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## Fifth Committee

### Summary record of the 9th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 23 October 2012, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Vargas (Vice-Chair) ..... (Brazil)  
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Kelapile

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Agenda item 133: Pattern of conferences

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*In the absence of Mr. Berger (Germany), Mr. Vargas (Brazil), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Agenda item 133: Pattern of conferences** (A/67/32, 127 and Corr.1, and 523)

1. **Ms. Popovici** (Chair of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2012 (A/67/32), said that the report contained a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences and a draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013, 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/67/127), which offered a comprehensive summary of the discussions held during the Committee's substantive session and respected the word limit for reports originating in the Secretariat. The substantive session had been conducted in a paper-smart fashion: documents had been provided on a dedicated website, while the Secretariat had provided print-on-demand services, laptops on loan and technical support.

2. 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 mandate. In 2012, one Committee member from the Latin American and Caribbean States and one member from the Asia-Pacific States were still to be appointed, leaving one Vice-Chair post, earmarked for the latter group, vacant.

3. In section II, paragraph 16, of its resolution 66/233, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to propose, at its sixty-seventh session, a comprehensive review of conference servicing highlighting any duplications and redundancies that might exist. In response to that request, the Secretary-General had suggested that the General Assembly might invite the Economic and Social Council to reconsider the necessity of reviewing its provisional biennial calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields. In the proposed draft resolution, the Committee concurred with the observations in paragraph 13 of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences

regarding the biennial calendar of meetings of the Economic and Social Council.

4. The Committee on Conferences had reviewed the statistical data on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities at the four headquarters duty stations and at Addis Ababa. In addition, she had reported orally consultations with the three intergovernmental bodies that had utilized less than the benchmark of 80 per cent of their allocated conference resources for the past three consecutive years, from 2009 to 2011. She had not, however, been able to meet with the Chairs of the Statistical Commission and the Commission for Social Development as those bodies were not based in New York, but as in the past, the secretariat of the Committee on Conferences had contacted the secretariats of those bodies, offering suggestions for improvement. She had met with the Chair of the Committee on Contributions, and suggested measures to improve use of resources, such as advising the Meetings Management Section in advance of foreseeable cancellations, reducing meeting time based on past patterns and starting meetings on time. The Chair of the Committee on Contributions had welcomed the suggestions and had explained that the sensitive nature of the Committee's agenda required it to work long hours in informal sessions. In 2013, that Committee would tentatively cancel interpretation services for eight of its meetings during the final week of its session.

5. Pursuant to section II, paragraph 17, of General Assembly resolution 66/233, the Secretary-General's report provided the utilization factor over a period of ten years for those intergovernmental bodies that had consistently underutilized conference resources. The Committee on Conferences urged those bodies to take into account such information when planning their future sessions so as to achieve the benchmark of 80 per cent utilization of resources.

6. The Committee of Conferences noted with concern the zero growth in the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa, which had remained at 70 per cent in 2011, the same rate as in 2010. While recognizing the Commission's ongoing efforts to promote the centre, the Committee recommended that the Secretary-General should continue to explore with partners, such as the African Union, additional means of increasing the utilization of the conference centre and to

encourage the heads of United Nations system entities to use the centre as a matter of priority to ensure better utilization of the conference facilities.

7. With regard to the integrated global management initiative, in its draft resolution, the Committee noted with appreciation the efforts of the Secretary-General to establish and implement in the four main duty stations common performance indicators and single information technology systems, such as gData, gMeets, gDoc and gText, and requested him to complete the internal reviews concerning accountability mechanisms and the clear delineation of responsibility between the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Directors General of the United Nations offices at Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna with respect to conference management policies, operations and resource utilization. In addition, the Committee reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to redouble his efforts to include in his next report on the pattern of conferences information regarding the financial savings achieved through the implementation of the integrated global management projects.

8. The Committee on Conferences welcomed the proximity rule as an efficient approach to servicing meetings away from established headquarters and, in that regard, requested the Secretary-General to follow the rule whenever applicable without jeopardizing the quality of services. The Committee had noted a lack of information concerning related financial savings in the Secretary-General's report; that information had been subsequently provided.

9. In an effort to ensure the timely submission of documentation, in its draft resolution, the Committee on Conferences requested the Secretary-General to enforce the slotting system more rigorously and urged author departments to fully adhere to deadlines in order to meet the goal of 90 per cent on-time submission.

