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Chairman: Mr. MacKay (New Zealand)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Kuznetsov

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

Agenda item 112: Pattern of conferences (A/58/435 and Add.1, A/58/620, A/59/32, A/59/133 and Corr.1, A/59/159 and Add.1, A/59/172 and A/59/418)

1. **Mr. Drogenik** (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/59/32), said that the report included specific recommendations to the General Assembly and directives to the Secretariat. All of the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report, including a draft resolution for consideration by the Fifth Committee, had been adopted by consensus.* The Committee on Conferences further recommended that the issue of the biennialization of the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" should be referred to the Fifth Committee.

2. Section I of the draft resolution approved the revised draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2005, subject to provisions within the resolution, and authorized the Committee on Conferences to make any adjustments necessary based on actions or decisions taken during the fifth-ninth session of the General Assembly. Concerns over a scheduling conflict, namely, the overlap between the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme had prompted the Committee on Conferences to recommend a long-term solution for such conflicts, which was set out in paragraph 4 of section I.

3. The overall utilization rate of 77 per cent in 2003 for conference-servicing resources and facilities had improved over the years. He had consulted the chairpersons and secretaries of those bodies which had underutilized their resources in three consecutive years and had urged them to consider changes to their programme of work. He had also noted the need for systematic follow-up of the utilization of conference services by those bodies that consistently underutilized their resources and for fine-tuning the complex methodology for measuring utilization.

* The decision to recommend the draft resolution for adoption by the General Assembly through the Fifth Committee had been made with the hope that consideration of the item would thereby be facilitated.

4. With regard to the utilization of conference facilities and services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNOB), the continued staff vacancies and high ratio of extrabudgetary funding for conference services were causes of concern. The Committee on Conferences also recommended that a review should be conducted of the current established practice for the provision of services to regional groups. The welcome efforts to reform the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management must be aimed to improving the timely delivery of documentation and the quality of conference services and to meet the needs of the Member States in an efficient and cost-effective way. The ongoing comprehensive study of workload standards and performance measurement should be both qualitative and quantitative and should be conducted from a full-system perspective.

5. With regard to the various options concerning summary records, the Secretary-General was requested to present a number of pilot projects and their related practical and financial implications to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. In the draft resolution, the Assembly would also request the Secretary-General to further develop the functions of the Electronic Meetings Planning and Resource Allocation System (e-Meets) and the electronic documentation management concept (e-Doc) and to consider the use of printing on demand for publications.

6. In the discussion of documentation and publication-related matters, familiar concerns had been raised about the equality of the six official languages, delayed and late issuance and distribution of documentation, partial compliance with page limits and late submission of manuscripts for processing. However, the slotting system had produced initial positive effects and could increase accountability within the Secretariat. The partial lapses in the timely provision of documentation to the Fifth Committee, for example, should not discourage efforts to further refine the system. That, combined with stricter compliance with page limits and submission guidelines, the application of limits and guidelines to intergovernmental reports, and restraint by Member States in circulating communications could further contribute to the solution.

7. The draft resolution noted the progress that had been achieved thus far across duty stations in integrating information technology into management and documentation-processing systems and the global

approach to sharing standards, good practices and technological achievements among the conference services at all duty stations and requested the Secretary-General to ensure the compatibility of technologies used in all duty stations and to ensure that they were user-friendly for all official languages. It also recognized the possible benefit of exchanging language staff among duty stations and requested the Secretary-General to report on the conditions of such exchange for the consideration of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

8. **Mr. Chen Jian** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the Secretary-General's reports on the pattern of conferences (A/59/159 and Add.1) and the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172), said that he foresaw the possibility of submitting a single consolidated report to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, which would cover both pattern of conferences and reform issues.

9. Significant progress had been made since the introduction of reform measures two years previously. The transition from conference servicing to conference management was well under way, further integration was being pursued at all levels, information technology strategies had been geared towards the priorities of the reform and a clearer focus on tangible results had emerged. However, the reform of the Department was a process of gradual adjustment and much remained to be done to make substantial headway in a more balanced and sustainable manner.

10. For many years, crisis had been a fact of life within the Department and crisis management was its primary modus operandi. Accordingly, the problems currently facing the Department could be solved only by bringing the chaos under control through proactive conference management. However, as a servicing department whose operations were largely influenced by those of the other departments of the Secretariat, Member States and intergovernmental bodies, there was a limit to what the Department could do alone. Just as it was only part of the problem, it could at best be only part of the solution. The success of its efforts depended, to a large extent, on joining efforts with the rest of the Secretariat and with Member States.

