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## Fifth Committee

### Summary record of the 12th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 6 November 2017, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Tommo Monthe ..... (Cameroon)  
*Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Ruiz Massieu

## Contents

Agenda item 139: Pattern of conferences

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Agenda item 139: Pattern of conferences** (A/72/32, A/72/116 and A/72/561)

1. **Mr. Yazdani** (Vice-Chair of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2017 (A/72/32), said that the report contained a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences and the draft calendars of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2018 and 2019, which were recommended for adoption by the General Assembly. The Committee on Conferences had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/72/116) together with the statistical data presented as supplementary information. The report of the Committee on Conferences provided a comprehensive summary of the discussions held on all items on its agenda. The annual substantive session of that Committee offered Member States an opportunity to engage with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management on all matters relating to conference and documentation services with a view to providing direction, guidance and support to the Secretariat in carrying out its mandates.

2. Two seats on the Committee on Conferences, one from among the Asia-Pacific States and another from among the Latin American and Caribbean States, remained vacant. A total of 14 Member States had been represented as observers at the Committee's organizational and substantive sessions. The Committee had reviewed the draft calendars of conferences and meetings for 2018 and 2019. It had recommended that the General Assembly should authorize six bodies to meet during the main part of its seventy-second session and had approved a number of intersessional departures.

3. The Committee on Conferences had reviewed the statistical data on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities at the four main duty stations and at the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa. In addition, the Chair of the Committee had reported on the mandate to consult those bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark of their allocated resources for the previous six years, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources. In June 2017, letters had been sent to the presiding officers of the calendar bodies whose utilization rate had fallen below the 80 per cent benchmark. Furthermore, consultations had been held in the first half of 2017 with the representatives of eight New York-based bodies on ways to improve their utilization factors.

4. With respect to documents management, the Committee on Conferences had recommended that the General Assembly should urge author departments to adhere fully to deadlines for document submission. It had also discussed the simultaneous distribution of documents and had received clarification from the Secretariat.

5. On staffing, the Committee on Conferences had taken note of the update provided by the Secretary-General on the pilot project related to the outposting to Vienna of translators from the French Translation Service in New York and had requested the Secretary-General to provide further updates on the matter.

6. With respect to the improvement of facilities and accessibility, the Committee on Conferences had welcomed the measures taken to ensure access to and use of conference services and facilities for persons with disabilities, including the establishment of the Accessibility Centre, and had requested the Secretary-General to continue to address such issues as a matter of priority. The Committee had also discussed the use of United Nations premises. Lastly, with regard to measuring the quality of conference services, it had sought inputs from the Secretariat on the actions taken to improve the rate of response to feedback surveys.

7. **Ms. Pollard** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/72/116), said that conference management was an ever-changing field, requiring continuous innovation. Her Department was leveraging technology in order to handle the growing workload. The increased use of eLUNA, the computer-assisted and machine translation platform that had been developed in-house, and the consolidation of UNTERM as the global United Nations terminology portal had improved quality and consistency across documents and languages and led to better working methods.

8. The Pipeline Visualization Tool, a cutting-edge, interactive instrument developed by the United Nations Office at Geneva, would be rolled out shortly. It was intended to help documentation managers by enabling them to visualize current and projected workloads and staff availability, based on productivity standards; to decide which documents to prioritize; and to identify critical periods when the engagement of contractual services would be required. It would improve the predictability of document delivery and ensure accountability for the meeting of deadlines and the timely issuance of documentation. In addition, an improved version of gData, the conference management dashboard, had been released. The gData reports and

dashboard displays had been enhanced to make them more usable and relevant.

9. Following a successful pilot project in 2016, a new contractual workflow model had been fully implemented in the Documentation Division in New York, whereby contractual work was assigned by the individual language services. Such a change had been made possible thanks to the introduction of new documentation management tools designed by her Department. The new workflow model had resulted in efficiency gains, including faster processing times, increased utilization of in-house capacity, improved quality assurance and the redeployment of staff from the Contractual Translation Unit to other services.

