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Summary record of the 10th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 13 November 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Mavroyiannis. (Cyprus)
*Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Ms. Maciel

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

Agenda item 138: Pattern of conferences ([A/74/32](#), [A/74/121](#) and [A/74/538](#))

Agenda item 141: Joint Inspection Unit ([A/74/217](#) and [A/74/217/Add.1](#); [JIU/REP/2018/6](#))

1. **Ms. Austin** (Chair of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2019 ([A/74/32](#)), said that that the report contained a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences and the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2020 and 2021. The Committee on Conferences had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences ([A/74/121](#)). The report of the Committee on Conferences provided a comprehensive summary of the discussions held on all items on its agenda. The annual substantive session of the Committee offered Member States an opportunity to engage with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

2. At its organizational session, the Committee on Conferences had adopted the provisional calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields for 2020 and 2021 ([E/2019/53](#)) and had recommended it for adoption by the Economic and Social Council. At its substantive session, the Committee on Conferences had reviewed the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2020 and 2021 and, pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/266 A](#), in which the Assembly had approved the change from a biennial to an annual budget cycle on a trial basis, beginning with the programme budget for 2020, had decided to adopt the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2020. The Committee on Conferences had also recommended that the General Assembly authorize eight bodies to meet during the main part of its seventy-fourth session, and had approved six requests for intersessional departures from the approved calendar of conferences and meetings.

3. The Committee on Conferences had reviewed the statistical data on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities. In accordance with General Assembly resolution [73/270](#), all four main duty stations had improved the utilization of interpretation services by engaging with relevant intergovernmental and expert bodies. In her capacity as Chair of the Committee on Conferences, she had sent letters to the presiding officers of calendar bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark of their allocated resources for the previous six years, with a view to improving the utilization of conference-servicing

resources without prejudice to the bodies' substantive work.

4. With respect to documents management, the Committee on Conferences had noted improvements in compliance with deadlines for the submission, processing and issuance of slotted documents. On staffing, the Committee on Conferences had expressed support for the signing of more memorandums of understanding with educational institutions and, in accordance with the General Assembly resolutions on multilingualism, for ensuring equal treatment and equally-favourable working conditions and resources for all language services. With respect to the improvement of facilities and accessibility, the Committee on Conferences had proposed that the General Assembly welcome the measures taken to ensure access to conference services by persons with disabilities, and had requested the Secretary-General to continue to address such issues as a matter of priority. Lastly, with regard to measuring the quality of conference services, the Committee had received information from the Secretariat on the feedback received from the global electronic survey administered by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

5. **Mr. Abelian** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences ([A/74/121](#)), said that the report provided information on procedures and activities relating to the pattern of conferences in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2018.

6. In 2018, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had provided services for approximately 35,000 meetings, an increase of 3 per cent from 2017. The proportion of non-calendar meetings, which had accounted for 75 per cent of all meetings held in New York and Geneva, had continued to increase, placing heavy constraints on the resources allocated to calendar meetings. In addition, the administrative instruction on the use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits ([ST/AI/416](#)) had been updated and superseded by the administrative instruction on the use of space at Headquarters in New York for meetings, conferences, events and exhibits ([ST/AI/2019/4](#)).

7. Between 2017 and 2018, the overall rate of utilization of interpretation services had increased from 81 to 82 percent, and the proportion of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for which such services had been provided had increased from 79 to 83 per cent. Member States and the Secretariat should take a collaborative approach to meetings planning in order to ensure the reliability of

workload forecasts and the efficient use of resources. All duty stations had achieved considerable efficiencies by continuing to apply the integrated global management rule when assembling teams to support meetings away from Headquarters.

8. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had given priority to the timely submission and issuance of documents for consideration by all intergovernmental bodies, including the Fifth Committee. In 2018, author departments had submitted 90 per cent of documents on or before the applicable deadlines. Between 2017 and 2018, compliance with the four-week processing deadline for documents submitted on time and within word limits had increased from 97 to 98 per cent. In addition, compliance with issuance deadlines had increased to 94 per cent, continuing the upward trend from the rate of 51 per cent recorded in 2013. The upward trend in the productivity of the Translation Services had also continued as a result of the increased use of eLUNa, a computer-assisted translation tool developed in-house and within existing resources, and of self-revision.

9. Past issues with filling vacancies in the language services had been addressed. Moreover, the introduction of fully-remote, combined examinations for translators, editors, verbatim reporters, copy-preparers, proofreaders and production editors had attracted record numbers of applicants, particularly from under-represented regions, resulting in enough successful candidates to meet anticipated staffing needs over the next three years. In addition, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had continued to foster relationships with universities and educational institutions through its outreach activities.

10. A number of measures had been taken to ensure the dignified participation of persons with disabilities in intergovernmental work. For example, all duty stations had supported efforts to increase the availability of, *inter alia*, sign-language interpretation, live and remote captioning, assistive devices, on-demand Braille printing and accessible seating, and accessibility had been enhanced as a result of renovation work carried out in the General Assembly Hall in New York. Furthermore, General Assembly resolution 73/341 on the revitalization of work of the General Assembly provided for arrangements to accommodate the seating of representatives with disabilities.

