

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Committee on Conferences
548th meeting
Substantive session
5 September 2017, 10:15 a.m.
Conference Room 5

**Statement of Ms. Catherine Pollard
Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management**

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Distinguished members,
Distinguished observers,

1. It is my pleasure to warmly welcome the members of the Committee. I should also like to extend greetings to the observers who are attending this session.

2. As you have noticed, in keeping with the practice established last year, we have invited conference managers at UNOG, UNOV and UNON to join us via videoconference during this session. They will participate in the discussions as time differences allow. This will facilitate the Committee's deliberations because questions can be answered directly by the relevant duty stations.

Distinguished delegates,

3. Before you is the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/72/116). In compliance with the established rule, it was issued on 21 July 2017, more than six weeks before the Committee's substantive session began this morning.

4. The report contains information on procedures and activities relating to conference management in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. It begins with a brief analytical overview, which is followed by sections presenting the results and developments in meetings management and documents management in 2016, together with cost-efficiency initiatives and cross-cutting issues. It ends with a set of conclusions, recommendations and proposed next steps. Statistical data are provided as supplementary information that is available on the Committee's website.

5. The report highlights matters related to conference management and notes that, despite an increase in the number of meetings and additional workload in translation and interpretation - combined with a constant reduction in resources - DGACM is still able to provide high quality services to Member States.

6. The report identifies opportunities for efficiency gains pursued through a more proactive reduction of underutilization by calendar bodies of their allocated meeting services. As in 2016, to provide a fuller picture, the statistics in the report cover all calendar bodies across all four duty stations, instead of being limited to core samples.

7. The integrated global management rule for providing conference services at meetings held away from established headquarters, whereby such meetings are serviced by teams from the geographically closest duty station rather than that at which the meeting is headquartered, continued to be applied in 2016. This resulted in a cost avoidance of some \$1.85 million, significantly higher than in 2015 owing to the higher number of such meetings. All duty stations have continued to build capacity to coordinate and service such meetings.

8. The report also addresses innovations in documents processing in 2016, including the increased use of eLUNa, a computer-assisted and machine translation platform developed in house; the consolidation of UNTERM as the global United Nations terminology portal to facilitate the use of harmonized official terminology and improve quality and consistency; and the optimization of contractual translation management.

9. Globally, looking at the key performance indicators of documents management in 2016, we note considerable improvements, including the Secretariat's compliance with processing deadlines and mandated issuance time frames. As in previous years, external factors beyond the control of DGACM, as well as of the author departments and offices, prevented some documents from being submitted for processing within the mandated time frames. This held particularly true for documents submitted for consideration by ACABQ, whose high volume of documentation always requires a very quick turnaround time.

10. The report also highlights several innovations aimed at filling language vacancies, such as fully remote, online recruitment testing; considerably expanded outreach to potential recruits in regions that have not historically produced many successful candidates; and the exploration of remote mentorship modalities. Moving forward, one single language competitive examination for editors, verbatim reporters, translators and copy-preparers will give the Department more flexibility to assign staff across functions and maintain healthy rosters of qualified language professionals.

11. As requested by the General Assembly, DGACM has continued to expand its outreach using social media with a view to raising awareness of career opportunities in conference

services at all duty stations. In keeping with the principle of multilingualism, DGACM has significantly expanded its coverage over the past year and now maintains six departmental Twitter accounts, all official languages being put on an equal footing, reaching out to qualified applicants from as wide a geographical spread as possible.

Distinguished delegates,

12. The report introduces a new request approval policy for the use of United Nations premises in New York for special events, transmitted to all Member States through a note verbale. The one-stop-shop project and the eDelegate portal in New York are also mentioned in the report. I will give you some more details.

13. The one-stop-shop project will provide a single entry point for requesting meeting services, with an easy-to-use self-service interface and streamlined business processes that will enhance coordination among all service providers. A first prototype was made available in June 2017. Other non-meeting-related requests, such as special events, will be accommodated once the second phase begins.