10. The harmonization of policies, practices and standard operating procedures across duty stations remained a priority. The Steering Group established to that end continued to produce specific and sound policy recommendations regarding meetings and documents management and interpretation.

11. Progress had been made regarding the “one-stop shop” for conference services, which would provide a single entry point for requesting meeting services, with an easy-to-use self-service interface and streamlined processes that would enhance coordination among service providers. It was expected to be deployed in 2018. Meanwhile, the user-friendly e-deleGATE portal enabled Member States to access essential information securely, replacing time-consuming manual submission processes.

12. The Department was revamping the *Journal of the United Nations*. Pursuant to resolution 71/323 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, the *Journal* would be published in all six official languages year-round. Although the paper version would continue to be available, the new *Journal* would be widely accessible online across a variety of browsers, desktop applications and mobile devices. It would have a user-friendly interface and a range of new features, such as a function allowing users to search for information. It would also be accessible to persons with disabilities. In that connection, she noted that the Department had improved the accessibility of conference services by upgrading assistive devices and standardizing the recruitment of sign language interpreters. The Department would be working with the Department of Management and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to improve the physical accessibility of meeting rooms, including the General Assembly Hall.

13. Lastly, she noted that the interaction between her Department and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions went far

beyond the meetings at which the pattern of conferences and section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, were taken up. The Department worked unceasingly to ensure that the Advisory Committee received its documents on time, to facilitate its programme of work. The documents of the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee continued to have the highest priority in the documentation processing chain.

14. **Mr. Ruiz Massieu** (Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/72/561), said that, while the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities for Geneva, Nairobi, New York and Vienna continued to be above 80 per cent, greater use should be made of certain dedicated facilities in Nairobi.

15. With regard to the application of the integrated global management rule and the notional savings achieved by the servicing of conferences held away from established headquarters, the Advisory Committee looked forward to seeing further developments in the quantification of the costs, and related savings to host countries or other international or regional organizations. Further updates on the development of departmental technological tools and the integration of cost benefits into the cost parameters for the production of documents and for interpretation into the six official languages should be provided in the next report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences.

16. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had taken a proactive approach to addressing the staffing and succession planning challenges it faced, through initiatives such as the outposting of French translators from New York to Vienna for a pilot period of two years and the selection and recruitment of translators with one foreign language. The Department was also taking measures aimed at replenishing the rosters of language posts. He commended the Department’s outreach efforts and use of social media, the training of potential recruits through internships and traineeships, and the use of internally developed technological tools.

17. **Ms. Pereira Sotomayor** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the draft resolution on the pattern of conferences would provide an excellent framework for the Committee’s negotiations on that agenda item. The Group attached great significance to the effective delivery of quality conference services in accordance with the principle of multilingualism, particularly in support of the work of the intergovernmental and expert bodies of the

Organization. Issues such as the utilization of conference services, resources, documentation and publications, translation and interpretation matters, and the calendar of conferences and meetings were crucial to the effective and efficient functioning of the Organization.

18. The Group commended the Secretariat's efforts to address the underutilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities and noted that the overall utilization factor for all calendar bodies at the four duty stations had met the established benchmark of 80 per cent. However, New York had recorded a utilization factor of 79 per cent. The Group noted with satisfaction that occupancy of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa had increased to 93 per cent, up from just 53 per cent in 2011. The Group urged the Secretary-General to continue reviewing the methodology for calculating the utilization rate of conference facilities and to reflect on how best to report on such statistics.

19. Information and communications technology (ICT) had an important role to play in the Organization's work. The integrated global management rule was intended to integrate ICT into the management of conference services and documentation processing, with a view to facilitating a balanced division of labour between New York and the other duty stations. As noted in the report of the Secretary-General, when assembling a servicing team, consideration was given to proximity, the quality of services, hidden administrative costs, replacement costs and expertise.

