participants in place.
- **Current Risk Rating: Low.** However, level to be assessed for each meeting request by OSH prior to the meetings.

- Interpretation capacity is limited to three hours for onsite (fully in-person) and two hours for virtual and hybrid meetings.
 - Requires installation of OICT purchased equipment and testing. If there is a change in the room configurations, cost implication may arise.
3. **Potential Increase to Delegation Size.** Once physical distancing requirements are reduced by the local authorities, one more seat per delegation could be added in the GA Hall (1+1) and in the other full membership conference rooms.
- This option would add another full membership venue. It would allow for up to seven concurrent meetings, including five with full services.
 - These would include:
 - **Three full membership meetings** in the GA Hall, CR1+2 and CR3+4 by virtually combining two and not three rooms (as is currently) with interpretation capability.
 - **Two medium size meetings** SCC+ECO, TCC, with interpretation capability.
 - Any other small and midsize room can be used without interpretation.
 - In addition, interpretation capacity permitting, up to five virtual/hybrid meetings could be serviced with RSI.
 - **Current Risk Level Rating: "High".** These physical distancing and room occupancy arrangements are not, at this time, in line with parameters of the relevant NY State regulations.
 - Once physical distancing requirements are reduced by the State and the City of New York, this option becomes more viable and the risk ratings could be reassessed by OSH, taking into account the prevailing conditions and applicable guidelines. Risk to be further assessed for each meeting request by OSH prior to the meetings.
 - Participation would still be limited to delegations.
 - In addition to physical room constraints, interpretation capacity also remains limited to three hours for onsite (fully in-person) and two hours for virtual and hybrid meetings.
 - Interpretation capacity can be below the combined in-person and RSI meeting demand.
 - It would require more critical servicing staff to be onsite but can be implemented with currently available staff and technical resources.
 - The Secretariat would require two weeks for the necessary reconfigurations. If the room configurations are made as proposed above, then funding has been identified by OICT and procurement is ongoing. If there is a change, possible the cost implication would depend on the changes to the conference room configurations.
 - Resource requirements are being evaluated for the OSH Section to handle the workload associated with increased meeting risk assessments.

4. **Consideration of Vaccination Status:** Governor Cuomo has announced that New York State will adopt, as of May 19, the new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention allowing fully vaccinated individuals to resume indoor activities without masking and distancing. When the City of New York confirms that the new guidance **can be implemented in New York City**, Member States may wish to consider how to apply this to intergovernmental meetings, including ascertaining the vaccination status of the participants and the possible implications of this criterion on the principle of granting equal access of delegates to meetings and the premises.

It should be noted that the UN Secretariat has no capacity or tool to verify vaccination status, nor policy to require vaccination of those entering the premises. Should Member States decide to make vaccination a requirement, a decision would need to be made as to whether vaccination status would need to be verified or unverified ("on the honor system").

In both systems, several ways forward could be explored depending on whether Member States had decided to limit access to only fully vaccinated delegates for: specific meetings, specific areas (such as the GA and second level of the Conference Building, similar to the high security areas during the GA high-level period), or the entire complex. The different options may hold additional cost implications.

Of note is that, according to the most recent New York State guidelines, a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated people in one meeting would require distancing and masking between the unvaccinated participants while this is not required for the vaccinated participants.

Availability of additional conference facilities, services and amenities in the conference building and other areas:

Independently from the conference servicing options, the Secretariat reopened the North Delegates Lounge, the Indonesian Lounge and the Qatar lounge on Wednesday 12 May. The furniture has been spaced to comply with current regulations and occupancy limits and will be adjusted as needed. Hot and cold drinks, and cold snacks, are available for purchase in the North Delegates Lounge. Members States and delegations are encouraged to use the lounges as needed.

Further services and amenities, including the Vienna Café and fourth floor cafeteria, are being examined and will be reopened once feasible. At the moment, no other commercial spaces in the premises may be reopened without incurring significant financial losses.