11. The strategic priority of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, as established by Member States, had remained the continuous improvement of its products in terms of multilingualism, quality, timeliness, cost-effectiveness,

accessibility and sustainability. The Department was addressing that priority by promoting innovation in technology and organization of work; attracting and retaining qualified professionals; and focusing on client orientation. In addition to eLUNa, key ongoing projects in the Department included the e-deleGATE portal, aimed at improving, harmonizing and unifying electronic services for delegations through a single, secure platform; a one-stop-shop, web-based application launched as the client-facing interface of gMeets, the electronic meetings management system, to provide meeting requesters with easy access to all meeting services; and Indico, a meeting registration tool approved for integration into the Extension 2 functionality of the Umoja enterprise resource planning project. However, as artificial intelligence was only effective if complemented by human intelligence, the Department's primary focus remained the skills and knowledge of its staff. It thus continued to promote learning, knowledge-sharing, creativity, and human communication and ingenuity.

12. **Ms. Maciel** (Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee on the pattern of conferences ([A/74/538](#)), said that the Advisory Committee noted the decentralized model used for conference services and, with regard to delegation of authority, trusted that clear indicators of accountability would be established as part of a framework of key performance indicators for the efficient use of resources and effective implementation of mandates.

13. The Advisory Committee noted the status of vacancies in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and encouraged the Secretary-General to ensure that vacant posts were filled expeditiously. The Advisory Committee also noted the efforts made to strengthen the internship programme and enter into agreements with universities to hold remote practicums, and encouraged the Department to increase the geographical diversity of language interns. In addition, the Advisory Committee noted the efforts made, through outreach, to address the paucity of qualified candidates for language posts from Africa and Latin America, and recommended that the Department increase the geographical diversity of language staff. To that end, it welcomed the use of remote testing as a recruitment tool. Lastly, the Advisory Committee acknowledged the Department's efforts to improve accessibility.

14. **Mr. Achamkulangare** (Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system" ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)), transmitted to the

General Assembly by means of a note by the Secretary-General (A/74/217), said that about 15 per cent of the global population lived with some form of disability and faced disproportionate barriers to participation in, and access to, deliberative processes. The accessibility of conferences and meetings was thus a critical indicator of the commitment of United Nations organizations to leaving no one behind. In response to a proposal by the Secretariat, and as part of its programme of work for 2018, JIU had carried out a review of the state of accessibility to persons with disabilities of large-scale, small-scale and off-site conferences and meetings organized by United Nations system organizations. The objective had been to identify obstacles and good practices in order to enhance accessibility for such persons and ensure their effective participation. The scope of the review had extended beyond physical meeting rooms to encompass all issues related to accessibility, and had included a human-rights perspective.

15. The report contained six main findings. First, there was a lack of formal accessibility policies, with only three entities having dedicated policies on accessibility or reasonable accommodation. Second, there was limited provision of accessible facilities and services. Many of the information and communications technology (ICT) tools essential to ensuring accessibility were unavailable at headquarters locations, and the accessibility of field offices lagged considerably behind that of headquarters locations. Third, stakeholder satisfaction with existing accessibility provisions was low. In surveys and interviews, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations had indicated the need to address the lack of communication on accessibility before, during and after conferences and meetings. Fourth, the participation of persons with disabilities in conferences and meetings was hampered by organizations' lack of internal capacity and coordination. Most organizations did not have focal points on disability inclusion and accessibility, and those that did have such focal points had not developed clear terms of reference for them. Standard operating procedures for activities related to accessibility were likewise non-existent. Fifth, there was a lack of proactive incorporation of accessibility considerations in relation to organizational matters, knowledge sharing and accountability. Accessibility considerations were rarely proactively incorporated into projects carried out by organizations, in particular in procurement processes, and most organizations did not systematically report on the state of accessibility to their legislative bodies. Sixth, there was limited progress towards mainstreaming accessibility. Stakeholders had underscored the need to mainstream accessibility considerations in all areas of

the work of organizations, as a cross-cutting issue, in order to strengthen institutional support for, and raise awareness of, the subject. In the light of the findings, the executive summary of the review would be published on the JIU website in Easy Read format in early 2020.

16. To address the aforementioned challenges, JIU had outlined 10 recommendations, 1 of which was addressed to legislative bodies and 9 of which were addressed to executive heads. Specifically, it had recommended that legislative bodies include in their agendas an item on the review of periodic reports on the state of accessibility of conferences and meetings of United Nations system organizations to persons with disabilities. It had also advised the General Assembly to encourage executive heads to implement the recommendations addressed to them in a timely manner.

17. Some organizations had responded with particular enthusiasm. One had developed, within three months of the review, an action plan for enhancing accessibility in three phases: a short-term phase, to be carried out within existing resources; a medium-term phase, for whose implementation resources would need to be identified; and a long-term phase involving structural improvements which would require significant expenditure. Similarly, several organizations had adapted their registration and accreditation procedures for conferences and meetings to proactively seek information from potential participants about their specific accessibility requirements. In addition, many organizations had agreed to include details about the availability of accessible facilities and services in information notes to participants, while some had agreed to include questions on accessibility in their global staff surveys. The active engagement demonstrated by those organizations had indicated that the primary challenge in addressing accessibility stemmed primarily from a lack of awareness rather than from an unwillingness to act. Furthermore, the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications had acknowledged that the review conducted by JIU had guided the joint work of the Department of Global Communications and the Department of Safety and Security to ensure a seamless accreditation process for, and unimpeded access to, the event for the observance of World Autism Awareness Day, held at United Nations Headquarters on 2 April 2019. Those efforts had met with heartfelt appreciation from attendees.

