



General Assembly

Seventy-second session

Official Records

Distr.: General
22 March 2018

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 31st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 15 March 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon)
*Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Sene

Contents

Agenda item 136: Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 (*continued*)

Standards of accommodation for air travel

Agenda item 142: Joint Inspection Unit (*continued*)

*Review of air travel policies in the United Nations system: achieving efficiency
gains and cost savings and enhancing harmonization*

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be sent as soon as possible, under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, to the Chief of the Documents Management Section (dms@un.org), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org/>).

18-04033 (E)



Please recycle



The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 136: Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 (continued)

Standards of accommodation for air travel (A/72/7/Add.44 and A/72/716)

Agenda item 142: Joint Inspection Unit (continued)

Review of air travel policies in the United Nations system: achieving efficiency gains and cost savings and enhancing harmonization (A/72/629 and A/72/629/Add.1)

1. **Mr. Saunders** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/72/716), said that the report reflected the findings of a review of the Secretariat's current travel policy, which, in response to General Assembly resolution 71/272 B and in connection with the internal review of existing policies and procedures announced by the Secretary-General in his report on management reform (A/72/492), had been conducted with a view to leveraging the Umoja enterprise resource planning system and ensuring further simplification and streamlining of procedures. To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of travel management in the Secretariat, the Secretary-General proposed to replace the current methodology for determining the standards of accommodation with a model whereby a single threshold, based on total travel time, would be used. That proposal, which was supported by analysis and data modelling, would enable the Organization to make full use of available technology and benefit from the resulting efficiencies. The Secretary-General also proposed to discontinue the home leave lump-sum travel interim measure, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/254 A, whereby the provision for determining the travel-related lump-sum payment had been revised downwards from 75 per cent to 70 per cent of the least restrictive economy-class fare, in order to promote greater use of the lump-sum option, which increasingly fewer staff had been exercising since the introduction of the interim measure. In addition, he proposed to eliminate the policy allowing Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General designated to represent the Secretary-General to travel in first class.

2. As requested in General Assembly resolution 69/274 A, and on the basis of data from the Umoja travel module, extracted through the business intelligence module, the Secretary-General's previous report (A/71/741) had provided, for the two-year period ended 30 June 2016, updated information on air travel

activities; comprehensive information on the effects of the implementation of Umoja in travel administration; and updated information, trends and analysis in all areas relating to air travel in the United Nations. The current report (A/72/716) included updated statistics for the interim period from July 2016 to June 2017, which provided necessary context for the Secretary-General's proposals.

3. **Mr. Sene** (Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/72/7/Add.44), said that, as no data had been provided regarding specific options for the single-threshold model, the Advisory Committee was not in a position to analyse the proposal and did not consider that a valid case had been made for amending the current standard of accommodation for air travel, as decided in General Assembly resolution 67/254 A. Noting the decrease in the rate of acceptance of the lump-sum option for home-leave travel and the additional administrative costs for the Organization entailed by requests to the Secretariat for the purchase of travel tickets, the Advisory Committee recommended approval of the proposal to discontinue the interim measure relating to the lump-sum payment, pending the submission by the Secretary-General of proposals to modify the lump-sum scheme for the Assembly's consideration at its seventy-third session. The Advisory Committee also recommended approval of the proposal to apply to Under-Secretaries-General or Assistant Secretaries-General undertaking official travel to represent the Secretary-General the standard of accommodation applicable to personnel at those levels, namely, the class immediately below first class. In addition, it reiterated the recommendations contained in its previous report (A/71/822) with regard to the need to promote compliance with the directive on advance purchase of tickets for air travel and to account for low rates of compliance; to apply to experts belonging to sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels the same standard of accommodation applicable to Secretariat staff; and to use alternative methods of communication in cases where official travel was not necessary for mandate implementation.

4. **The Chair** drew attention to the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Review of air travel policies in the United Nations system: achieving efficiency gains and cost savings and enhancing harmonization" (A/72/629) and the note by the Secretary-General transmitting his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) on the report of JIU

(A/72/629/Add.1), as well as introductory statements by JIU and CEB, to be posted on the Fifth Committee's website.

