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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 20 October 2014, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Ružička (Slovakia)
*Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Chernikov

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 133: Programme planning (*continued*)
(A/C.5/69/L.4)

Draft resolution A/C.5/69/L.4: Programme planning

1. *Draft resolution A/C.5/69/L.4 was adopted.*

Agenda item 135: Pattern of conferences (A/69/32, A/69/120 and A/69/527)

2. **Mr. Goren** (Chair of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2014 (A/69/32), said that the report contained a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences and a draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2015, which were recommended for adoption by the General Assembly. The Committee on Conferences had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/69/120), which had been issued within the mandated time frame and was within the word limit for reports originating in the Secretariat. The report of the Committee on Conferences offered a comprehensive summary of the discussions held during its substantive session, which had again been conducted in a paper-smart fashion, with all documents posted on a dedicated website, and laptops, technical support and print-on-demand services provided by the Secretariat. The annual substantive session offered Member States an opportunity to engage with the senior management of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management with a view to providing guidance and support to the Secretariat in carrying out its mandates.

3. With regard to the request to add Yom Kippur to the list of official holidays of the United Nations, which had been made in a letter dated 30 June 2014 from the representatives of 32 Member States addressed to the Chair of the Committee on Conferences (A/AC.172/2014/3), the Committee on Conferences had requested the Secretary-General to report to the Fifth Committee at the main part of the sixty-ninth session of the Assembly on the modalities and criteria for approving additional official holidays.

4. The Committee on Conferences had reviewed the statistical data on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities at the four main duty stations and at the Conference Centre of the Economic Commission for Africa. In addition, he had reported on

his mandate to hold consultations with the four intergovernmental bodies whose utilization factor had fallen below the 80 per cent benchmark over the previous three consecutive years, from 2011 to 2013. He had met with the representatives of the Committee on Contributions, the Committee on Information and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, while the Secretary of the Committee on Conferences had held a separate consultation with the Assistant Secretary of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund owing to the unavailability of the President of the Board.

5. The Committee on Contributions had employed all the suggestions made by the Committee on Conferences and had improved its utilization factor from 71 per cent in 2013 to 88 per cent in 2014. It had also reduced the number of planned meetings from 30 to 22, cancelled interpretation services for an additional four meetings at a point in the session when informal consultations could be expected and reduced to two hours the time required for two further meetings when the programme had been predictably lighter. The Committee on Information had agreed to make greater efforts to start meetings on time and to consider reducing meeting blocks to two hours when members were likely to need informal consultations before a meeting. As a result, the utilization factor of that Committee had increased from 65 per cent in 2013 to 75 per cent in 2014. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations had increased its utilization factor to 79 per cent in 2014 compared to 51 per cent in 2013. The Assistant Secretary of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund had agreed to raise the matter with the Board's Bureau in order to raise awareness of the need for more efficient utilization and a reduction in the number of meetings. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/251, the report identified those bodies that had consistently underutilized conference resources over the previous 10 years and the Committee on Conferences had made specific suggestions to the secretariat of each body on how to improve its utilization.

6. With regard to the impact of the last phase of the capital master plan on meetings held at Headquarters, the lessons learned from the early phases had been implemented in the renovation of the General Assembly Building. The Committee on Conferences had discussed the need to continue to improve information technology support for conferences and

access to conference services and facilities for persons with disabilities.

7. On integrated global management, the global document management system, gDoc, had been rolled out in New York and Geneva, and the computer-assisted translation suite, gText, had been rolled out in New York and Vienna and was being launched in Geneva. The information warehouse, gData, would be fully operational by the end of 2014 and all four duty stations were using gMeets, the electronic meetings management system, to manage their meeting resources. In its draft resolution, the Committee on Conferences reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to include in his next report on the pattern of conferences information about the financial savings achieved through the implementation of the integrated global management projects.