10. During the substantive session, a videoconference had been held with conference managers from New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi on the lessons learned from the application of paper-smart meetings on a trial basis. Like Headquarters, other duty stations had been developing the paper-smart model. For example, since 2008, the United Nations Office at Nairobi had been servicing meetings held under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme in a paper-smart way. In Vienna, the

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had been pioneering the use of digital audio files as the main record of their discussions. In Geneva, the tremendous backlog of summary records of the Human Rights Council required practicable solutions and alternatives to written meeting records. The Committee had held lengthy discussions on the presentations made by the duty stations as well as the proposals outlined in the note by the Secretariat on the paper-smart concept (A/AC.172/2012/CRP.1). Recalling in its draft resolution paragraphs 23 and 24 of General Assembly resolution 55/285 and paragraph 23 of section IV of General Assembly resolution 66/233, the Committee requested the Secretary-General to elaborate the scope of the paper-smart concept so that it would become a more comprehensive concept based on the use of modern technology in order to better serve Member States, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

11. The Committee had held a question-and-answer session on the Secretariat's outreach and training initiatives in the area of translation and interpretation. It welcomed the measures taken by the Secretary-General to address the issue of the replacement of retiring staff in the language services and noted that recent efforts had led to the signing of two memorandums of understanding and two collaboration agreements with two universities in Africa, and one memorandum of understanding with a Latin American institution. The Committee 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, but in particular Africa and Latin America. In addition, the Committee on Conferences reiterated its request to the Secretary General to provide at all duty stations adequate staff at the appropriate level, with a view to ensuring appropriate quality control for contractual translation, with due consideration of the principle of equal grade for equal work.

12. **Mr. Graisse** (Acting Head of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127 and Corr.1), said that the volume of documentation and frequent late submission of manuscripts by author departments was

one of the greatest challenges facing the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. He had taken note of the concerns raised by the Fifth Committee at its first meeting of the current session regarding the late issuance of its documentation. That long-standing issue was not connected with the Department's recent cost-saving measures, such as cuts in resources allocated to nightshifts and weekend work and the reduction in the number of posts in the printing services. The Department was working actively with stakeholders to alleviate the problem. In that regard, it would welcome a less compressed calendar of meetings, a more predictable output from author bodies and greater compliance with the prescribed word limit for Fifth Committee documents.

13. As in 2011, the Committee on Conferences had opted to hold its 2012 session in a paper-smart fashion, setting an example for other bodies and allowing the Department to adapt the model to the needs of actual users. The theme of the videoconference with the four duty stations had been selected in response to General Assembly resolution 66/233, wherein the Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to report on the paper-smart concept, including lessons learned from implementing the model on a trial basis. The Committee had also been presented with a conference room paper on the implementation of the paper-smart model (A/AC. 172/2012/CRP.1). The Department did not propose the concept as a means of eliminating the use of paper entirely, but rather as a vehicle to conduct business in a more efficient and sustainable manner, reducing the volume of printing and distribution operations at United Nations Headquarters and elsewhere. It also recognized that the model could only be fully implemented with the approval of Member States.

14. With the addition of new electronic distribution tools, a shift from offset to digital printing, and a reduction in demand, the Department's production of parliamentary documents had been reduced from 136 million page impressions in the first half of 2009 to a projected 60 million page impressions for the whole of 2012. The aim was to move from a high-volume and resource-intensive printing operation to a high-speed, low-volume and low-cost operation.

15. The Department was at the forefront of the Secretariat's efforts to achieve efficiencies and quality gains by leveraging existing and emerging technologies. In the area of translation, in accordance

with paragraphs 7 and 8 of section V of General Assembly resolution 66/233, a global project called gText had been initiated. The project aimed to streamline the documentation workflow by automating key processes, thereby increasing the efficiency and quality of translation and related processes and facilitating remote working arrangements. The project would develop and implement a system that would provide staff and contractual translators alike with a complete and uniform suite of Internet-based language tools, as well as seamless access to background information necessary for quality translation. By profoundly changing the working methods in the multilingual documentation processing chain, gText would help to reduce capacity requirements in some support processes.