5. **Mr. Ahmed** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group attached great importance to the effective and efficient utilization of resources for air travel. Bearing in mind the significant budgetary constraints faced by the Organization during recent bienniums, the significant changes to the standards of accommodation for air travel approved by the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh and sixty-ninth sessions, and the Secretary-General's ongoing management reform proposals, the Group would examine the proposals in the report (A/72/716) to ensure that they supported cost-effective mandate implementation and improved the effectiveness and efficiency of travel management. In that regard, the Group looked forward to receiving further information on the benefits realized from the implementation of Umoja in the area of air travel administration, particularly in terms of transparency, accountability and the provision of comprehensive analysis of travel data.

6. The Group would seek further clarification regarding the proposed elimination of the policy allowing Under-Secretaries-General or Assistant Secretaries-General to travel in first class. It noted with concern the low rate of compliance with the advance purchase policy directive and concurred with the Advisory Committee on the need for enhanced efforts in that regard. As no concrete proposals had been made to address the challenges in applying the current travel policy, the Group would request further information in that regard, while noting that any decisions that might have a far-reaching impact on staff and the Organization should be based on a solid business case. It would also seek additional details on the effects of the proposed discontinuation of the interim measure relating to the lump-sum payment for home leave travel, in the light of the decline in the rate of acceptance of that option from 93 per cent to 74 per cent since the measure's implementation. Lastly, he reiterated that any policy changes and new formulations in the area of standards of accommodation for air travel remained the exclusive prerogative of the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly.

7. **Ms. Demetris** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Liechtenstein, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the States members of the European Union supported the Secretary-General in his efforts to

enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations. The Advisory Committee's report (A/72/7/Add.44) provided a useful starting point for discussions on how to adjust and improve the Secretariat's travel management policies and practices. In line with its recommendations, the European Union advocated more careful use of resources for official travel, noting with concern the year-on-year increase in overall air travel costs and underscoring the need for the Organization to employ the same strict discipline that Member States applied to themselves. In that connection, the Fifth Committee had agreed on a reduction in the resources allocated for official travel of United Nations staff and representatives for the biennium 2018–2019.

8. Managers must be held accountable for ensuring the judicious use of funds for air travel. In that regard, she noted the recurring overexpenditure in travel budgets and low level of compliance throughout the Organization with the advance purchase policy directive, and looked forward to discussing the proposed single-threshold model for determining the standards of accommodation for air travel. In view of the important role of Umoja in providing the General Assembly with comprehensive information on air travel activities, continued use and implementation that system should be encouraged with a view to further streamlining the Organization's air travel policies and practices. The European Union supported the elimination of entitlement to first class travel throughout the Organization, as they were contrary to the spirit of a modern, accountable, effective and efficient United Nations, particularly given that business class was now functionally equivalent to the first class of the past. While noting the observations contained in the report of JIU (A/72/629) with regard to the persistent fragmentation of air travel policies in the United Nations system and the continued application of overly generous policies in certain parts of the system, her delegation supported the Unit's recommendation that the Secretary-General and CEB should ensure system-wide harmonization of standards of accommodation for air travel and related expenses. In addition, the European Union invited the Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive review of the policy on air travel, including for members of organs, subsidiary organs, committees and councils, as well as for participants in United Nations conferences.

9. **Ms. Norman Chalet** (United States of America) said that, in view of the significant financial implications and the adverse impact of costly travel policies on the Organization's reputation, significant improvements must be made to air travel policies and

practices, in particular by eliminating entitlements to first class travel, as recommended by JIU. Her delegation commended the Secretary-General's efforts to promote cost-conscious travel, including by limiting the number of his own staff accompanying him when travelling, and looked forward to the inclusion in future reports of details on additional measures to modernize air travel policies and systems and on the Secretary-General's interpretation of regulations and rules regarding the use of exceptions to the standards of accommodation. Economy class should be the standard for air travel for the United Nations, in line with the practice of many Member States. The Organization must follow the example of many States, including her own, in adjusting its travel policies to reflect contemporary travel alternatives and budgetary realities, with a view to effectively targeting its resources towards fulfilling its mandates.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.