



# Economic and Social Council

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## Committee for Programme and Coordination

Sixtieth session

8 June–3 July 2020

Agenda item 7

Adoption of the report of the Committee on its sixtieth session

### Draft report

*Rapporteur:* Mr. Felix-Fils **Eboa Ebongue** (Cameroon)

#### Addendum

### Programme questions: proposed programme budget for 2021

(Item 3 (a))

#### Programme 1

#### General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management

1. During its sixtieth session, the Committee considered programme 1, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, of the proposed programme plan for 2021 and programme performance information for 2019 (A/75/6 (Sect. 2)). The Committee also had before it a note by the Secretariat on the Review of the proposed programme plan, by sectoral, functional and regional bodies (E/AC.51/2020/10).

2. The Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, together with other representatives of the Secretary-General, introduced the programme and responded to questions raised by the Committee during its consideration of the programme.

#### Discussion

3. Several delegations expressed appreciation and support for the excellent work of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in general and commended the Department for its compliance with the simultaneous issuance of documents in the six official languages. It was the view of several delegations that multilingualism was a core value of the United Nations, pursued as a means of promoting, protecting and preserving the diversity of languages. Equal treatment of



all official languages in each organ of the United Nations was advocated and satisfaction was expressed to see that principle fully respected by the Department.

4. A delegation expressed the view that it was vital that the requirements of the Department, with regard to both financial and human resources, be met in order to contribute to the efficient, transparent and successful implementation of its objectives. The importance of ensuring the proper functioning of the language sections and preserving the provision of high-quality conference services at all duty stations was stressed. Enquiry was made on the measures taken to ensure that translation services, in Geneva and Nairobi in particular, were comparable in performance to other comparable international services. Another delegation asked for information on the capacities of the locations outside New York, especially Nairobi, for holding meetings.

5. The Department was also commended for the work done on the equal representation of women among staff, as well as for the steps taken to improve disability access, including through its participation in the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. On gender parity, a delegation welcomed reflections on lessons learned that could be shared with other United Nations entities, which, it was hoped, could also achieve that important goal.

6. A delegation welcomed the progress made on modernization and, conscious of the impact resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, emphasized the need for continual innovation to ensure readiness for future scenarios, including security around voting protocols and simultaneous interpretation for virtual meetings. Notwithstanding the difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, another delegation insisted on the need to ensure interpretation into the six official languages in all circumstances, including with the videoconferencing configuration, as was the case for the sessions of the Committee for Programme and Coordination. A delegation expressed surprise regarding the conduct of remote meetings, considering that the practice was not used for every occasion at Headquarters, and congratulated the efforts made, for example in handling simultaneous meetings of the Fifth Committee and the Committee for Programme and Coordination. An inquiry was made concerning the potential use of the positive experience acquired during that period, for example how the tools for remote meetings could be used in the future to enable the holding of meetings at various locations outside the United Nations.

7. Delegations expressed support for the Department's intention to apply an innovative approach to various areas of its work, through technological and other innovations, and stressed the need for such innovations to be introduced step by step and thoroughly analysed and assessed from both organizational and financial perspectives. The top priority should remain unchanged, namely, to ensure the simultaneous availability of all documents and provide conference services in the six official languages. A delegation noted the possibility of using machine-generated translation for documents that were not official United Nations documents, such as the Journal of the United Nations, so that human resources could then be allocated to processing official documents. The same delegation indicated that it valued the work already done with the e-deleGATE portal, noted the usability and usefulness of the platform and asked whether future improvements would be forthcoming, in particular in the development of mobile applications and integration with the Journal.

8. The move towards digital documentation, thereby reducing the environmental impact of United Nations meetings around the world, was welcomed. A question was raised by a delegation on why there was an emphasis on reducing the environmental footprint in Vienna, but very little discussion on the matter in other locations.

9. A delegation enquired about the impact of COVID-19 on the outreach programme with educational institutions across the globe in 2021, especially in

developing countries, as well as the impact of the pandemic on the internship programme in New York. Another delegation expressed support for the Department's work in managing a network of universities that had signed United Nations memorandums of understanding, enabling universities around the world to prepare young and talented experts to work in language sections. In that regard, appreciation was expressed for the significant increase in the number of rostered candidates and applicants resulting from the use of the remote format for language competitive examinations.

10. A delegation underlined the importance of continued access to United Nations facilities for non-governmental organizations, human rights activists, religious minorities and others to peacefully assemble in accordance with existing security and access procedures. A delegation noted the work done to allow access to United Nations sites for various bodies, including civil society organizations, and expressed the view that that was important, under the principle of respect for peaceful assembly, and something it therefore looked forward to continuing to see, as long as it met the necessary security requirements. Another delegation stressed the importance of regulating the use of United Nations premises in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, on the basis of the instructions from United Nations Headquarters published in the administrative instruction on the use of space at Headquarters in New York for meetings, conferences, events and exhibits (ST/AI/2019/4). A question was raised on what could be done to encourage other duty stations, in particular the United Nations Office at Geneva, to review their policies on managing and using United Nations premises and on managing the participation of non-governmental organizations in conferences. A request was made that the Department make available a list of both calendar and non-calendar meetings held at the United Nations, to provide greater transparency and more comprehensive information.

#### **Conclusions and recommendations**

**11. The Committee noted with appreciation the efforts of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in managing and supporting United Nations conferences, meetings and deliberations to enable the effective implementation of United Nations mandates, programmes and operations.**

**12. The Committee reaffirmed the importance of full compliance with the equal treatment of the six official languages of the United Nations and with the simultaneous issuance of documents in the six official languages of the United Nations.**

**13. The Committee noted with appreciation the progress made by the Department in reviewing its internal structure and processes to ensure greater effectiveness in the future.**

**14. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the programme narrative of programme 1, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, of the proposed programme budget for 2021.**