16. The Department had carefully considered alternative options before initiating the gText project, such as utilizing commercially available computer-assisted-translation and machine-translation applications, but had instead opted for the development of a customized, in-house system, which would guarantee the purity of data — a necessary condition for upholding the highest quality of translated documents as demanded by Member States — and provide the most cost-effective set of capabilities to meet the needs specific to the Organization.

17. The Secretariat was actively exploring the possibility of holding multilingual meetings with remote participation, a new approach piloted by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The initiative responded to paragraphs 2 and 5 of section III of General Assembly resolution 66/233 and would improve the utilization of existing conference-services resources, make United Nations meetings more accessible and greener, and mitigate logistical and cost limitations, such as meeting facilities requirements, travel and accommodation expenses, and administrative support. It was important to note that interpreters at ITU had accepted the new meeting format.

18. Recognizing that the satisfaction of Member States was a key performance indicator of conference management, the Department continually solicited feedback from delegations through a global e-survey and informational meetings on language-related issues at all four duty stations. The Department provided the secretaries for many of the General Assembly's main committees and subsidiary bodies and relied on input

from Member States to improve its support to intergovernmental processes. It was therefore a disappointment that, despite the Department's varied efforts, the response rate to the e-survey was consistently low. The substantive session of the Committee on Conferences had included a discussion on ways to enhance feedback. However, since delegates' participation in the two annual mandated informational meetings had been low, the Department welcomed the Committee's recommendation to amend the mandate to require a single informational meeting per year.

19. He recalled that the Department had faced challenges in recruiting competent language staff, in particular translators and interpreters for certain language combinations, and that vigorous measures had been taken to avoid a disruptive shortage of applicants. Those measures had had positive effects; the critical need to replace retirees had been largely met. However, dedicated resources must be made available if the Department was to continue its outreach and training efforts and expand its traineeship programme. Without such resources, the Department would struggle to balance the imperative of securing future language staff against the more immediate requirement of delivering timely conference services. It would address the issue of a dedicated resources for outreach in its budget proposal for the next biennium.

20. Also in response to General Assembly resolution 66/233, the Secretary-General's report identified six intergovernmental bodies whose average utilization factor had been below the benchmark of 80 per cent for the past ten years. In addition, it was suggested that the preparation of the provisional biennial calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields for review by the Economic and Social Council should be reconsidered. The Committee on Conferences had addressed those issues in its draft resolution.

21. The Department faced new challenges in delivering high-quality and timely services with a budget that had been reduced by \$42 million for the biennium. The provision of conference services, in particular for parallel meetings and on weekends, could no longer be taken for granted. In that regard, he drew the Committee's attention to the General Assembly's practice of holding several high-level meetings near the time of its annual general debate in September. Improved coordination was needed in the scheduling of

such meetings in line with General Assembly resolution 66/294.

22. **Mr. Kelapile** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the report of the Advisory Committee on the pattern of conferences (A/67/523), said that the low average utilization rate of conference-servicing facilities was a matter of concern. In that regard, the Advisory Committee recommended that the Chair of the Committee on Conferences should be urged to intensify contacts with the bodies concerned, with a view to resolving the underlying issues. Given the competitive market for conference services in Addis Ababa, it was expected that a workable marketing strategy would be formulated to address the decreasing utilization of the conference centre at that location.

23. With regard to integrated global management, the Advisory Committee reiterated the need to review the relevant Secretary-General's bulletins in order to delineate and codify the responsibilities of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and of the Directors General of the United Nations offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in relation to conference management and regretted that little progress had been made in that regard. In respect of the proximity rule, the Advisory Committee urged the Secretary-General to look beyond travel costs when seeking to generate savings from implementation of the rule. The Advisory Committee reiterated the position of the General Assembly regarding the Flextime system, as stated in resolution 66/233, and was of the view that proper analysis was required before further implementation of the system could be considered.

24. With regard to documentation and publications, the Advisory Committee was concerned about the low overall rate in the timely submission of documents by authors and requested the Secretary-General to address the issue. Recognizing the capacity constraints that limited workload sharing among duty stations, it called for further analysis of workload sharing trends in order to better assess the feasibility of the approach. While the Advisory Committee took note of the reported benefits, based on the Department's experience with the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), in conducting meetings using the paper-smart method, it requested the Secretary-

General to report also on the human resources, financial and other implications of the model.