8. During their discussion of documentation and publication-related matters, delegations had expressed concern about the late issuance of certain documents for the Fifth Committee. Updated information on the PaperSmart initiative had been provided by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management at the request of delegations. On translation and interpretation, the Committee on Conferences requested the Secretary-General to redouble his efforts to ensure the highest quality of interpretation and translation in all six official languages. It also requested the Secretary-General to make further concerted efforts to promote outreach through, *inter alia*, traineeships and internships, and to introduce innovative methods to increase awareness of the programmes, including through partnerships with Member States, relevant international organizations and language institutions in all regions, in particular Africa and Latin America. In addition, it reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to provide adequate staff at the appropriate level at all duty stations with a view to ensuring appropriate quality control of contractual translations, with due consideration of the principle of equal grade for equal work.

9. **Mr. Gettu** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/69/120), said that the staff of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management at the four main duty stations provided critical services for the intergovernmental deliberations of the United Nations and the Department was

committed to improving its services by embracing new technologies. In meetings management, the Department was adopting a proactive approach to improve utilization rates in cooperation with the presiding officers of meeting bodies.

10. The Department was aware of the importance of the timely availability of documents and had expedited the processing of documents on planning, budgetary and administrative matters. The situation had improved significantly in recent years and the average processing time for Fifth Committee documents was currently 28 days compared with over 30 days in 2013. As at 15 October 2014, 68 out of 84 slotted documents for the Committee had been received; of those, 52 had been received on time, representing a timely submission compliance of 76 per cent. The Department had completed and issued 61 documents on time in all six languages; 7 documents were currently being processed and would be issued on time. The average length of the 68 reports received to date easily exceeded the word limit set by the Assembly; of the 1,450 reports processed to date that year, 269 had exceeded the word limits.

11. The Department had mobilized its resources to issue documents as early as possible. For the first time ever, all reports of the Board of Auditors had been translated and issued by the end of August, one month earlier than in 2013. However, with its limited resources, the Department must give priority to more urgent documents, as it was unable to process all documents at once. It was therefore crucial that the Department had the tentative programmes of work of the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee in order to reconcile the slotting schedule with the anticipated needs of those Committees and ensure the necessary processing capacity. The fact that the Fifth Committee did not prepare its programme of work until September made slotting and synchronization difficult. To overcome that problem the Department used the pattern from previous years to devise an internal document schedule and provided estimated distribution dates based on timely submission of documents for processing. However, it needed help to facilitate slotting and provide the necessary time for delivery and quality control.

12. The Department was working intensively to enable pre-session documents for the other Main Committees to be distributed earlier, including through workload sharing with the other duty stations.

However, the remaining issues were the most intractable ones and tended to involve the most sensitive documents. Document delivery was a process that required the cooperation of many actors. The Department could provide documents on time in the six official languages only if well-drafted documents were submitted on time and within the agreed word limits. In addition, the submission of documents in Word format instead of portable document format (PDF) format would help expedite their processing.

13. The Secretariat was making concerted efforts to make further improvements but the cooperation of Member States was crucial to ensure that agreed slotting dates and schedules were enforced, quality manuscripts were submitted for processing in a timely manner and word limits were respected by authors. The Department would continue to control its workload and reach out to authors to improve the quality of manuscripts and ensure timely processing through careful planning and increased workload sharing. One of its priorities was to secure sufficient temporary assistance for all language services to complement the permanent capacity in peak workload periods with effective internal quality control. Given that the language services were overstretched and ageing, it was important to train and recruit young professionals and to add some experienced experts to the Department's capacity, but that required resources.

14. Dramatic changes in the human rights treaty body system had resulted in a \$10 million reduction in the Department's budget on the assumption that the changes would reduce the documentation processing workload. By its resolution 68/268, the Assembly had decided to allocate an additional 20 weeks per year of meeting time to the treaty bodies while at the same time imposing word limits for documentation, limiting the number of working languages for interpretation and translation of pre-session and in-session documentation, and discontinuing translation of summary records unless requested. Managers within the Department would monitor the situation as the changes in documentation length came into effect from January 2015 and would report on the results in the second performance report. Documentation for consideration by the Assembly would continue to be processed in all six languages.

15. Much attention had been paid to the impact of the capital master plan on meetings held at Headquarters. Despite some challenges with equipment in the

conference rooms, the Department was doing its utmost to ensure that the sixty-ninth session proceeded smoothly. The Secretary-General had submitted several reports on the strategic heritage plan of the United Nations Office at Geneva, which would have an impact on conferences being held there in the coming years.