18. The Unit noted the comments made by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) on the review, and appreciated that organizations generally welcomed its findings and supported most of its recommendations. However, in many of its comments, CEB had linked the fulfilment of the JIU recommendations to the implementation of the United

Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, adopted by the High-level Committee on Management in May 2019. While an important tool for measuring progress on inclusion, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy provided for relatively long time frames for monitoring and reporting, while the JIU recommendations called for specific action by the end of 2020 or 2021. It was therefore inadvisable to subsume those recommendations under the Strategy, and the legislative and governing bodies of participating organizations should give further consideration to that approach.

19. **Ms. Petrova** (Director, United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination), introducing the comments of the Secretary-General and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) on the report of JIU, as contained in the note by the Secretary-General ([A/74/217/Add.1](#)), said that United Nations system organizations welcomed the findings and recommendations contained in the report; appreciated the breadth of its scope; and were in favour of ensuring access for persons with disabilities to United Nations meetings and conferences through a holistic approach, benefitting all staff, visitors and beneficiaries with disabilities. Organizations had noted that country context should be taken into consideration when implementing the JIU recommendations, and that some measure of flexibility with regard to accessibility requirements should be exercised in planning conferences in field locations.

20. Organizations were also of the view the JIU recommendations should be considered and implemented as part of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, which was in the process of being finalized. Designed to provide a foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion under all pillars of the Organization's work, the Strategy was underpinned by the highest level of commitment and by clear objectives for whose achievement the United Nations would be held accountable at the entity and country-team levels. While organizations generally supported the JIU recommendations, some of those recommendations might have cost implications, and adequate time would need to be allowed for implementation. Disability inclusion was of great importance to CEB and the entire United Nations system, particularly given the relevance of such inclusion to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

21. **Ms. Tarbush** (Observer for the State of Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Committee on Conferences was to be commended for the quality of its report ([A/74/32](#)), and

that the draft resolution on the pattern of conferences would provide a valuable framework for the Fifth Committee's negotiations on the related agenda item. Notwithstanding the liquidity challenges facing the Organization and the resulting austerity measures, the Group continued to call for the delivery of high-quality conference services in accordance with the principle of multilingualism, particularly in support of the work of the intergovernmental and expert bodies of the Organization. Issues such as the utilization of conference services and resources, documentation and publications, translation and interpretation matters, and the calendar of conferences and meetings were crucial to the effective and efficient functioning of the Organization.

22. The Group commended the Secretariat's efforts to address the underutilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities, and noted that the overall utilization factor for all calendar bodies at the four duty stations had been 82 per cent in 2018, above the established benchmark of 80 per cent. The Group also noted the continued increase in non-calendar meetings, which placed constraints on the resources allocated to calendar meetings, and looked forward to learning more about plans to implement a cost-recovery mechanism for meetings not related to the intergovernmental process in New York.

23. The Group welcomed the new administrative instruction on the use of space at Headquarters in New York for meetings, conferences, events and exhibits ([ST/AI/2019/4](#)) and would closely compare it with the previous administrative instruction on the use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits ([ST/AI/416](#)). The Group encouraged other duty stations providing conference services to follow the example of United Nations Headquarters by updating their information circulars on the use of United Nations premises, bearing in mind the need to ensure that such services were managed in an integrated manner throughout all duty stations.

24. The Group also welcomed the report of JIU ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)) and supported the concept of moving beyond dedicated policies on accessibility by developing comprehensive approaches that would benefit staff, visitors and beneficiaries with disabilities. The Group was carefully examining the JIU recommendations and the comments of organizations thereon, and noted that, at the start of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had begun implementing measures to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.

25. The Group was concerned at the deteriorating conditions of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which were severely hampering its capacity to provide meeting services, especially for the regular calendar meetings of United Nations bodies headquartered in Nairobi. The Group therefore welcomed the related report of the Secretary-General ([A/74/471](#)), prepared in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2020, and expected that a speedy and effective solution would be implemented.

26. The Group also appreciated that, at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the percentage of conference resources used in 2018 had remained high. In addition, it welcomed the improvements to the carpeting and podiums in the Conference Centre at ECA, and continued to call for regular renovations and urgent technological enhancements in order to ensure that the Commission maintained its ability to provide cutting-edge conference services.

27. The Group acknowledged the efforts of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to address staffing challenges and particularly commended the measures taken to strengthen the recruitment of language professionals, including the increased outreach to universities aimed at addressing the paucity of qualified candidates from Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

28. **Mr. Cheshire** (New Zealand), speaking also on behalf of Australia and Canada, said that the three delegations welcomed the emphasis in the report of JIU ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)) on engaging with persons with disabilities, and attached great importance to the system-wide mainstreaming of disability inclusion, an endeavour to which the review conducted by JIU made a vital contribution. They also welcomed the comprehensive nature of the JIU recommendations, which covered practical ways to enhance accessibility and coordination on disability issues in the short term, as well as methods for continuing improvement in the long term. Those recommendations should be implemented as part of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and according to an ambitious timeline. For example, organizations should accelerate the implementation of recommendation 3 by appointing focal points on disability before 2021, as the early presence of such focal points could advance the fulfilment of the other recommendations. The mainstreaming of disability inclusion was essential to effecting the cultural change needed to reform the Organization. Good practices in that area should be leveraged, shared and standardized across the United Nations system, with the Secretariat leading by example.

29. **Mr. De Preter** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union welcomed the efforts made to improve and modernize the conference and language services of the Organization, in particular the use of innovative approaches and modern technologies. Following the open and fruitful discussions at the 2019 substantive session of the Committee on Conferences, the States members of the European Union were prepared to endorse the recommendations contained in that Committee's report ([A/74/32](#)).