11. In that regard, the Fifth Committee had an important role to play, in both legislative and practical

terms, in creating the necessary conditions for the Secretariat to achieve results. In particular, clearer encouragement was needed for the efforts of the Secretariat to consolidate reports, enforce the 20-page limit for reports not within its purview, ensure respect for the drafting guidelines issued in the context of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, and encourage Member States to exercise restraint in their communications. With regard to the availability of documentation, there should be better interaction with meetings planning services in order to coordinate the programmes of work of the various intergovernmental bodies with documentation processing needs. The Assembly's continued support and guidance were needed for the Department's efforts at integrated global management and on the direction to go in handling the question of summary records. The Assembly's endorsement was also sought for pursuing the study on workload standards and performance measurement from a full-system perspective.

12. **Mr. Ouédraogo** (Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "From the Optical Disk System to the Official Documents System (ODS): status of implementation and evaluation" (A/58/435), said that the original Optical Disk System had been introduced following a series of Joint Inspection Unit reports in 1986, 1987 and 1989, and had become operational in both Geneva and New York in the biennium 1991-1992. Since then, it had been extended to other duty stations and had expanded so much that it had been succeeded by the current ODS in 1999, with navigation and search facilities no longer restricted to English and French, but available instead in the six official languages of the United Nations.

13. Most of the report's eight recommendations were addressed to the Secretary-General, with the remainder addressed to the General Assembly. The Secretary-General had accepted all of the recommendations addressed to him and the general progress made towards implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit was described in the annexes to the report.

14. With regard to policy issues, recommendation 1 proposed that the Assembly should reaffirm the need for implementation of ODS to cover the entire organization, including all the regional commissions and UNON. Recommendation 2 proposed that the Secretary-General should remind all units responsible

for posting documents on ODS of the need to abide strictly by the simultaneous distribution rule established by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/117 B and subsequent resolutions. Recommendation 3 concerned the possible revision of the policy of fee-for-service access to ODS, though the General Assembly had since forestalled that recommendation by approving the financial provisions made in the programme budget for 2004-2005.

15. With regard to management issues, recommendation 4, which was supported by the Advisory Committee, proposed that the Secretary-General should report to Member States on the progress and cost of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library project to digitize all documents published between 1946 and 1992 in order to preserve the Organization's "institutional memory". Recommendation 5 proposed that the Secretary-General should review the overall process of the management of ODS, including whether the inputting of documents should revert to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management so as to keep the global chain of document management intact. Recommendation 6 proposed that, in order to widen awareness of ODS and to increase its multilingual content, more hyperlinks should be placed on the web sites of all departments, regional commissions and organizations for which relevant documents were posted on ODS. Recommendation 7 proposed that the Secretary-General should take steps to improve user satisfaction and the user-friendliness of ODS, and recommendation 8 proposed that he should include in the Organization's information and communication technology strategy all relevant aspects of the implementation of ODS in offices away from Headquarters and ensure that future development of the System was part of a coherent and coordinated approach to electronic document management at the United Nations.

16. **Ms. Mabutas** (Director of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management), introducing the related report of the Secretary-General (A/58/435/Add.1), said that the Secretariat had responded positively to the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit. It was committed to providing the regional commissions and other offices away from Headquarters with full access to the system and had made further development of ODS an integral part of the Organization's information and communication technology strategy.

17. Good progress had been made in implementing the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit. In connection with recommendation 1, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and UNON now had the capacity to input documents into the system. In connection with recommendation 3, links had been established so that the Google search engine could provide access to ODS documents via the Organization's public web site. With regard to free public access, additional equipment had been installed, configured and tested to increase the capacity of ODS and a new web interface would provide open access to public documents on ODS without the need for a user ID or password. The target date for implementation of those improvements was the end of 2004.

18. **Ms. Azarias** (Director of the Internal Audit Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General regarding the Office of Internal Oversight Services report on the integration of global management of conference services (A/59/133 and Corr.1), said that, in response to a request for consulting services from the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Office had held workshops in the Organization's four duty stations to identify obstacles to full integration of conference services. All of the recommendations contained in the report had been developed jointly with the Department.

19. Diverse management practices and policies had been developed in the four duty stations because there had been no consistent determination of where responsibility for conference services resided. To overcome that problem, the Office had proposed a collaborative model in which policies and practices would be developed jointly across all four duty stations. As a first step towards implementing the model, nine task forces were to be formed covering all relevant areas. Five high-priority task forces would submit reports in 2004 and the remainder would do so in 2005. The final result envisioned was a Department-wide manual of practices and procedures. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had fully endorsed the recommendations in the report and had begun to implement many of them.

