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Chair: Ms. Bird (Australia)
*Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Sene

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 139: Pattern of conferences ([A/73/32](#), [A/73/93](#) and [A/73/458](#))

1. **Mr. Kafle** (Chair of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2018 ([A/73/32](#)), said that the report contained a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences and the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2019. The Committee on Conferences had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences ([A/73/93](#)). 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 the Committee offered Member States an opportunity to engage with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. Several Member States had been represented as observers at the organizational and substantive sessions of the Committee.

2. The Committee on Conferences had reviewed and adopted the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2019. It had recommended that the General Assembly authorize six bodies to meet during the main part of its seventy-third session. The Committee had reviewed the statistical data on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities. In his capacity as Chair of the Committee, he 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. Letters had been sent to the presiding officers of the 10 calendar bodies concerned. In addition, consultations had been held on ways to improve the utilization factor.

3. With respect to documents management, the Committee on Conferences had discussed the timely processing and issuance of documents. On staffing, the Committee had expressed its support for the signing of more memorandums of understanding and the use of temporary staff, particularly in understaffed language services. With respect to the improvement of facilities and accessibility, the Committee had welcomed the measures taken to ensure access to and use of conference services and facilities by persons with disabilities, and had requested the Secretary-General to continue to address such issues as a matter of priority. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had arranged a tour of the General Assembly Hall so that the Committee could see the accessibility-related improvements that had been made. Lastly, with regard to measuring the quality of conference services, the Committee had received

information from the Secretariat on the feedback received from the global e-surveys.

4. **Ms. Pollard** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences ([A/73/93](#)), said that the report focused on innovations in meetings management, document processing and staffing. A delineation of responsibilities for conference services had been achieved among the four duty stations. The number of non-calendar meetings had continued to increase in New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna, putting tremendous pressure on the resources allocated to calendar meetings. The deteriorating conditions of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi posed an immediate risk to the servicing of the main calendar events hosted in Nairobi, namely the sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

5. The Secretariat was pleased that the General Assembly, in its resolution [72/261](#), had welcomed the reorganization of the Translation Services, which would increase the number of self-revising translators, with a view to improving timeliness while maintaining quality standards. The timely issuance of documents, in particular those submitted for consideration by the Fifth Committee, remained a challenge, although the situation had improved in recent years. Compliance with the six-week rule had risen from 55 per cent during the sixty-eighth session of the Assembly to 72 per cent during the seventy-second session. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management would continue to strive to improve compliance rates, work closely with author departments and prioritize the reports of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

6. **Mr. Sene** (Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee ([A/73/458](#)), said that the Advisory Committee welcomed the harmonized conference management strategy and looked forward to receiving more detailed information regarding future delineations in the delegation of authority and the assessment of individual capacities in conference management. The Advisory Committee also welcomed the initiatives of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and noted that the majority of the projects had been developed and implemented utilizing in-house capacity and expertise.

7. Remote interpretation could potentially have an impact on quality. The Advisory Committee trusted that the Secretary-General would provide additional justification of the proposed remote interpretation pilot project for the consideration of the General Assembly.

8. Regarding the deteriorating condition of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Advisory Committee recommended that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit a proposal for addressing the matter expeditiously.

9. The concept of accessibility had evolved to the extent that the requirements and ramifications encompassed much wider considerations across headquarters locations and other duty stations, as well as considerations for current and future staff members and Member States. Those included recognition of the range of disabilities affecting individuals, access to physical facilities, availability of assistive and accessible technologies, measures to ensure physical and psychological well-being in the workplace, inclusiveness and integration efforts and the provision overall of reasonable accommodation for temporary or permanent conditions. The Advisory Committee trusted that the Secretary-General would consider the breadth of issues associated with the matter of accessibility and the context in which to report annually and in a comprehensive manner.

10. **Mr. Alsayed** (Egypt), 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 importance 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 and 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.

11. 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 been 81 per cent, above the established benchmark of 80 per cent. However, the Group was concerned at the deteriorating conditions of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which were severely hampering its capacity to provide meeting services. The utilization rate of those

conference facilities had fallen to 39 per cent in 2017. The current condition of the conference centre posed an immediate risk to the servicing of the main calendar events hosted in Nairobi. The Group wondered when the issue had come to the attention of the Secretariat and why no solutions had been put forward. The issue must be addressed expeditiously.

12. The Group was pleased that, at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the percentage of available conference resources used in 2017 had remained high, at 90 per cent. However, urgent technological improvements were needed to ensure that ECA maintained its ability to provide cutting-edge conference services, and the premises must be renovated regularly.

13. The Group had taken note of the significant increase in non-calendar meetings held in New York, Geneva and Vienna, and the additional work generated for the meetings management services. The Group looked forward to the results of the study being conducted in New York regarding a cost reimbursement mechanism for cultural activities, meetings and events not related to the intergovernmental process.

14. While the Group acknowledged the initiatives related to the accessibility of persons with disabilities to conference services and facilities, it was of the view that the concept of accessibility had evolved to encompass much wider considerations. The Group urged the Secretary-General to consider the breadth of accessibility issues and to report annually and in a comprehensive manner thereon.

15. The Group acknowledged the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to address staffing challenges. The Group welcomed the innovations in meetings and documents management, and noted that the majority of the projects had been developed and implemented utilizing in-house capacity and expertise. The Group also welcomed the harmonized conference management strategy and looked forward to receiving more detailed information on the agreed delineation of responsibilities regarding conference management across the four duty stations, as well as future delineations in the delegation of authority and the assessment of individual capacities in conference management.