30. The States members of the European Union welcomed the extensive analysis of accessibility carried out by JIU, as well as its recommendations and their implementation as part of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. The European Union had long supported the rights of persons with disabilities, as evidenced by the adoption by the Council of the European Union of the European Accessibility Act in 2019, in accordance with one of the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. One of the most advanced pieces of legislation on accessibility in the world, that Act would be enforceable in the European Union in 2025. The European Union fully supported increasing access for persons with disabilities to United Nations conferences and meetings in order to ensure more inclusive decision-making.

31. **Ms. Al-Hail** (Qatar) said that Qatar attached great importance to the digitization of historical United Nations documents. The digitization project would help to protect the Organization's institutional memory and facilitate access to documents of the deliberative bodies by giving Member States, Secretariat staff and the public a set of research tools that included the United Nations Digital Library, speeches, voting records, meeting records and documentation research guides. From 2013 to 2018, Qatar had donated a total of \$5 million to the digitization project. Her Government would continue to support that project and, to that end, had pledged to contribute another \$2.5 million, which it would pay in instalments from 2020 to 2025.

32. **Ms. Norman-Chalet** (United States of America) said that her delegation recognized the role of conference management support in enabling multilateralism and effective discussion in the Organization, commended the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management for its innovations, and welcomed the use

of forward-leaning and progressive thinking to advance the effective and efficient delivery of mandates.

33. Ensuring accessibility for all persons, including those with disabilities, was likewise essential to multilateralism. The United States thus supported the recommendations of JIU, including those on the need for a more systematic approach to accessibility underpinned by, *inter alia*, a standardized system for receiving requests for accessibility services for each meeting. Despite the lack of international standards for accessibility, the United Nations should draw on existing standards such as universal design principles and should fully implement the Americans With Disabilities Act. Furthermore, while JIU had pointed out the need to systematically address costs for accessibility improvements, it had not mentioned that many immediate enhancements were cost-neutral. For example, by its resolution [73/341](#), the General Assembly had, within existing resources, provided for the availability of accessible seating arrangements for all delegates at its meetings.

34. While JIU had made important overarching policy recommendations, it had not adequately addressed the everyday challenges faced by delegates at the United Nations. Her delegation had first-hand experience of those challenges, which ranged from the only building exits usable after 9 p.m. being turnstiles, to the absence of permanent accessibility arrangements for access to the podium in the General Assembly Hall. Encouraging progress had nevertheless been made by the General Assembly, whose Third Committee would consider, at the current session, a draft resolution specifically focused on accessibility in connection with the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto. That draft resolution addressed many initiatives in which her delegation was actively involved, including the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and the Steering Committee on Accessibility established by the President of the General Assembly, which, in June 2019, had adopted its own recommendations that more effectively responded to delegates' needs. JIU and other United Nations entities should take those recommendations into account. As preparations began for the observance of the annual International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December 2019, full consideration should be given to all issues related to accessibility. In addition, persons with disabilities, in particular those serving the Organization, should be included in all related efforts, in line with the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

35. **Mr. Rong Sicaï** (China) said that China supported the measures taken by the Department for General

Assembly and Conference Management to provide high-quality conference services, in particular the efforts by Chinese language professionals to improve the quality of translation and interpretation. The Department should continue to strengthen quality control and accountability in order to further enhance the quality of the services provided by language professionals, in particular contractual translation and freelance interpretation.

36. His delegation was deeply concerned at the policies of the United Nations Office at Geneva and some other duty stations whereby non-governmental organizations were allowed to apply directly to hold meetings on United Nations premises. In order to avoid risks and ensure accountability, such organizations should submit their applications through a sponsor such as a Member State or a United Nations entity, in accordance with administrative instruction [ST/AI/2019/4](#). The United Nations Office at Geneva and the other relevant duty stations should also adapt their information circulars on the use of United Nations premises to reflect the rules set out in that administrative instruction.

37. **Mr. Park Chull-Joo** (Republic of Korea) said that the report of JIU ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)) provided a valuable basis for efforts to improve accessibility at the United Nations, as evidenced by its use by the Steering Committee on Accessibility as a point of reference in developing its own recommendations.

38. Accessibility was essential to the enjoyment by persons with disabilities of their rights to health, education and equal participation in political, public and cultural life. The United Nations must therefore lead by example in ensuring the accessibility of conferences, meetings, information and communications. The Steering Committee on Accessibility, of which he had served as co-Chair, had taken a number of initiatives consistent with the JIU recommendations. Specifically, it had recommended the introduction of accessible seating arrangements for delegates with disabilities, which had led to the inclusion of a related provision in General Assembly resolution [73/341](#). The Steering Committee was also exploring ways of adapting registration forms for conferences and meetings to seek information on accessibility requirements, and of implementing wayfinding technology to provide step-by-step instructions for navigating the premises at United Nations Headquarters. He would be interested in knowing what steps JIU considered most essential to ensuring the implementation of its recommendations.

39. **Mr. Perera** (Sri Lanka) said that Sri Lanka welcomed the JIU recommendations to develop dedicated policies on accessibility and address related considerations through a comprehensive approach in

order to ensure that no one was left behind. Given the specific and time-bound nature of those recommendations, it would be appropriate to fulfil them by 2020 or 2021, in anticipation of the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy over the long term.