16. Progress had been made in establishing integrated global management and the four main duty stations were working in a much more integrated way in human resources and financial management. The next step would be more extensive workload sharing among the duty stations. New Secretary-General's bulletins would explicitly recognize that all four conference management operations were part of the global conference services capacity funded under section 2 of the programme budget. Conference service managers at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi would be accountable both to their respective Directors General and to the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management. In addition to providing conference services to their local clients, all duty stations would contribute to global conference services delivery coordinated by the Under-Secretary-General. The clearer delineation of responsibilities would lead to greater harmonization of the way in which each duty station worked and in turn improve quality, timeliness and cost-effectiveness.

17. Progress had been made in developing software to support the Department's activities. The official documentation management system, gDoc, had been rolled out in New York and Geneva and was currently at the stabilization stage. The suite of computer-assisted translation tools known as gText had already been rolled out in New York and Vienna and was currently being rolled out in Geneva and Nairobi. The information warehouse, gData, and its dashboard had been collectively fine-tuned by the four duty stations and should be completed by the end of 2014, while gMeets was being used by all four duty stations and was facilitating the rational management of meetings resources. The information technology systems were designed to maximize the automation of conference management processes in the four duty stations, which would enable the Department to absorb the budget cuts already made without reducing the scope or quality of mandated services. However, the maintenance costs of those tools must be covered and it was also necessary to ensure their harmonization, integration and

compliance with the Umoja enterprise resource planning system.

18. **Mr. Chernikov** (Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee ([A/69/527](#)), said that the Advisory Committee welcomed the successful conclusion of the process of delineating the responsibilities of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Directors General of the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna. It also welcomed the efficiencies achieved under the integrated global management rule and the joint effort by the Department of Public Information and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to digitize United Nations documents.

19. With regard to the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities, the overall utilization rate for the four main duty stations should be monitored closely, given that the rate had dropped from 85 per cent in 2011 to 82 per cent in 2013. Furthermore, information concerning the utilization rates showing actual occupancy against existing full capacity for all Secretariat conference facilities should be provided to the Advisory Committee in the context of future budget submissions.

20. Lastly, there was a need to further enhance the multilingual nature of the Organization. The process of preparing the proposed budget for the biennium 2016-2017 was a good opportunity to consider whether sufficient resources were allocated to multilingualism and to maintaining the quality and quantity of services provided to Member States in all official languages.

21. **Ms. Rios Requena** (Plurinational State of Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group welcomed the recommendations and the draft resolution contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences ([A/69/32](#)). The Group attached great importance to the effective delivery of quality conference services, including the equal treatment of the six official languages, since those services were critical to the functioning of the United Nations.

22. The Group was concerned at the notable decrease in the utilization rate of the Conference Centre of the Economic Commission for Africa and expected that the renovation work currently under way and the

comprehensive marketing and pricing strategy would significantly improve that rate. On integrated global management, the Group welcomed the introduction of the term “integrated global management rule” as a replacement for the term “proximity rule” and looked forward to the clear delineation of responsibilities of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Directors General of the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. The Group was disappointed that the Secretary-General’s report ([A/69/120](#)) did not include an evaluation of the Flextime pilot project and a recommendation on whether the project should be continued at the United Nations Office at Vienna and implemented further at other duty stations.

23. The Group attached great importance to the timely issuance and quality of documents, and disagreed that the late issuance of documents was due mainly to the lack of predictability of the Committee’s programme of work and the overlap between the sessions of the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee. More attention should be paid to the main challenge: the late submission of reports by author departments. An accountability mechanism was needed to properly monitor late submission by authors and to identify all the factors affecting document issuance.

24. The Group welcomed the efforts to digitize important United Nations documents and hoped that the team assigned to that task would have the capacity to process the 3 million documents that were in urgent need of digitization. It also welcomed actions designed to improve the quality of translation and interpretation in the six official languages, given that those services allowed for smooth deliberations by intergovernmental bodies. Any efficiencies sought should not come at the expense of quality of services. Lastly, with regard to the addition of new official holidays of the United Nations, all proposals from Member States should be considered equally on the basis of clear, well-defined criteria without affecting the official holidays already approved.