25. Regarding translation, editing and text-processing services, the Advisory Committee noted the lack of consistency in productivity across the four main duty stations. It also called for greater efforts to identify and address the root causes of the high vacancy rate for translators and interpreters at the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

26. **Mr. Mihoubi** (Algeria), 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/67/32). The Group attached great importance to the effective delivery of quality conference services, as they were critical to the functioning of the United Nations. While the Secretary-General's report on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127 and Corr.1) indicated that the overall utilization of conference resources in 2011 had been at 85 per cent — above the established benchmark but the same as in 2010 — it should be noted that two duty stations had recorded a decreased utilization factor as compared with the previous reporting period owing to an increase in time lost during meetings. The Group called for enhanced efforts to address the issues that led to underutilization of conference-servicing resources, taking into account the unique working circumstances and function of each of the Organization's bodies.

27. The low utilization rate of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa had been attributed to the competition posed by other conference facilities in the region. It had also been indicated that the inauguration of the African Union conference complex in 2012 had further increased the competition. Nevertheless, the Group remained convinced that more innovative and proactive marketing would improve the centre's utilization rate.

28. The Group reiterated its position that the purpose of the integrated global management initiative was to incorporate information technology into the management of conference services and documentation processing in order to facilitate a balanced division of labour between Headquarters and the other main duty stations. In that regard, the unique aspects of each duty station and language group must be taken into account and the principle of equal grade for equal work must be respected. The implementation of integrated global

management should also comply with the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

29. The Group took note that implementation of the proximity rule had resulted in \$1.1 million in savings during the 2010-2011 biennium. Given that, as stated in the Secretary-General's report, many factors in addition to a duty station's proximity to a meeting away from an established headquarters were taken into consideration when planning provision of conference services, the Group concurred with the Advisory Committee on the need for a more accurate term for the concept.

30. The Flextime system required more detailed analysis before it was further implemented. In that regard, the Group recalled paragraph 16 of section III of General Assembly resolution 66/233, in which the Assembly stressed that the rules and regulations of the United Nations governing human resources should be uniformly applied. The Group therefore looked forward to the results of the evaluation of the Flextime initiative called for in the same resolution.

31. The timely issuance of documents and the quality of documentation were essential to the effective conduct of the deliberations of intergovernmental bodies. In that regard, the Group continued to support the efforts of the interdepartmental task force on documentation to address the problem of late issuance of documents. The task force was one component of a multi-pronged approach to finding a lasting solution to the perennial problem of the late issuance of documents, particularly those relating to the work of the Fifth Committee. The Group emphasized that author departments should draft their reports in accordance with the requirements laid down in General Assembly resolution 63/248.

32. The Group was encouraged by the improvement in the timely submission of documents at Headquarters, which had reached 88 per cent in 2011 for slotted pre-session documents, up from 78 per cent in 2010 and 73 per cent in 2009. However, the overall submission rates for 2012 in other three main duty stations — 74 per cent in Geneva, 43 per cent in Vienna and 0 per cent in Nairobi — were disappointing. It was imperative that the Secretary-General take appropriate measures to ensure that all author departments met document submission targets.

33. Recalling the investment in off-set printing authorized by the General Assembly, he noted that the

backlog of documents made it apparent that the use of digital printers did not cover the full demand for printed materials. Furthermore, the information concerning paper-smart meetings requested by the General Assembly in resolution 66/233 had not been provided. While some concerns had been addressed in the conference room paper on the paper-smart concept (A/AC/172/2012/CRP.1), that approach was not in line with the approved mandate. The Secretariat had instead engaged in a self-congratulatory exercise on the paper-smart initiative, without providing details on its concrete implications with regard to such issues as human resources, finances, potential effects on the proceedings of the intergovernmental bodies, the transfer of costs to Member States, and the technological gap between developed and developing countries. The Group would be seeking clarification on those issues during the informal consultations.

34. The implementation of a successful succession management plan in the language services was of critical importance to maintaining the highest standards of quality in translation and interpretation. The Group reiterated its support for a proactive succession planning programme, based on outreach to universities and the streamlining of the competitive examinations. Outreach programmes should include institutions from across all geographic regions that were ready to partner with the Organization.

35. The Group had taken note that the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) had entered into new agreements with the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) and the International Association of Conference Translators (AITC), and expected that those agreements would effectively facilitate short-term contracts for interpreters and translators, while guaranteeing delivery of the highest standards of service.