40. Sri Lanka affirmed its national commitments under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and appreciated the call made by JIU to United Nations system organizations to voluntarily assume the obligations under article 9 of the Convention, which related to accessibility. Organizations should positively consider the JIU recommendations, and the concept of inclusive development should be at the centre of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

41. **Ms. Pereira Sotomayor** (Ecuador) said that the desire of the world's 1.5 billion persons with disabilities to be involved and heard in debates should not be heeded only on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Ecuador recognized the efforts of JIU and encouraged the replication and further development of best practices related to accessibility. An inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory environment throughout the United Nations system was critical to the realization of the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities. Legislative bodies did not focus systematically on the topics of disability inclusion and accessibility, and did not adopt resolutions on those topics on a regular basis. Moreover, in a number of organizations, accessibility considerations were viewed as ancillary rather than integrated into attitudes and practices. Organizations must therefore meaningfully include persons with disabilities in all initiatives concerning them, in line with the principle of "nothing about us without us."

42. The United Nations system must work fearlessly to achieve full accessibility, as a failure to do so could result in reputational risks if it was incorrectly perceived as unable to fulfil the promise to leave no one behind. To that end, all organizations should respect the spirit and letter of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto, and should voluntarily assume the obligations under article 9 of the Convention. Ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities was the best way to build inclusive societies underpinned by equality and dignity for all.

43. Since its election as Chair of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2018, Ecuador had been contributing to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities; to the advancement of efforts to make the

United Nations more inclusive; and to the promotion not only of physical accessibility, but of the inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities in all United Nations discussions, resolutions and initiatives. Specific action, guided by the recommendations of JIU, was required to ensure accessibility. Encouraged that CEB had welcomed those recommendations, her delegation would be interested to know which of them could be implemented in the short and medium term.

44. **Mr. Braquetti** (Monaco) said that the report of JIU ([JIU/REP/2018/6](#)) represented important progress in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. It was necessary to incorporate the principles of disability inclusion and accessibility, as set forth in the Convention, into all facets of the work of United Nations system organizations. The full participation of persons with disabilities in meetings hosted by those organizations was particularly vital, given the valuable perspective that they provided. While ensuring physical access to meetings was essential, the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities was also critical to upholding justice and building a common future. Barriers related to ICT, services, transportation and attitudes should therefore be eliminated.

45. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy included a policy and an accountability framework, with benchmarks to promote sustainable progress and change in the area of disability inclusion. The JIU recommendations contributed meaningfully to that Strategy through their focus on strengthening internal capacity and coordination on accessibility; promoting the participation of persons with disabilities; taking into account accessibility requirements; sharing best practices; raising the awareness of staff and improving accountability. It was encouraging that organizations had supported most of the recommendations and had made comments thereon. All stakeholders must continue their efforts to ensure the full inclusion of persons with disabilities.

46. **Ms. Muchiri** (Kenya) said that Kenya appreciated the report of the Committee on Conferences ([A/74/32](#)) and greatly valued the presence on its soil of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the only duty station in the South at which United Nations organizations had their global headquarters. In addition to its mandate to provide conference services to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Office also provided a full range of conference facilities to the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes based in Nairobi. However, the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the Office's conference facilities

were affecting its ability to provide meeting services. Conference rooms were underutilized owing to their substandard quality, and it had become increasingly difficult to host the large numbers of participants at the meetings of the governing bodies of UNEP and UN-Habitat. Indeed, there had been over 5,000 participants at the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, while 7,000 were expected at its fifth session.

47. The desire of Member States for concrete proposals to address the deteriorating conditions and limited capacity of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi had been reflected in successive General Assembly resolutions. Her delegation thus looked forward to the introduction of the related report of the Secretary-General (A/74/471) at the current session. Her Government would continue to support efforts to upgrade the Office to meet the standards achieved by the other three headquarters duty stations.

48. **Mr. Webson** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that JIU had issued its report (JIU/REP/2018/6) at a time when the United Nations was making tremendous progress in ensuring equality and equity for persons with disabilities. Efforts to implement the JIU recommendations, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and the recommendations of the Steering Committee on Accessibility should be harmonized, and persons with disabilities should be included in those efforts. In particular, a monitoring and evaluation system needed to be established to ensure that the Strategy and the recommendations of JIU were implemented in a timely and coordinated manner. The Fifth Committee was often reluctant to approve activities requiring additional resources, and even short-term accessibility improvements, such as the implementation of wayfinding technology, might entail additional costs. The Committee should nevertheless consider whether the need to limit expenditure should take priority over the full realization of the rights of persons with disabilities. He called on all stakeholders to help the Organization to become a leader in disability inclusion.

49. **Mr. Achamkulangare** (Joint Inspection Unit), responding in particular to the question posed by the representative of the Republic of Korea, said that the most critical step for fulfilment of the JIU recommendations would be an express request from the General Assembly to the Secretary-General to ensure such action.

Agenda item 135: Proposed programme budget for 2020 (continued)

Construction and property management (continued)

Progress on the renovation of the North Building at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago (A/74/7/Add.11 and A/74/330)

50. **Mr. Huisman** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division), introducing the report of the Secretary-General regarding progress on the renovation of the North Building at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago (ECLAC) (A/74/330), said that the report provided an update on the project since the approval by the General Assembly, in its resolution 73/279 A, of the project's overall scope, maximum cost and implementation strategy. The report also outlined the steps taken, through the use of solar energy, to achieve a "net zero" building serving as a regional example of the Organization's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Upon the completion of the renovation, the North Building would be sustainable and accessible to persons with disabilities.