16. **Mr. Al-Maawda** (Qatar) said that his delegation commended the efforts of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Department of Public Information to improve online access to United Nations documents. Qatar attached great importance to the digitization of historical documents. The digitization project would help to

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. Qatar had donated \$5 million to the digitization project over a five-year period starting in 2013, which was evidence of his Government's commitment to empowering the United Nations and promoting its work.

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

Construction and property management

Proposal for the renovation of the North Building at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago (A/73/351 and A/73/457)

17. **Mr. Saunders** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the proposal for the renovation of the North Building at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago (A/73/351), said that the report provided an update on the progress made and set out possible options for meeting the objectives of the project, in particular those relating to energy efficiency and reducing the environmental impact of the building's operation.

18. The project was moving forward as planned. The recruitment of a project manager and an independent risk management firm had been completed, and a stakeholders committee had been established, which was a key aspect of the overall governance structure. The project team at ECLAC was coordinating closely with the Office of Central Support Services and other stakeholders working in substantive areas directly affected by the project.

19. The Office of Internal Oversight Services had conducted an audit of the project in February and March 2018. The Office had reviewed the progress made, the risk management and anti-fraud measures taken, the establishment of the governance structure, and procurement activities. It had concluded that satisfactory management structures were either already in place or were being established by ECLAC and the Office of Central Support Services.

20. The basis of the proposal was to dismantle the envelope and reconstruct the North Building, utilizing the existing structure, to attain a code-compliant, safe, functional and efficient office building. The aim was to extend the useful life of the building and transform it

into a healthy and sustainable working environment. During the design phase, which was due to start in 2019, consideration would be given to how to integrate innovative technologies and energy efficiency solutions, improve space usage efficiency and create additional swing space. The renovated building would be accessible to persons with disabilities and comply fully with international and local health and safety codes, including national seismic codes.

21. The renovation project would reduce energy consumption by 40 per cent and enable the building to self-generate 115 per cent of its energy requirements. The surplus would be redirected within the ECLAC compound, generating further savings. In addition, a wastewater treatment plant would be constructed, enabling 100 per cent of the building's wastewater to be reused for irrigation purposes. The volume of recycled water would meet approximately 57 per cent of the compound's irrigation requirements, which was important as water was a scarce and costly resource in Chile.

22. In line with General Assembly resolutions 70/205 and 71/228, the renovation project was intended to reduce the building's annual greenhouse gas emissions by over 100 tons of carbon dioxide. Once fully operational, the renovated North Building would be an entirely sustainable, "net zero" building, which would demonstrate the Organization's commitment to leading by example. It was recommended that the Assembly approve the proposed overall scope of the project and its maximum cost, appropriate the resources requested for 2019, and approve the establishment of a multi-year account.

23. **Mr. Sene** (Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/73/457), said that the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the actions proposed by the Secretary-General, including the establishment of a multi-year construction-in-progress account. The Advisory Committee reiterated its recommendation for the implementation of strategy 2, namely the "complete building renovation strategy" or a "gut renovation" of the building; however, it was of the view that there was a need to provide further details on the envisaged efficiency gains in the next progress report.

24. The Advisory Committee noted the Secretary-General's intention to mitigate project risks during the design phase and looked forward to the results of the risk analysis. A number of other capital projects were under way in various locations, including at ECA, the

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Office at Geneva. The Advisory Committee encouraged the Secretary-General to share applicable lessons learned with respect to seismic mitigation and energy efficiency, in particular in the context of the transformation of the North Building into a net zero building.

25. **Mr. Ahmed** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, noted with appreciation the support of the people and Government of Chile for ECLAC. The Group trusted that the Secretary-General would continue to engage with the host country to ensure the success of the renovation project. The Group emphasized the relevance of the regional commissions to the work of the Organization. In addition to acting as a regional mouthpiece for the United Nations, ECLAC served as a point of reference for information, ideas and multilateral cooperation in the area of regional development, in line with its historic role as a bastion of support for developing countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

26. Following the earthquake in Chile in 2010, ECLAC had concluded that the North Building, constructed as a temporary structure in 1989, was in need of mitigation measures. The Group was pleased that, despite some setbacks, the overall timeline of the project remained unchanged, with completion expected at the end of 2023.

27. A qualitative risk assessment workshop had been held in July 2018, resulting in a project risk management strategy and a project risk register. A similar workshop would be held in the first quarter of 2019, when more detailed information would be available on the scope and design elements, which would enable the conduct of a risk analysis and the production of a cost-sensitivity chart. The Group trusted that appropriate risk mitigation measures would be put in place, particularly during the design phase.

28. The Group had taken note of the need to establish two temporary positions and one position of Project Coordinator (P-3) at Headquarters, and the proposed revised cost plan. During informal consultations, the Group would seek further information regarding the cost plan, with a view to ensuring that the project was adequately resourced and could be completed on time.

29. It was important to draw on lessons learned from previous capital projects, including the ESCAP seismic mitigation project and the Africa Hall renovation project at ECA, in particular with regard to the use of locally sourced and manufactured materials. Efforts should also be made to adhere to project timelines and cost estimates. The Group was pleased that many of the

required construction materials would be obtained from the region, and agreed with the Advisory Committee regarding the importance of ensuring the use of local materials and labour.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.