

**General Assembly**Distr.: General
6 August 1999

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session

Item 125 of the provisional agenda*

Pattern of conferences**Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States****Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

Meetings held by regional and other major groupings are provided with interpretation services on an as available basis, that is, from existing resources not used owing to the cancellation of meetings of calendar bodies. Certain measures can be taken to improve the chances of services being made available and there has been a marked increase in the percentage of meetings provided with interpretation over the three-year period under review, despite a slight downward trend during the first half of 1999. Also of note is the significant rise in the requests for conference facilities outside normal meeting times.

* A/54/150.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolutions 50/206 A of 23 December 1995 and 51/211 A of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide, within the resources approved for conference services in the bienniums 1996–1997 and 1998–1999, interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, taking into account the priority due to meetings included in the calendar of conferences and meetings, and to submit a report on the implementation of those decisions to the General Assembly, respectively, at its fifty-first and fifty-second sessions through the Committee on Conferences. The Committee fulfilled its reporting requirement through its annual reports to the Assembly. The most recent report on the item (A/53/826) was issued in accordance with paragraph 31 of Assembly resolution 53/208 A of 18 December 1998.
2. Furthermore, in paragraph 28 of resolution 53/208 A, the Assembly decided to include all necessary resources in the budget for the ensuing biennium to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of that decision.
3. The present report, submitted in pursuance of the above request, contains statistics of meetings of regional and other major groupings held from February to June 1999.
4. The General Assembly has mandated the Secretariat to make provision in its requests for resources for the servicing of such groups, while at the same time maintaining its decision that services should be provided on an as available basis, that is, without any servicing capacity being specifically allocated for that purpose.
5. The manner in which the Secretariat has addressed these mandates has derived from the actual practice of calendar bodies. Every biennium, meetings are planned for in its capacity requirements and eventually scheduled. Cancellations of meetings of calendar bodies reduce the number of meetings actually held, thus freeing capacity to service regional and other major groupings.

II. Data

6. For the five-month period from February to end-June 1999, all but one of the 27 requests for the provision of conference services to regional and other major groupings of Member States were met at Geneva, a total of 96 per cent.
7. With regard to New York, for the period from the beginning of February to end-June 1999, 100 per cent of the 510 requests for facilities alone were met. It bears pointing out, however, that this often entailed rescheduling of the dates and times originally targeted and, in some cases, providing a conference room without the sound facilities requested. As to the provision of interpretation services, of 145 requests, 111 were met, a total of 77 per cent.
8. A compilation of the statistics reflected in paragraph 7 above and in paragraph 8 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/826) for the period from July 1998 to end-June 1999 shows that 100 per cent of the 909 requests for facilities alone were met. As to the provision of interpretation services, 262 of 314 requests, or 83 per cent, were met.
9. The reasons for the unavailability of interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings vary, but the most frequent cause is the growing overall demand for ad hoc meetings scheduled by other intergovernmental groups, as evidenced by the week

of 22–26 February when six meetings each were requested by a working group of the International Civil Service Commission and a grouping of Member States on issues related to small island developing States. This was also a week of heavy activity by the Security Council and few cancellations overall, which meant that four of the nine regional groups which met that week were not allocated interpretation services. Another factor which affected overall capacity was the adjustments made in staffing or in overprogramming rates to avoid the possibility of wasting resources. Also of note was a trend towards holding more informal consultations on the part of Charter and mandated bodies which, in accordance with existing mandates, are serviced on a priority basis. The Economic and Social Council, for example, met informally 15 times during the month of June. Also, one regional group which seldom requested services prior to 1999 now requires them on a regular basis.

10. A comparative table of statistics for the three reporting periods follows:

	<i>Interpretation services</i>			<i>Conference facilities</i>	
	<i>Requested</i>	<i>Provided</i>	<i>Not provided</i>	<i>Requested</i>	<i>Provided</i>
July 1996–June 1997	125	85	40	408	407
July 1997–June 1998	348	283	65	535	535
July 1998–June 1999	314	262	52	909	909

11. In an effort to provide services and facilities whenever possible to regional and other major groupings, the Planning and Meetings Servicing Section of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services is in constant contact with the secretaries of intergovernmental bodies with a view to coordinating services so as to accommodate the maximum number of requests. The practice of dovetailing interpretation teams, that is, providing services to two groups within a three-hour time block, is one way of maximizing the efficiency of both time and resources and therefore providing services for as many meetings as possible.

12. The use of facilities without interpretation services during off-peak hours (i.e., prior to 10 a.m., between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. and after 6 p.m.) is now vital to accommodating the burgeoning number of requests from all groups but especially regional and other major groupings. The Group of 77 in particular relies upon meeting outside normal time schedules in order to accomplish its work and this accounts in large part for the steep rise in the use of facilities.

III. Conclusion

13. The percentage of meetings held by regional and other major groupings provided with interpretation services for the period under review has risen from 68 per cent in the first year to 83 per cent in the third year. Further improvement could be realized, however, if calendar bodies would plan their work programmes well in advance, thereby giving the Planning and Meetings Servicing Section of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services the opportunity to juggle scarce resources and programme meetings as efficiently as possible. By the same token, more flexibility on the part of regional groupings in rescheduling meetings to different days and time slots would further increase the likelihood of interpretation services being made available to them.