20. **Mr. Maycock** (Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related reports of the Advisory Committee on

Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) contained in documents A/59/418 and A/58/620, said that the Advisory Committee's primary concerns regarding the report on pattern of conferences (A/59/418) were the problems encountered with the implementation of the slotting system and the unreliability of raw statistics for analysing the utilization of conference resources. With regard to the vacancy situation, the Advisory Committee felt that greater attention should be paid to succession planning. The impact of information technology tools on the work of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management had been uneven and more needed to be done to ensure that the use of new technology led to efficiency gains and reflected the needs and experience of its users.

21. Greater efforts were also needed to raise the performance and productivity of individual staff members by, inter alia, linking staff training programmes with workload standards and performance measurement.

22. **Mr. Elkhuisen** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro) and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that conference services were instrumental to the success of the Organization's work. Since the resources required in that area represented a substantial share of the regular budget, the European Union placed great value on the principles of effectiveness, efficiency and quality of the services provided.

23. The report of the Committee on Conferences (A/59/32) contained many positive, forward-looking elements, including the consultations held by the Chairman of the Committee with those bodies that consistently underutilized their allocated resources. In addition, the draft resolution annexed to the report would substantially facilitate the work of the Fifth Committee on the issue during the current session of the Assembly.

24. With regard to the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the introduction of e-Meets and the progress made with e-Docs were valuable steps in the right direction. The

European Union was looking forward to the completion of the comprehensive study of the integrated global management of conference services and the study on workload standards and performance measurement. It also supported the development of pilot projects designed to bring about more efficient and cost-effective delivery of summary records.

25. One of the main challenges facing the Secretariat was to find a balance between improving the quality of documents and their timely issuance and delivering them in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Significant progress had been made in that regard, in particular through the strict implementation of the slotting system, the electronic transmission of documents and printing on demand, but there was still room for improvement. The negative impact of the late issuance of documents or their non-availability on the functioning of intergovernmental and expert bodies could not be underestimated.

26. Lastly, while the risks associated with the proposed biennialization of the agenda item entitled "Pattern of conferences" seemed minimal, the benefits seemed substantial. The profile of the Committee on Conferences would be enhanced and its annual sessions would be maintained. In addition, the workload of the Fifth Committee would be lessened and the Secretariat would have more time to analyse and assess new and emerging trends.

27. **Mr. Al-Ansari** (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the general increase in the utilization of conference services at the different duty stations, but expressed regret at the continued decrease in the number of meetings held by regional groups that were provided with interpretation. The Group of 77 and China endorsed the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences aimed at improving the provision of interpretation services to those meetings.

28. The Group was deeply concerned about the disproportionately high vacancy rates in the translation and interpretation services at UNON. The continued failure to fill those vacancies should be addressed through the implementation of accountability measures to ensure that all duty stations were treated equally. The Secretary-General must take the necessary steps to address current disparities in the level of conference services provided to delegations at non-Headquarters duty stations. Nearly half of the resources allocated to

conference services at UNON, for example, came from extrabudgetary funding. Immediate action should be taken to remedy that situation and to bring the financial arrangements of UNON into line with those of similar duty stations.

29. The late issuance of documentation was another issue of concern to the Group, particularly in view of its negative impact on the legislative process. Author departments were therefore urged to comply with the 10-week rule for the submission of documents and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to redouble its efforts to ensure strict compliance with the six-week rule for their issuance. However, any reduction in the length of reports should not affect their quality or content and should be conducted in a non-selective manner. Timely and easy access to documents in the six official languages was essential to the success of the intergovernmental process. Summary and verbatim records were particularly important tools for preserving institutional memory and the continuous delays in their issuance were a matter of some concern.

30. **Ms. Ebbesen** (United States of America) said that her delegation hoped that Member States would avoid a protracted debate on the draft resolution submitted by the Committee on Conferences. It supported the biennialization of the item in order to promote better working practices in the Fifth Committee while allocating appropriate time to what was an important topic. It endorsed the comments on that subject made by the Secretary-General in his report.

31. Although in most cases the author departments were responsible for the late issuance of documents, her delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that the slotting system had become an obstacle to timely issuance. It also agreed with the Committee on Conferences that the programmes of work of the Main Committees should be better coordinated with documentation-processing needs. But the Main Committees themselves, including the Fifth Committee, needed to do a better job of limiting requests for documentation.