51. All positions on the project management team had been filled, and, prior to the issuance of a bid tender for the selection of the lead consulting firm, the team had finalized the detailed technical specifications related to the scope of the architectural and engineering work. In addition, the Global Asset Management Policy Service and the independent risk management consultant commissioned for the project were conducting periodic risk reviews. The project was expected to be completed as planned, by the end of 2023, within the estimated cost of \$14,330,200 approved by the General Assembly. The Assembly was requested to take note of the Secretary-General's report; take note of the revised cost plan for the project; and appropriate an amount of \$389,100 for project activities in 2020.

52. **Ms. Maciel** (Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/74/7/Add.11), said that the Advisory Committee recommended approval of the actions proposed by the Secretary-General. It trusted that he would closely monitor and mitigate project risks, and take the necessary measures to ensure the implementation of the project within the scope, budget and timeline approved by the General Assembly. The Advisory Committee also recommended that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to include, in his next progress report, an update on the risk management and mitigation measures taken. Lastly, it recommended that the Assembly request the Secretary-

General to provide, in his next progress report, detailed information on the energy to be produced, used and redirected by the North Building's photovoltaic plant.

53. **Mr. Katkhuda** (Observer for the State of Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group appreciated the support of the Government of Chile for the work of ECLAC and for the renovation project, in particular the technical support provided to the project team for the implementation of integrated building information modelling and for the development of a plan for reusing or recycling components of the existing building, following its dismantling. The Organization should continue to cooperate closely with the host country and local authorities throughout the planning and implementation phases, and the Secretary-General should continue to engage with Member States to seek voluntary contributions and other forms of support for the project.

54. In line with its historic role as a bastion of support for developing countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC served as a point of reference for information and ideas in the area of regional development, informing the formulation of public policies in the region. While welcoming the progress made in the implementation of the project, the Group attached great importance to risk management and noted that there was a relatively low level of confidence that the project would be completed within the approved budget. The Group therefore encouraged timely monitoring and mitigation of risks to ensure the project's successful completion by 2023.

55. With regard to the planned seismic mitigation measures, the Group welcomed the lines of communication established between the ECLAC project team and the teams managing the seismic mitigation project at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Africa Hall renovation project at ECA. The Group trusted that detailed information on such measures would be included in future progress reports on the renovation of the North Building at ECLAC. In addition, given the value of project governance and oversight, close coordination between ECLAC and the Secretariat in New York, in particular the Global Asset Management Policy Service, was essential to ensure smooth implementation.

56. In view of the importance of energy efficiency and cost-effectiveness, the Group welcomed the planned renovation of the North Building as a sustainable, "net-zero" building, and looked forward to receiving more detailed information in that regard in the Secretary-General's next progress report. The Group also

welcomed the work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to ensure project accountability, and appreciated the fact that the recommendations from the 2018 OIOS audit had been implemented and completed. In addition, the Group noted the Advisory Committee's observations and recommendations relating to, inter alia, safety concerns with respect to the North Building, including in relation to fire protection and egress; the need to ensure the continued compliance of the three-level underground garage structure with current seismic safety codes; and the use of locally sourced and manufactured materials and labour. The Group welcomed the Advisory Committee's recommendations and supported the Secretary-General's proposals for the project for 2020.

57. It was important to ensure the health and safety of staff and visitors at all United Nations locations in order to enhance the Organization's effectiveness and efficiency, and to promote more efficient building performance, energy conservation and space utilization. In that regard, support must be provided for the implementation of other United Nations capital projects, including those in progress at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, ECA and ESCAP.

58. **Ms. Pereira Sotomayor** (Ecuador), speaking also on behalf of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, said that the twelve delegations welcomed the Secretary-General's report and the Advisory Committee's related comments and recommendations. For more than 70 years, the Government of Chile had provided significant support for ECLAC and, through its "Construye2025" programme, would support the ECLAC project team and the lead consulting firm through all phases of design and construction-drawing development. The delegations welcomed the ongoing assistance provided by the Government and people of Chile for the project, and encouraged ECLAC to continue to collaborate with the host country and local authorities throughout implementation.

59. The goal of the project was to provide ECLAC with a fully renovated and code-compliant work environment in an efficient building that met or exceeded industry standards and fulfilled rigorous requirements in the areas of energy efficiency, energy generation and wastewater treatment, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. She recalled that, in its resolution [73/279](#) A, the General Assembly had requested that, in his next progress report, the Secretary-General include information on his efforts to proactively seek voluntary and in-kind contributions from Member States; stressed the importance of governance, effective

oversight, transparency and accountability in the management of the project to ensure that its objectives were achieved within the approved budget and schedule; requested updated information on the results of the Monte Carlo analysis to be generated on the basis of a quantitative assessment of project risks; requested the Secretary-General to further develop an energy-efficiency strategy providing for the redirection of energy to the ECLAC compound, including the return of surplus energy to the national grid; and requested the Secretary-General to provide more detailed information on the planned seismic mitigation measures in his future reports.