25. **Mr. Onuma** (Japan) said that quality conference services were essential for proper decision-making by Member States, but those services should be provided in the most efficient, effective manner possible. The Secretariat should continue to seek efficiencies in delivering conference services through the introduction of new cost-saving measures. At the same time, Member States should refrain from adding unnecessary

conference resource requirements when determining the modalities of new meetings to be approved by General Assembly resolutions. The issue of seeking efficiencies should continue to be at the centre of the Committee's discussions.

26. The PaperSmart initiative was already an unquestionable reality at the United Nations and offered clear benefits by enabling Member States to access up-to-date information electronically. However, the Committee should continue to discuss the initiative, taking into account both the ongoing need for hard copy documents and the premise that the promotion of PaperSmart should ultimately contribute to a reduction in the total cost of conference services.

27. While Japan welcomed all initiatives designed to increase the utilization rates of conference-servicing resources, more concrete and practical measures should be taken to reduce the cost of conference services, including planning fewer meetings and shortening their duration. His delegation also welcomed the use of digital recordings by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and encouraged all intergovernmental bodies to make use of that technology in the interests of cost-effectiveness and efficiency. Expressing appreciation for the Secretariat's efforts to improve its practices in the editing of resolutions, he stressed that no changes should be made to the agreed texts of draft resolutions or final resolutions except for purely grammatical and editorial reasons.

28. **Mr. Grant** (Canada) said that adding Yom Kippur to the United Nations calendar of official holidays would send a strong message of tolerance, acceptance and unity from the Organization to the global community, and delegations should endorse recognition of that day. The issue was Member-State driven by precedent and practice, and his delegation looked forward to thorough consideration of the technical aspects of the request, including the implementation process.

29. **Ms. Norman Chalet** (United States of America) said that her delegation appreciated the continued efforts of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to reform its services and welcomed the tangible efficiency gains that had been realized following the roll-out of gDoc and gText for document processing and translation, and gMeets for

meetings management. Those initiatives had not only improved the services provided by the Department but had also made the work of the staff easier. She also welcomed the progress made in improving integrated global management across the four main duty stations, but wished to know why the timely submission of documents continued to be a significant challenge and what could be done to solve that problem collectively. The problem was not solely a result of processing problems within the Department and instead involved submitting departments and the bodies responsible for examining reports. Late issuance of documents made it difficult for Member States to fulfil their oversight responsibilities. Lastly, the United Nations calendar of official holidays should reflect the holy day of Yom Kippur, given that it already recognized the major festivals of other world religions. However, any addition of a holiday must be done on a cost-neutral basis.

30. **Mr. Roet** (Israel) said that making Yom Kippur an official United Nations holiday could serve to further Member States' shared vision of tolerance and mutual respect. Yom Kippur was the holiest day of the Jewish faith and a day on which millions of Jews contemplated how to advance peace and understanding between peoples. The day's messages of compassion and reconciliation were universal values shared by all peoples and were echoed in the Charter of the United Nations. Recognition of that day in the United Nations calendar would therefore send a strong message of tolerance, acceptance and unity from the Committee to the global community. Given that the issue was Member-State driven by precedent and practice, his delegation looked forward to a robust debate in good faith on the technical aspects of the request and the implementation process.

31. **Ms. Smolcic** (Uruguay) said that her delegation supported the addition of Yom Kippur to the list of official United Nations holidays. While religious views could be considered personal and private, certain holy days also had broader collective significance. The issue of religious holidays should be analysed and treated with respect and generosity. Although the Fifth Committee was a technical one that dealt with administrative and financial matters, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations should take priority. It would be unjust and arbitrary to establish criteria and modalities for determining new holidays after the holy

days of other religions had already been established as official holidays of the Organization.

32. **Mr. Khalizov** (Russian Federation) said that the Secretariat must step up its efforts to achieve parity among the six official languages, introduce common standards for quality control of documents, improve the quality and range of services as working methods changed, and expedite the digitization of older United Nations documents. The Committee should adopt the draft resolution approved by the Committee on Conferences.