32. Where the problems of summary records were concerned, her delegation supported the request contained in the draft resolution that the Secretary-General should consult bodies with entitlement to summary records with a view to assessing the

continued need for such records. The concentration of précis-writing in the English Service would also help to reduce delays in translation. The possibility of replacing summary records with digital records should certainly be explored as a timely and cost-effective alternative.

33. The United States delegation remained concerned about the lack of progress in the Task Force on Workload Standards and Performance Management and, like the Advisory Committee, was not convinced that the Department had made sufficient efforts to raise the performance of individual staff members. Despite the improvements achieved by the Department through the application of information technology, efficiency gains could never be fully realized until appropriate workload standards and performance measurements were implemented. On a more positive note, her delegation welcomed the Department's successful development of the system of integrated global management at the four duty stations and looked forward to reviewing the findings of the nine task forces. It also noted with appreciation the savings resulting from the introduction of printing on demand.

34. **Mr. Iosifov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation was following the reform of the Department closely. While it welcomed the initial steps taken in improving the use of information technology, any innovation should be carefully analysed to ensure full-system benefits, taking into account the unique nature of each duty station. In the past, it had cautioned that existing working methods must not be swept away without a reliable alternative and new methods must undergo small-scale testing to ensure that any problems did not cause widespread harm. Its fears had been confirmed by the Advisory Committee, which had described the problems caused by the slotting system. The Secretariat should take action to address the current problems of the late issuance of documents.

35. Extreme care should also be taken in reforming the working methods of the language services. As the Advisory Committee had pointed out, the introduction of new technology had not automatically increased productivity in those services. It should not be assumed that methods tested in other departments could be used in the language services, whose tasks were often not amenable to automation.

36. The quality of translation remained a concern. Documents in Russian, including even Security

Council and General Assembly resolutions, contained inaccuracies, omissions and distortions of meaning. Different documents on a single subject used different terminology. Interpretation from Russian into English, while satisfactory in the Security Council, was often not so in other bodies. Some interpreters surprisingly lacked knowledge of the basic vocabulary of particular committees. The management of the Interpretation Service should remind interpreters of the need to prepare for meetings and to read documents in advance.

37. In the absence of any reliable qualitative or quantitative performance indicators for the language services, Member States' satisfaction remained the only test of quality. The Department should find ways of keeping track of such user satisfaction. One possible solution was to hold the information meetings twice rather than once a year. The results of those meetings should not be wasted. In that connection, the Department's initiative to establish a web site for user feedback on the quality of service and terminology was a welcome step.

38. One of the influences on stable quality of service was the suitability of the working conditions and resources of the language services. The uneven distribution of human and financial resources among the language services was a concern which the Department must address. With regard to the global management of conference services, rigid centralization must be avoided. There must instead be a balanced division of labour among duty stations, with the Department in a coordinating role, ensuring efficient use of potential.

39. The way to make genuine improvements in the quality of conference services was to adopt a balanced, individualized approach to the reform of divisions, while constantly monitoring full-system progress. Obviously ineffective and obsolete working methods and technologies must be replaced in an evolutionary manner and step-by-step with proven and tested new working methods and technologies.

40. **Mr. Kutty** (India) commended the work of the Committee on Conferences, particularly the draft resolution on pattern of conferences it had recommended for adoption by the General Assembly (A/59/32, annex I), which would facilitate the Committee's consideration of the item. The consolidation of reports and reduction in the number of

reports originating in the Secretariat were legitimate issues that Member States needed to examine. However, it was also necessary to consider how to deal with reports that were not within the Secretariat's purview. Reiterating his delegation's concern about the late issuance of documentation, he called on the Secretariat to ensure that documents were delivered in a timely fashion by increasing efficiency and accurately projecting the resources required to handle the workload at any given time.

41. With regard to the slotting system, the Department should hold consultations with the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies and author departments with a view to introducing a measure of flexibility. He trusted that the interdepartmental task force would address that issue. Reports pertaining to matters of a time-bound nature should be prioritized so that delegates were able to give them due consideration. The Department should also set aside sufficient capacity to produce reports requested by the Committee at the first and second parts of the resumed session for consideration at the main part of the subsequent session of the General Assembly.

42. Greater use of information technology could lead to efficiency gains in the Department's work. However, it was important to conduct adequate training and testing beforehand so as to avoid the teething problems experienced with the introduction of electronic processing of documentation and other such innovations. Also, as the Advisory Committee had stated, some areas of work, including editing, translation and interpretation, were not readily amenable to automation.