36. The Group reiterated its concern over the high vacancy rates for interpreters and translators at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. The supplementary information to the Secretary-General's report provided by the Secretariat indicated that while the average vacancy rates at the duty station had been reduced to 3.1 per cent, the vacancy rate stood at 35 per cent for interpreters and 30 per cent for translators. The Secretariat had stated that the reasons for those very high vacancy rates included perceived insecurity, lack of medical and educational facilities, lack of spousal

employment and the categorization of the United Nations Office at Nairobi as a category B duty station. The Group noted that, if the factors cited for the Secretariat were indeed deterrents, they would be pertinent to all staff, and not just those in the language services. It would therefore be seeking clarification as to why those concerns were particularly critical to the language staff.

37. With regard to the proposal to replace written meeting records with digital audio recordings, the Group recalled paragraph 29 of section IV of General Assembly resolution 66/233, and stressed that written summary and verbatim records constituted an important part of the documentation used by all members of the Group and other Member States.

38. The Group reiterated its position that the accelerated implementation of the capital master plan should not have any negative impact on the quality and availability of conference services, or the equal treatment and working conditions of language staff in all six official languages. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management should take appropriate measures to ensure the smooth continuation of its services during the implementation of the plan.

39. The Group also reiterated the importance of adhering to the guidelines and procedures contained in the administrative instructions for the authorization of the use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits by Member States and the Secretariat, and emphasized that such activities must be consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

40. General Assembly resolution 61/236 recognized the importance of meetings held by regional and other major groupings of Member States and the necessity of interpretation services for their smooth conduct. The Group was therefore concerned that only 92 per cent of requests for interpretation services for meetings of the regional or other major groupings had been met in 2011 as compared with 96 per cent in 2010.

41. **Mr. Coffi** (Côte d'Ivoire), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/67/32) was well balanced and that the draft resolution provided a solid basis for negotiation. The Group welcomed the adoption of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013. The effective delivery of

quality conference services was critical to the work of intergovernmental bodies and contributed to the overall achievement of the Organization's goals.

42. The Group noted that, although the 85 per cent rate of utilization of conference services for 2011 was above the established benchmark, it had not increased from the 2010 rate; the Organization should strive to achieve a yearly improvement in the rate. Given that utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa remained at the low rate of 70 per cent and that the new African Union conference facilities had created an additional source of competition in the region, the Group wished to know what measures beyond marketing and outreach activities could be taken to improve use of the centre.

43. With regard to the Flextime initiative, the Group stressed that the rules and regulations governing human resources should be uniformly applied and looked forward to receiving during the current session a report of the Secretary-General on the evaluation of the initiative, in line with the Assembly's request in its resolution 66/233. The African Group commended the work of the interdepartmental task force on documentation to improve the timely issuance of documents and the quality of documentation. No effort should be spared to improve the timely submission of documents. In that regard, the Group urged all author departments, in particular at the three duty stations that had reported low rates of timely submission, to submit their documents within the allotted time frames.

44. With regard to the concept of paper-smart meetings, the Group urged the Secretariat to provide the information that had previously requested by the General Assembly, including the possible effects of the paper-smart concept on human resources and the costs to Member States, among other concerns. The Group also noted with deep concern that, contrary to the provisions set out in General Assembly resolution 57/300, Member States needs for printed copies of documents on demand had not been fully met.

45. The African Group had continuously supported the implementation of a proactive succession planning programme for language service staff in order to maintain the highest standards of quality in the translation and interpretation services. While it welcomed the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding with a university in Egypt, the Group

remained deeply concerned about the slow pace of outreach activities with African universities.

46. The second pan-African conference on the training of translators, conference interpreters and public service interpreters, held in Addis Ababa in May 2012, was a welcome development. Participants at the conference had examined the draft administrative structure and budget of the Pan-African Consortium in Interpretation and Translation, which would implementing a programme to assist universities in Africa in the field of training of translators and interpreters. It was hoped that increasing the provision of training in Africa would alleviate the problem of high vacancy rates for language professionals at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the Economic Commission for Africa. Such training would also help to address succession management challenges.