33. His delegation supported the implementation of integrated global management of conference services at the four main duty stations and application of the proximity rule as an effective approach to servicing meetings. It also supported the broadening of the practice of signing memorandums of understanding with linguistic institutes to train translation staff and welcomed the efforts being made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to strengthen its contact with universities in countries where the official languages of the United Nations were spoken in order to ensure a supply of qualified language staff in the future. The implementation of that initiative on a rational resource basis should be part of a strategy for the long-term planning of the competitive examinations for language staff. The Secretariat should continue to use internships for young professionals as a way of encouraging recruitment to translation and interpretation. It should also continue its efforts to ensure the smooth transfer of knowledge from senior to new colleagues. Regarding multilingualism, the Secretariat should ensure that all language services benefited from the same favourable conditions of work, including funding and staffing levels.

34. His delegation was not opposed to PaperSmart in principle, but the initiative should be continued only with the agreement of Member States and only if it did not have a negative impact on their work. The Secretariat's efforts to achieve equal treatment of the six official languages were insufficient and there was a need to ensure the translation into all six languages of documentation for treaty bodies and the official websites of the Main Committees and other United Nations bodies. Consideration should be given to establishing a single centre to promote multilingualism, given that multilingualism was a pivotal aspect of the Organization. The late submission of documents for the Fifth Committee continued to be a problem. A modern

system was needed to monitor and evaluate the conference services provided. Quality control of translations was especially important, given the increasing volume of translations being done by external contractors.

35. **Mr. Kisoka** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the Organization should invest in digital conference services and extend the use of laptops and e-readers at intergovernmental meetings where appropriate. Any deliberations concerning PaperSmart should be accompanied by discussions on improving technological support for Member States, which should be regarded as an investment rather than merely as recurrent expenditure. While his delegation welcomed the improvements in the facilities at Headquarters that had resulted from the capital master plan, some work was still required, including repairs to power sockets in some conference rooms and improved accessibility for persons with disabilities. In addition, the Organization should invest in improving the videoconference infrastructure at all duty stations. Lastly, the information technology kiosk previously available to Fifth Committee members should be restored.

36. **Mr. Gettu** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management) said that the Economic Commission for Africa did not fall under section 2 of the programme budget and was therefore not within the mandate of his Department. However, the Department was cooperating with the Commission and would transmit questions relating to cost efficiency and the use of conference services to it for a response. The four duty stations under the Department's jurisdiction were New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi.

37. Notable progress had been made in promoting integrated global management and the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management held weekly videoconference meetings with the Directors General of the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna. The responsibilities of the Directors General had been clearly delineated and revised Secretary-General's bulletins were currently undergoing internal legal assessment to define the organization of the Department and the Offices.

38. Flextime was a useful instrument for attendance and payroll, but it was used differently by different departments and was not used at all by some staff in

his Department. A decision must be made about whether to extend the system to the entire Organization or to stop its use.

39. Regarding documentation, the Department was doing its best to correct its shortcomings and was cooperating with various departments and with Member States to make improvements, but it was facing limitations. In many instances, the Department was not at fault for the late issuance of documents, as submissions must be received on time in order for staff to process them in a timely manner. Language staff were working under very stressful conditions and the French Translation Service in particular was short-staffed. Moreover, the entire workforce of the Department was ageing and forthcoming retirements of senior staff would have an impact over the following two years. It was therefore important to allocate resources to training and recruitment of young professionals.

40. It had been decided that, if a department submitted a document late and the document exceeded the agreed word limit, the cost must be absorbed by that department. Author departments must be held accountable for submitting well-drafted documents on time and within the established word limits. It was also imperative that documents should be submitted in Word format instead of PDF so that language staff did not need to retype documents.

41. Regarding digitization, an in-depth analysis was needed to provide a real understanding of what the undertaking entailed. It would take many years and hundreds of millions of dollars to digitize the 20 million documents in need of digitization. Documents were currently being digitized on an experimental basis but additional resources were needed. It was also important to establish priorities and digitize the oldest documents first. While the digitization of documents was not part of the Department's mandate, it would do its best to play a catalytic role in the process.

42. The Department was, in his view, one of the most efficient departments in the Organization. Despite budget cuts, it had been creative in developing software to facilitate its work. The implementation of PaperSmart, under which paper copies of documents were provided to delegations on demand, had radically reduced paper usage.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.