43. There was a need for more predictable provision of conference services to meetings of regional and other major groupings, since the percentage of such meetings provided with conference services had actually gone down. The proposal to produce utilization statistics for meetings of regional groups was illogical, since conference services were provided for such meetings on an as-available basis rather than being earmarked for that purpose.

44. The problems with the delivery of summary records had persisted for too long. His delegation welcomed the options proposed in the report of the Secretary-General on reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172). The relevant provisions of the draft

resolution proposed by the Committee on Conferences could also provide a way forward.

45. **Mr. Elji** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, in order to improve the delivery of conference services, the Secretariat must find a way to ensure the timely issuance of documents while maintaining high standards and respecting the principles of multilingualism. Although significant measures had been taken to that end in the context of the reform process, they had not produced the expected results, primarily as a result of the failure of relevant departments to cooperate and the vulnerability of the Organization's accountability system.

46. Through the regular budget, the General Assembly provided the financial resources necessary to enable the Secretariat to service the conference management needs of Member States. However, in spite of the efforts of Member States to facilitate its work through the revitalization of the working methods of the General Assembly, frequent delays in the issuance of documents continued to be experienced. It was particularly unfortunate that the Secretariat had, on several occasions, failed to justify those delays and had attempted to divert the blame for its shortcomings onto Member States.

47. In order to improve matters, the slotting system must be further developed, since it lacked the needed flexibility and had become an obstacle to the timely issuance of required documents. Moreover, printing on demand, an important element of the reform process designed primarily to reduce paper usage, had been implemented in parallel to traditional printing methods rather than as a replacement, thereby doubling the cost of issuing documents and further delaying the process. He welcomed the introduction of electronic bulletin boards to publicize the times and locations of meetings but suggested that meetings should be listed according to the importance of the legislative mandate of the body concerned. The electronic equipment used in conference rooms should also be updated.

48. The implementation of page limits was a cause for concern, since reducing the length of reports often brought about a decline in their quality. Moreover, requests for supplementary information prolonged the negotiation process and the need to obtain official approval for exceeding prescribed limits further contributed to delays in the issuance of documents. The

Secretariat should also provide an explanation for its violations of the rule of simultaneous distribution.

49. On the question of summary records, the Secretary-General's report on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172) did not accurately reflect the Assembly's objectives in that regard, since it had merely requested a cost-benefit study of summary records to be conducted. Furthermore, while the report placed appropriate emphasis on the fact that summary records were an important form of institutional memory, it also made illogical claims regarding their financing, since the Secretariat had not requested additional funding for conference services during the negotiations on the programme budget for the current biennium, and should therefore be able to fulfil its mandate in a satisfactory manner within existing resources.

50. The use of new technologies should be encouraged with a view to improving the efficiency and reliability of conference services. However, their use must not be regarded as an end in itself but rather as a means to enable the Secretariat to fulfil its existing mandate while enhancing the quality and timely delivery of services. Despite its positive attitude towards new technologies, the Administration seemed unable to find a way to use them to solve the problems associated with the drafting of summary records. He recalled that the Committee on Information had recognized that technological infrastructures in the United Nations were based on Latin script, which led to difficulties in processing non-Latin and bidirectional scripts. That situation produced serious imbalances in the treatment of the official languages and further consideration should be given to ways of remedying it.

51. A number of vacancies still remained in the interpretation services at UNON, despite the General Assembly's repeated calls for the expeditious filling of the vacant posts. Decisive measures must be taken to rectify the situation and, in that regard, he enquired about the outcome of the recent competitive examination for Arabic interpreters.

52. Lastly, his delegation took note of the report on the integration of global management of conference services (A/59/133) but requested further information. It also endorsed the recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "From the Optical Disk System to the Official Documents System

(ODS): status of implementation and evaluation” (A/58/435 and Add.1) and the relevant recommendations of ACABQ and enquired whether all documents in ODS would eventually be made available free of charge to the general public.

53. **Mr. Chen Jian** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management) said that his Department would give full answers to the questions raised at the end of the discussion, but he would comment immediately on the slotting system. There was probably no dispute as to the system’s value, but its operation needed to be explained more clearly by the Secretariat. The slotting system was a tool for planning the submission of documents and the Department’s capacity to process and issue them. The planning process brought together the three main actors, namely, the submitting department, his own Department, and the intergovernmental body concerned. It allowed the submitting department to know when an item was to be taken up, the Department to assess the processing requirements, and the intergovernmental body to understand the whole pre-issuance procedure. The process thus enhanced accountability within the United Nations system. The statistics already confirmed that the submitting departments now understood the situation better and were submitting more documents under the slotting system.