20. The Group emphasized the need for timely and simultaneous issuance of documentation in all official languages. In addition, the quality of documentation must be improved to facilitate the deliberations of intergovernmental and expert bodies, in particular the Advisory Committee. In that regard, the Group encouraged the interdepartmental task force on documentation to ensure that challenges related to documentation were addressed.

21. The Group welcomed the continued efforts of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to improve eLUNa. Access to previously translated documents, terminology and machine translation was essential. The Group looked forward to receiving further updates on eLUNa, the e-deleGATE portal and the integration of cost benefits into the cost parameters for the production of documents and for interpretation into the six official languages. Specifically, the Group requested information on the new methodology for calculating the cost parameters for

the production of documents and the impact of initiatives such as eLUNa.

22. The official languages must be treated equally. High-quality meeting and documentation services must be provided in all six official languages at the four duty stations and all international conferences held by the Organization, with a view to ensuring the effective participation of Member States. The Group regretted the Secretariat's tendency to prioritize some of the official languages over others, as evidenced by media coverage and the advance issuance of official documentation in certain languages.

23. Outreach programmes, in the form of traineeships, internships and initiatives such as the Pan-African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation, should target institutions throughout the world, in particular in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Outreach efforts would help to address the lack of candidates from certain regions and the Organization's staffing challenges.

24. The Secretary-General should take measures to ensure that requests to organize events, in particular those held by non-governmental and civil society organizations, were properly vetted, with a view to ensuring that such events were consistent with the principles and purposes of the United Nations. The Group noted the commitment of the Secretary-General to mainstreaming accessibility considerations into conference services and called for continued efforts at all duty stations. To ensure the quality of conference services, feedback surveys must be improved.

25. **Mr. De Preter** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, said that the European Union acknowledged the efforts of the Secretariat to improve, modernize and innovate the Organization's conference and language services. His delegation welcomed the development and implementation of new conference management software and the increasing use of modern technology, and would be interested in receiving further information on the benefits such initiatives could bring.

26. The European Union was committed to working with all partners in an open and transparent manner with a view to finding a sustainable and pragmatic solution to the persistent time management problems affecting the second part of the resumed session of the Fifth Committee. In recent years, the Committee had been unable to conclude its work within the allotted period.

Extending the deadline meant that interpretation and conference services were not secured and put pressure on the secretariat of the Committee, which had to service other intergovernmental meetings simultaneously. During the substantive session of the Committee on Conferences, the matter had been discussed extensively. A number of delegations had agreed that four weeks was not sufficient, given the Committee's increasing workload. His delegation welcomed, therefore, the reference to the issue in the draft resolution on the pattern of conferences.

27. **Mr. Al-Kuwari** (Qatar) said that his delegation welcomed the efforts of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Department of Public Information to improve online access to historical United Nations documents. The Organization was the best forum for mobilizing international opinion to address past, present and future problems, since it had institutional memory of Member States' views on matters raised at the system level. Qatar attached great importance to the project for the digitization of United Nations documents, some of which were nearly 70 years old, since the Organization was the only world body that held all essential documents related to international peace and security, economic development, international law, humanitarian affairs, education and health. Older or historical United Nations documents that were liable to decay must be preserved. The project would help protect the Organization's institutional memory and facilitate access to documents of the deliberative bodies by giving Member States, Secretariat staff and the public a set of research tools that included the United Nations Digital Library, speeches, voting records, meeting records and documentation research guides.

28. His Government had undertaken to donate \$5 million to the project over a five-year period starting in 2013. It had deposited \$4 million so far, and would continue to honour its commitment, with a view to making the documents available through the Official Document System, and to support all essential United Nations activities and programmes. The digitized documents could be viewed on the new United Nations Digital Library web page, part of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library website. His delegation looked forward to the completion of the project, which was of use to Member States, researchers and anyone interested in the work of the United Nations.

*The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.*