60. The delegations welcomed the progress made thus far, in particular on the renovation of the North Building as a sustainable, “net-zero” building. They hoped that the lead consulting firm would complete the planning and design activities in due course, bearing in mind that the main project objectives of seismic mitigation, energy efficiency, efficient space planning and accessibility for persons with disabilities were included in the design requirements. They also hoped that, in future progress reports, the Secretary-General would provide detailed information on energy production and usage, as well as updated information on risk management and mitigation measures taken to ensure that the project was carried out within the scope, budget and timeline approved by the General Assembly. In addition, the delegations welcomed the guidance of OIOS and welcomed the implementation and completion of the recommendations from its 2018 audit. Lastly, they expressed support for the recommendation of the Advisory Committee that the General Assembly support the Secretary-General’s proposal to appropriate an amount of \$389,100 for the project in 2020.

Agenda item 140: Human resources management (A/74/78 and A/74/539)

61. **Ms. Armstrong** (Director, Ethics Office), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Ethics Office (A/74/78), said that the report covered the period from 1 January to 31 December 2018 and also included information on the activities of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/250. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office had continued to assist the Secretary-General in enhancing the Organization’s culture of ethics, transparency and accountability. It had received nearly 2,000 requests for services, compared with approximately 1,500 in 2017. It had also provided advice on due diligence, reputational risk management and best practices in corporate compliance programmes.

62. Under the financial disclosure programme administered by the Ethics Office, just under 6,000 statements had been reviewed and a new supporting online platform had been rolled out. In addition, 78.3 per cent of eligible officials had participated in the annual voluntary public disclosure initiative for senior officials at the level of Assistant Secretary-General and above. The Office had also facilitated the 2018 Leadership Dialogue under the theme “Speaking up: when does it become whistleblowing?”, in which around 31,700 United Nations personnel had participated, the largest number since the launch of the Dialogue in 2013.

63. Under the recently strengthened policy on protection against retaliation for reporting misconduct and for cooperating with duly authorized audits or investigations, the Ethics Office had received 136 requests, an increase of 48 per cent from 2017. It had responded to 7 referrals for preventive action from OIOS and had conducted preliminary reviews of 38 claims, 6 of which it had considered to represent *prima facie* cases of retaliation; of those cases, it had determined, after investigation, that 4 had involved retaliation. With respect to policy coherence, she had chaired 10 meetings of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations and had co-chaired the tenth meeting of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, hosted by the Secretariat for the first time.

64. As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 71/263, the Secretary-General had, in his previous report (A/73/89), proposed several measures to strengthen the independence of the Ethics Office: the direct submission of the Office’s annual reports, through the Secretary-General, for the Assembly’s consideration; the addition of a reporting line to the Independent Audit Advisory Committee; raising the rank of the head of the Office from the Director (D-2) level to the level of Assistant Secretary-General, starting with her successor; limiting the term of office of the head of the Office to one five-year term, with the possibility of renewal for one additional term; ensuring security of tenure for the head of the Office by allowing termination of appointment only in cases of serious misconduct or unsatisfactory performance; and prohibiting the re-employment of the head of the Office in the Secretariat. In response to the recommendation made by the Advisory Committee in its previous related report (A/73/183), the Secretary-General had, in his current report (A/74/78), indicated the rationale for those measures, consideration of which had been deferred to the current session owing to a lack of consensus on a draft resolution on the related agenda item. Ensuring the independence of the Office was essential to fostering trust in its work, as emphasized by JIU in its reports.

65. **Ms. Maciel** (Vice-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee ([A/74/539](#)), said that the Advisory Committee welcomed the increased participation in the voluntary public disclosure initiative and trusted that the Secretary-General would continue to encourage senior officials who had not yet done so to disclose their assets in future cycles. The Advisory Committee also noted the increase in requests for advice regarding honours, decorations, favours, gifts or remuneration, and the continued absence of a consolidated online gift registry. Furthermore, there was a need to analyse the benefits, lessons learned and requirements of the global gift registry that had been launched on a pilot basis in New York in 2016, prior to its development and roll-out across the Secretariat.

66. The Advisory Committee was of the view that any revisions to the stature, reporting line and governance structure of the Ethics Office would have significant consequences for the Organization as a whole. Should the Secretary-General wish to make a fully justified proposal concerning the independence of the Office, a detailed report would need to include such matters as the workload, structure and functions of the Office and the implications for other offices in the Secretariat and for the United Nations funds and programmes.

67. **Ms. Tarbush** (Observer for the State of Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group attached great importance to human resources management and hoped that the Fifth Committee would be able to adopt a draft resolution on the matter at the current session, notwithstanding the additional challenges posed by the late issuance of some reports under the related agenda item.

68. The fulfilment of the Organization's mandates depended on the quality of its staff and the availability of adequate resources. The Group supported reforms that would contribute to the development of a highly motivated, diverse and dynamic workforce, with a view to making the United Nations fairer and more representative, transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of Member States. The Group regretted that, despite its repeated requests, the Secretary-General had not proposed a comprehensive strategy to ensure equitable geographical distribution in the Secretariat by increasing the representation of developing countries, in particular at senior levels, so that the Organization had the truly global Secretariat needed to successfully implement its mandates. The Group therefore, once again, urged him to propose such a strategy.

69. The Group attached great importance to the advice and guidance on ethical issues provided to staff by the Ethics Office, as the protection of the Organization's core values and ensuring adherence to the highest standards of ethical conduct were necessary to build a United Nations that was a model of transparency and public administration. The Ethics Office was to be commended for the ethics briefings that it had conducted for groups and individuals at Headquarters and in the field, as well as for the high level of participation in those briefings. The Office was likewise to be commended for reducing the average number of days taken to conduct preliminary reviews of claims for protection against retaliation. The Group also welcomed the continued increase in the number of staff covered by the financial disclosure programme and encouraged more senior officials to disclose their assets.