54. In 2004, the first full year of the system’s operation, the three main actors had decided not to entertain “reslotting”. There would be no change in slotted dates regardless of the circumstances. The 2004 figures indicated in fact a lower rate of compliance with slotted dates, but that did not mean that the submitting departments were any less aware of the need for timely submission of manuscripts for processing.

55. With regard to the alleged inflexibility of the slotting system, it should be noted that the system was based on the inflexible 10-week rule, which allowed four weeks for processing. That inflexibility carried over in principle into the slotting system, but in practice the Department tried to accommodate the actual needs.

56. Since only 40 per cent of the current workload was “slottable”, the Department had to combine the slotted workload with a forecast workload, based on past experience, for the other 60 per cent. It needed to

improve its handling of that larger part of the workload. But the slotting system, as the Committee on Conferences had noted, had proved initially successful. It would perform even better in the future. Of course, the Department could never comply fully with the 10-week rule, but the late issuance of documents was usually due to external factors. For example, the submitting departments often had to seek inputs from programmes or agencies or await replies from Governments. That was an area in which improvement would be very helpful.

Agenda item 153: Financing of the United Nations Operation in Burundi (A/59/300 and A/59/412)

57. **Ms. Pollard** (Director of the Peacekeeping Financing Division), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the budget for the United Nations Operation in Burundi for the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 (A/59/300), said that the Secretary-General’s proposed budget for the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) for the full period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 amounted to \$333.2 million, which provided for the phased deployment of 200 military observers, 5,450 military contingent personnel, 120 civilian police, 403 international and 423 national staff, and 172 United Nations Volunteers. The budget also provided for the transfer from the strategic deployment stock of various categories of equipment with a replacement value of \$13.6 million. The action to be taken by the General Assembly was set out in paragraph 102 of the report.

58. **Mr. Maycock** (Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee’s report on the item (A/59/412), said that the Advisory Committee had identified reductions totalling \$3.5 million in the Secretary-General’s request and had made observations and recommendations on the administration and management of ONUB and on opportunities for further savings.

59. In paragraphs 5 to 7 of its report, the Advisory Committee commented on the results-based budgeting format and described the proposed structure of ONUB. That structure was discussed further in paragraphs 16 to 20, where the Advisory Committee’s remarks closely tracked the concerns expressed in its report on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) (A/59/390) with regard to a model structure for current and future missions.

60. The recommendations on posts, contained in paragraph 21 of the report, took account of the Advisory Committee's concerns with regard to structure and were intended to be consistent with its recommendations on other missions.

61. A number of comments on operational costs were set out in paragraphs 22 to 28 of the report. The Advisory Committee was expecting the performance report on ONUB to show savings on travel of staff and rental of premises. It also called for more precision in the methodology for estimating requirements for spare parts and for a review of arrangements for rental of vehicles. With regard to communications and information technology, the Advisory Committee cautioned that, when planning its acquisition of computers and other equipment, ONUB should take into account the actual incumbency situation and pace of mission deployment. It also commented on the need to develop a consistent policy with regard to hospitality expenses.

62. Electoral assistance was dealt with in paragraphs 30 to 31 of the report. The Advisory Committee stressed the importance of starting quick-impact projects at the earliest stages of mission deployment.

63. It concluded by recommending an estimate of \$329,714,400 for ONUB for the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005, inclusive of the previously granted commitment authority of \$106,334,600 for the period from 1 July to 31 October 2004.

64. **Mr. Postema** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that the European Union had set out its general views on policy in its statement on the financing of peacekeeping operations under agenda items 129 and 155. It now supported the Advisory Committee's comments on ONUB and commended the Secretariat for its use of the results-based budgeting framework for the Operation. It urged the Secretariat to make further use of that framework to improve the indicators for measuring achievement and outputs. The Secretariat was to be commended on the high degree of cooperation between ONUB and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo (MONUC). The question of cooperation between missions in a given region should be explored further.

65. The European Union was concerned about the vacancy rate for national staff of more than 60 per cent and urged the Secretariat to address the problem. It was also concerned about the replication of functions in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and in other ONUB offices.