47. The African Group had consistently urged that every effort should be made to reduce the vacancy rates, in particular those of language staff, at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. It was therefore deeply concerned at the persistent high vacancy rates for translators and interpreters. The reasons advanced by Secretariat to explain those this rates were not acceptable, as the those reasons would presumably apply to all categories of staff.

48. Audio recordings of meetings should not replace summary and verbatim records, which constituted an important part of the documentation used by the majority of Member States for intergovernmental decision-making processes. In that regard, the Group recalled the Assembly's request in resolution 66/233 relating to an evaluation of the pilot project undertaken by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

49. **Mr. Onuma** (Japan) said that maintaining the quality of conference services was essential for proper decision-making by Member States. The Secretariat should nevertheless continue to seek efficiencies through cost-saving measures, while Member States should refrain from adding unnecessary conference services when deciding on the modalities of new meetings.

50. His delegation wished to have more information about the lessons learned from the use of the paper smart concept during the Rio+20 Conference. Those lessons should provide guidance for further application of the concept, including in the Secretariat, provided that transparency and accountability were not



jeopardized. He was concerned, however, that it might increase the total cost of documentation owing to the duplication of human resources.

51. **Mr. Kamau** (Kenya) said that, over the years, the General Assembly had approved measures to strengthen the United Nations Office at Nairobi, including the establishment of the post of Director General of the Office and the upgrading of 11 language posts from the P-4 to the P-5 level. His delegation was therefore concerned at the vacancy rates of 35 per cent for interpreters and 30 per cent for translators, compared to an overall vacancy rate of 3.1 per cent for that duty station. Finding a solution required careful scrutiny of the problem based on credible information, yet the information presented by the Secretariat did not reflect the actual situation in Nairobi. While it was true that the worldwide shortage of language personnel might be one cause of the problem, the reasons given — security concerns; lack of educational health facilities; and a reduced hardship allowance — were not credible.

52. Nairobi hosted thousands of United Nations employees and their dependents. It had over 70 diplomatic missions, several scientific organizations and regional institutions, and scores of non-governmental organizations, many of them staffed by foreign nationals who enjoyed access to good international and multilingual schools, excellent health facilities and a satisfying lifestyle. Security was a priority for his Government and international personnel in Nairobi were no less secure than in any other major city. Moreover, the United Nations Office at Nairobi had never officially informed his Government that security or educational and health facilities were a deterrent to attracting staff to the duty station. Lastly, he was dismayed that the failure to recruit staff would be attributed to the reduction in the hardship allowance that had resulted from the upgrade of Nairobi's hardship category from C to B, suggesting that some staff members would prefer to seek financial gain by having the classification criteria compromised.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.55 a.m.*

53. **Mr. Bame** (Ethiopia) said that his delegation welcomed the efforts to increase the utilization rate of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa, particularly through the implementation of a promotional strategy both inside and outside Africa,

and was concerned to learn that the utilization rate had remained at 70 per cent in 2011. To make the centre competitive and attain the benchmark of 80 per cent, the Economic Commission should ensure a high standard of maintenance at the facilities. Aggressive marketing and timely maintenance were all the more important given the growing number of conference facilities in Addis Ababa. The Organization should also draw on lessons learned from conference management experiences in other cities with many competing facilities.

54. **Ms. Moreno Guerra** (Cuba) said that her delegation hoped to receive coherent information from the Secretariat during the current session, as decisions concerning conference services were essential for the functioning of intergovernmental bodies. She reiterated her delegation's opposition to the use of United Nations facilities by some Member States for events that were hostile to others, a violation of the Charter and the rules of the Organization that also damaged its reputation. Her delegation reserved the right to take appropriate action to address the situation.

55. While resources for conference services should not be squandered, her delegation was concerned at the recent tendency to exert pressure on some intergovernmental bodies on that account; the utilization factor was a useful tool, but should not become hindrance to intergovernmental deliberations, which in some bodies necessitated extensive informal consultations.

56. The proposal to shorten the reports of the Secretary-General, including those based on submissions by Member States and arising from sessions of intergovernmental bodies, was a matter of concern. The arbitrary imposition of word limits would have disastrous implications and could be detrimental to the quantity of information provided to Member States and thus to transparency. The Secretary-General also proposed to implement the paper-smart concept, on which the General Assembly had not yet taken a decision, but had failed to provide the information requested by the Assembly on the related budgetary and human resources implications. The technological divide between developing and developed countries must also be taken into consideration. Lastly, she wished to receive information on the resources approved by the Assembly in recent bienniums for offset printing; while her delegation was not opposed to digital printing, it was of the view that the

Organization should also maintain its offset printing capacity.