70. While acknowledging the need for a strong and reliable Ethics Office, the Group would seek further clarification regarding the recommendations for strengthening the independence of the Office, as set out in the Secretary-General's previous report ([A/73/89](#)). Given the Office's important role, the Group was of the view that revisions to its stature, reporting line and governance structure would have significant consequences for the Organization. Further analysis of the related proposals was therefore needed. The Group would engage constructively in the Fifth Committee's deliberations in order to ensure substantive progress on human resources management.

71. **Mr. De Preter** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union had long supported progressive human resources policies and human resources management reform at the United Nations. It also supported the Secretary-General's efforts to make the Organization more effective and efficient by establishing a modern human resources system and an organizational culture that fostered the full potential of staff at all levels. The people worldwide who benefited from the Organization's work deserved a workforce that embodied high standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, as set out in Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations.

72. The European Union welcomed the efforts of the Ethics Office to ensure that staff complied with the highest standards of integrity, by fostering a culture of ethics, transparency and accountability. It noted a number of positive developments in the Office's work and stressed the need to ensure its independence. While

regretting that the Fifth Committee had been unable to reach consensus on a draft resolution on the current agenda item at the seventy-third session, the European Union and its member States would work constructively to achieve such a consensus at the current session in order to ensure that current and future human resources management reforms met the needs of the Organization and its staff.

73. The European Union supported the Secretary-General's efforts to achieve a new management paradigm, including his global human resources strategy for 2019–2021. In particular, it attached great importance to the amendments to the Staff Regulations and Rules proposed at the seventy-third session, which would enable the alignment, at the policy level, of human resources management with the overarching reforms agreed upon by the Fifth Committee at that session. His delegation was also concerned at the chronic delays in the issuance of documents in all official languages, and looked forward to receiving all outstanding reports of the Advisory Committee in due course.

74. **Mr. Ammann** (Switzerland), speaking also on behalf of Liechtenstein, said that, notwithstanding the complex factors affecting the issuance of documentation, it was unfortunate that all reports under the current agenda item had not been issued in a timely manner. Staff – the Organization's most valuable asset – must be empowered to leverage their expertise and capacities towards mandate fulfilment. A modern and streamlined human resources management system that supported a high-performing workforce was critical to ensuring an effective, efficient, flexible and results-oriented Organization.

75. Liechtenstein and Switzerland welcomed the Secretary-General's global human resources strategy for 2019–2021 and his efforts to strengthen human resources management. Senior management must lead by example and make human resources management a real priority. Indeed, modern and appropriate management of human resources was an integral part of overall management reform which, in turn, was critical to the comprehensive reform of the Organization.

76. The two delegations supported the Secretary-General's goal to acquire, develop and retain a mobile, field-oriented, high-performing, multilingual and diverse workforce. Particular attention should be paid to gender balance, which remained inadequate at the senior leadership level. In addition, a credible and fair performance management system, under which high performance was rewarded and underperformance was addressed, was essential for ensuring mandate fulfilment and staff accountability. Switzerland and

Liechtenstein would engage constructively in the deliberations on the current agenda item.

77. **Mr. Wakabayashi** (Japan) said that the greatest asset of the United Nations was its staff, and that improving human resources management was essential to the Organization's effective and efficient operation. The United Nations must acquire and retain staff who met the highest standards of efficiency and competence, while embodying the diversity required to support the implementation of the Organization's broad-ranging mandates. In that regard, the underrepresentation of some Member States in the Secretariat remained a problem, despite repeated requests by the General Assembly for more equitable geographical distribution. As one of those underrepresented countries, Japan requested the Secretary-General to redouble his efforts in that regard. His delegation would engage constructively in the deliberations with a view to reaching consensus on human resources management reform.

78. **Ms. Norman-Chalet** (United States of America) said that, two years after the Secretary-General had presented his vision for United Nations reform to Member States, human resources management remained one of the areas most in need of improvement. In particular, there was a continued need to enhance and shorten recruitment processes, develop a comprehensive workforce planning strategy and implement an improved performance management system. Her delegation fully supported the Secretary-General's efforts to address such issues, bearing in mind that the paramount consideration in the employment of staff should remain the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, in accordance with Article 101 of the Charter.

79. United Nations staff were central to ensuring the successful implementation of the Secretary-General's reforms aimed at shifting the management paradigm and transforming the Organization's culture, initiatives that had been unanimously endorsed by Member States. Holding staff accountable by recognizing good performance and penalizing underperformance was essential in that regard. While regretting that the Fifth Committee had been unable to agree on a robust draft resolution on human resources management at the seventy-third session, she welcomed the Secretary-General's proposals for enhancing the recruitment, development and retention of high-performing staff. However, her delegation was concerned at the slow pace of implementation of a proper performance management system to identify and remove poor performers, which was essential for ensuring accountability and effective human resources management and mandate fulfilment.

The United States also supported the Secretary-General's efforts to prevent and address sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and protect whistle-blowers from retaliation. Her delegation appreciated the work of the Ethics Office and OIOS in that regard, and would carefully consider the recommendations for enhancing the independence of the Ethics Office.

80. She recognized the tireless efforts of those who served the Organization, often in extremely challenging environments. Given the critical role of the United Nations in upholding peace, security and human rights, Member States had a shared responsibility to ensure that the Organization was effective, efficient and accountable. Her delegation thus looked forward to engaging constructively in the deliberations on the current agenda item.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.