66. The European Union fully endorsed the Advisory Committee's comments on the number of posts. While recognizing the requirements of the Operation and the need for the Special Representative to have appropriate numbers of personnel, it sought further justification for the number of posts from the Secretariat.

67. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the Group welcomed the Secretary-General's budget proposal for ONUB, which reflected the resources required for successful implementation of its multidimensional mandate. It was imperative for the Committee to provide a solid foundation for the work of the peacekeeping operation. The Group would consider the Advisory Committee's recommendations further during the informal consultations, when the Secretariat should provide a detailed explanation of the potential impact of any reductions on the work of ONUB.

68. It was to be inferred from paragraph 21 of its report that the Advisory Committee's proposed reductions to the staffing table of ONUB were similar to those proposed for MINUSTAH. However, while both missions were multidimensional, they had very different mandates. The model used by the Secretariat to determine mission structure should therefore be applied flexibly and the Advisory Committee should examine the resource requirements of the two missions on a case-by-case basis. The Group looked forward to further elaboration by the Advisory Committee on the comments contained in paragraphs 16 to 21 of its report and their specific application to ONUB.

69. Most of the staffing adjustments proposed by the Advisory Committee were in the Offices of the Special Representative and the two Deputy Special Representatives. It should be remembered that the Special Representative also chaired the Implementation Monitoring Committee for the Arusha Agreement, and the Group cautioned against any decision that might

weaken the Offices in the crucial early stages of the deployment of ONUB.

70. The Group did not understand the reasoning behind the proposal to downgrade one of the posts of Deputy Special Representative to the D-2 level. The Deputy Special Representative in question would serve both as Resident Coordinator and as Humanitarian Coordinator, as well as overseeing substantive components of the Operation. The tasks assigned to him would have a crucial impact on the fulfilment of the mandate of ONUB. Furthermore, it was estimated that as many as 500,000 refugees might return to Burundi over the next three years, and the Secretary-General had reported that the return and resettlement of internally displaced persons and refugees would constitute a major humanitarian challenge. Since those matters also fell within the purview of the Deputy Special Representative, the post should be maintained at the appropriate level to ensure the effective functioning of the Operation.

71. The African Group shared the Advisory Committee's opinion of the importance of undertaking quick-impact projects. The ones identified in the budget proposal would enhance public confidence in and goodwill towards ONUB. It also shared the Advisory Committee's concern about the slow pace of recruitment of national staff; urgent steps should be taken to address that problem.

72. Sustainable peace in Burundi was necessary for long-term stability in the Great Lakes region. The close cooperation between ONUB and MONUC was therefore encouraging and should be continued. In view of the expanded role for MONUC provided for in Security Council resolution 1565 (2004), its resources might soon come under considerable strain. ONUB should therefore be helped to develop further its own capacities.

73. **Mr. Nteturuye** (Burundi) said that ONUB had a crucial role to play in the continuation and completion of the peace process in Burundi. It must be provided with adequate human, financial and logistical resources, taking into account its multidimensional mandate and the conditions on the ground. Those resources must also reflect, to the extent possible, his Government's priorities for the transition period: restoration of security throughout the territory; provision of assistance to returnees and internally displaced persons; and successful implementation of

the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme, which, together with the political process, would be a decisive factor in the outcome of the peace process. In addition, ONUB would require sufficient resources to support election preparations and to monitor both the electoral campaigns and the voting in the seven elections that were to be held.

74. Burundians were confronted with the harsh realities of poverty. Many citizens had no access to basic social infrastructure, much of which had been destroyed during the conflict. While his Government, aided by donors, bore the primary responsibility for reconstruction and economic recovery, ONUB could facilitate that process by implementing quick-impact projects. Such projects would also help ONUB gain acceptance among the population. His delegation had therefore been surprised to learn that only \$1 million had been allocated for that purpose. It was also concerned about the slow pace of recruitment of national staff. Greater use of national staff would contribute to the reduction of unemployment in Burundi and create goodwill towards ONUB, while lowering the mission's costs. Given the subregional dimension of the conflict in Burundi, adequate resources should be provided for the establishment of a permanent dialogue among the Governments of the region and officials in border areas.

75. Concerning the Advisory Committee's recommendations for reductions to the proposed budget for ONUB, the Organization would surely not enhance its image in the region by cutting the mission's resources even before it got off the ground. He therefore urged delegations to approve the budget as proposed by the Secretary-General.