57. **Mr. Soomro** (Pakistan) said that his delegation concurred with the Advisory Committee on the need to engage with bodies whose utilization factor had been below the 80-per-cent benchmark for the previous 10 years. He would seek further information on the action being taken to address the issue.

58. To ensure that the integrated global management initiative yielded benefits, the relevant Secretary-General's bulletins should be amended expeditiously to delineate the responsibilities of senior managers in accordance with the guidance set out in General Assembly resolution 66/233.

59. Regional groups' requests for conference and interpretation facilities should be given priority to the extent possible, as meetings of those groups were important in facilitating the work of the Organization. Improvements were needed across all duty stations in the planning of conference services and the allocation of meeting rooms to regional groups. In that respect, he noted with concern that, on the previous day, a group had been denied conference services and had been asked to pay for services. His delegation would seek clarification from the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and an assurance that the situation would not recur.

60. To facilitate analysis of the Flextime system, it would be useful to have information on the experience of other organizations, apart from those based in Vienna, which had used the system.

61. Lastly, he looked forward to hearing the outcome of discussions among the duty stations concerning how to achieve the targeted 90 per cent compliance rate for the timely submission of documents. He would also seek information in informal consultations concerning the impact of business transformation initiatives such as the Umoja enterprise resource planning project, which should not merely be used as a means of deflecting criticism but were expected to produce tangible results.

62. **Mr. Chumakov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation supported the initiatives of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management aimed at controlling expenditure on conference resources and implementing integrated global management. He welcomed the signing of

memorandums of understanding with language training institutions and hoped that the internships offered in New York and Vienna to attract young translators and interpreters would be extended to other duty stations. The Secretariat should ensure the smooth transfer of knowledge from senior to junior staff. It should also continue its efforts to enhance the quality of translation and interpretation in all official languages and ensure that all language services enjoyed equally favourable working conditions, including in respect of resources and staff. Urgent action should be taken to address such pressing issues as the replacement of retirees. Initiatives to optimize the functioning of the language services should be implemented cautiously; he was concerned, for example, that the plans to have proofreading done electronically rather than by trained personnel might negatively affect the quality of documents.

63. His delegation had no objection to holding one rather than two informational meetings annually, provided that the one meeting took place before the session of the Committee on Conferences. His delegation had no objection to the gradual implementation of the paper-smart concept and other measures to improve conference services on the condition that they did not affect the quality or scope of such services. A balanced approach to such measures and a careful analysis of their financial and organizational implications were needed. For example, his delegation had begun using electronic documents to the extent possible and urged other delegations to do the same, yet the decision to stop providing printed copies of statements and other documents to the interpreters could negatively affect the quality of conference services.

64. **Mr. Lieberman** (United States of America) said that the use of digital recordings of meetings of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had proven to be a successful alternative to written records. He applauded such efforts, which had led his delegation to support the proposal made at the Assembly's preceding session to eliminate summary records. He looked forward to receiving a report on the scope of the paper-smart concept, which would reduce the large volume of paper used for printed documents.

65. He requested the Secretary-General to work with entities that underutilized conference services in order to achieve and then surpass the 80 per cent utilization benchmark.

66. His delegation supported the Flextime concept and looked forward to receiving the report on its implementation.

67. He was puzzled by recent statements in the Committee concerning the agreement on recosting of the budget for the biennium 2012-2013. Paragraph 27 of General Assembly resolution 66/246 stated that the Assembly had decided to defer consideration of post-related recosting to the first performance report. The purpose had been to ensure that any appropriation would be in line with actual expenditure, with the expectation that that expenditure would be as low as possible. All delegations had agreed to the language on the understanding that it would enable the Secretariat to find savings in order to minimize and offset any recosting impact. The Secretary-General had assured the Assembly that he would instruct managers to continue finding cost savings and his delegation had supported the budget for the biennium 2012-2013 on that basis. Should that understanding change, so too would his delegation's support for other aspects of the budget agreement, including those relating to conference services. Reopening such issues would be detrimental to the work of the Committee; he therefore urged other delegations to avoid reinterpreting past agreements.

*The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.*