76. **Mr. Shalita** (Rwanda) said that the situation in Burundi was unique and challenging: the country had experienced long periods of civil strife, economic decline and social upheaval; some two thirds of the population lived below the poverty line; there was widespread displacement; and the transition process remained fragile. The task of ONUB was therefore complex and multidimensional, and it was important to ensure that the new mission had sufficient human and financial resources to implement its broad mandate.

77. His delegation welcomed the budget and civilian staffing proposals for ONUB. It recognized that having the right people in the right jobs was critical for the success of the mission and the peace process in

Burundi. In that connection, he noted that in its recommendations on posts, the Advisory Committee had referred to its report on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) (A/59/390). It was not advisable, however, to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to peacekeeping missions. Rather, the structure of each mission should be dictated by its mandate and the conditions on the ground.

78. He noted with concern that the Advisory Committee recommended the abolition or downgrading of several key posts in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Weakening her Office would undermine the capacity of the Special Representative to discharge her many important functions. Accordingly, the posts of Political Affairs Officer (P-4) and Protocol Officer (P-3) should be retained, while the post of Director of the Office should be established at the D-1 level, as proposed by the Secretary-General. As the representative of South Africa had stated, the post of Deputy Special Representative (Humanitarian and Development Coordination) should be maintained at the Assistant Secretary-General level, taking into account the post holder's responsibilities in the crucial areas of human rights, child protection, gender and HIV/AIDS. Public information was an important and sensitive aspect of post-conflict peace-building. The Communications and Public Information Office should therefore be headed at the D-1 level, while the post of Spokesperson should be retained.

79. His delegation concurred with the Advisory Committee that quick-impact projects should be implemented in the early stages of the mission. The projects identified in the proposed budget would help build public confidence in ONUB. The 64.5 per cent vacancy rate for national staff was a cause for concern. While cooperation between ONUB and MONUC was welcome, it was important for ONUB to develop its own capacity, especially since MONUC now had an expanded role and would fully utilize its own resources.

80. Lastly, his delegation wished to underscore the importance of the success of ONUB to peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region. The mission had a critical role to play and should therefore be given the resources it needed to discharge its mandate effectively.

81. **Mr. Mumbey-Wafula** (Uganda) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statements made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group and by the representatives of Burundi and Rwanda. Uganda had been deeply affected by the conflict in the Great Lakes region and was closely involved in the efforts to achieve a sustainable and lasting peace. His delegation broadly supported the proposed budget and staffing requirements for ONUB. The Secretary-General's proposal to establish the post of Deputy Special Representative (Humanitarian and Development Coordination) at the Assistant Secretary-General level was entirely appropriate given the realities of the situation on the ground. It was not clear to him, however, what provision had been made for the personal protection of the parties in the peace process for Burundi.

82. **Mr. Ng'ongolo** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statements made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group and by the representatives of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's budget proposal for ONUB, which reflected his clear understanding of the unique situation in Burundi. It was grateful to Member States that had met their financial obligations in respect of the mission and urged other Member States to do likewise. His Government would continue to contribute to efforts to bring peace to Burundi, including by establishing close cooperation with ONUB.

83. The United Republic of Tanzania shared a land border with Burundi and had long been a haven for refugees from that country. His delegation therefore noted with satisfaction the progress achieved in the political process in Burundi, which had led to the voluntary repatriation of more than 65,000 Burundian refugees in 2004. However, approximately 777,000 refugees remained in the United Republic of Tanzania, placing a tremendous strain on the already impoverished host communities. His delegation therefore attached great importance to ONUB and was ready to support any proposal that would enable the mission to implement its mandate effectively and expeditiously.

84. **Ms. Samayoa-Recari** (Guatemala) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement

made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group.

85. **Mr. Elji** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group. It also shared the concerns expressed by the representative of Burundi. It supported the Secretary-General's budget proposal for ONUB. The Advisory Committee's recommendations for the application of a model structure for peacekeeping missions would require careful analysis. The Committee could revert to the matter at the second part of the resumed fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly when it considered cross-cutting issues in the operational aspects of peacekeeping. In the meantime, it should focus on ensuring that ONUB had sufficient resources to discharge its mandate.

86. **Mr. Renault** (Brazil) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the African Group.

87. **Ms. Pollard** (Director of the Peacekeeping Financing Division) said that her office would give a detailed account of the reasons for the high vacancy rate for national staff in ONUB during the informal consultations. It would also explain the justification for the posts in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the likely impact on the mission should the Committee endorse the recommendations of ACABQ. Personal protection for the parties in the peace process was being provided under a bilateral arrangement. Accordingly, no resources had been allocated for that purpose.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.