14. The one-stop-shop will provide access to the following services: conference room allocation; interpretation; nameplates, podium signs and room set-up; publishing of material in the *Journal of the United Nations*; audiovisual services; lending of technological equipment; webcast services; broadcast television coverage (UN TV); access and security-related services; and special events services.

15. The objective of the eDelegate portal project is to provide all necessary information to Member States in an easy-to-use secure portal. General Assembly resolution 70/305 mandates that Member States make, to the extent possible, full use of the e-services provided by the Secretariat to save costs, reduce environmental impact and improve the distribution of documents, and in this regard requests the Secretariat to further improve, harmonize and, where appropriate, unify such e-services.

16. Accordingly, in 2017, the eDelegate portal has either provided or is providing unified access to delegates for the following Secretariat e-services, which has streamlined business processes and eliminated paper-based procedures:

- eSpeakers, for registering speakers for the general debate, the plenary meetings and the meetings of the Main Committees;
- eSponsorship, which enables Member States to initiate or co-sponsor draft resolutions for the Main Committees and the plenary;
- eCorrespondence, allowing for the generation of correspondence to Member States through secure electronic channels;

- eBlueBook, which is a database that can automatically generate the Blue Book in various formats for printing, electronic publication and the web; and
- eRegistration, for registering delegates in New York and improving the existing application to create a user-friendly system and efficient web-based workflow.

17. The eDelegate portal gives permanent missions the ability to validate data while minimizing entry errors. The new streamlined procedure replaces and automates the current time-consuming manual submission process, saving time and resources for the missions and the Secretariat.

18. DGACM is also revamping the *Journal* in response to the desire expressed by Member States to have it issued in the six official languages throughout the year. The new modernized *Journal* will be a fully online version, widely accessible across web browsers and platforms, desktop applications and mobile devices. It will be accessible to persons with disabilities. The paper version will continue to be available and will contain all the necessary information on meetings, such as the name of the body, the agenda item, the meeting title, the location and the time, but the website will have many more features, including hyperlinks and the ability to search information, customize preferences and import to your calendar. The project was presented to the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly and we are awaiting the Assembly's decision on the way forward.

19. Committed to mainstreaming accessibility considerations in its work and operations, DGACM expanded its activities in 2016 to improve the accessibility of conference services by upgrading assistive devices, taking steps to standardize the planning and recruitment of sign language interpreters (whose availability is extremely low) and featuring increased accessibility when renovating the premises.

Distinguished delegates,

20. Conference management is an ever-changing area with many challenges, requiring continuous innovation, of which I should like to highlight some more examples. With the successful outcome of a project piloted in 2016, a new contractual workflow model was fully implemented in the Documentation Division in New York, whereby contractual work is now assigned by the individual language services rather than through the centralized and administratively heavy model used for many years before. This became possible thanks to the introduction of new documentation management tools designed by DGACM. Further efficiency gains were realized, notably an increased utilization of in-house capacity, improved quality assurance for outsourced jobs and the redeployment of the Contractual Translation Unit staff to other services in need of additional resources.

21. We are improving and modernizing our work in the translation services so that we can handle the increased workload by leveraging our investment in technology, which is also driving changes in working methods. Another cutting-edge technology is now entering its implementation phase. The Pipeline Visualization Tool was designed and developed in the Central Planning and Coordination Service in Geneva as an interactive data interface that provides decision support to managers of document management and processing units. It enables them to see the current and projected workload superposed on the available and projected workforce based on standards of productivity. It imports staff members' leave records and documents and assignments information from gDoc to provide a one-stop solution to review and prioritize the processing of documents. It also helps to identify critical periods when the engagement of contractual services is required to handle the workload.

22. While the tool improves the predictability of document delivery and ensures accountability for the meeting of deadlines and the timely issuance of documentation, a new improved version of gData has been released. The usability and relevance of existing gData reports and dashboard displays are significantly enhanced to meet requirements in the six main business areas - financial, documents management, translation, meetings management, interpretation and printing - by analysing the historical trends in workload for all DGACM duty stations and providing a global and comprehensive overview.

23. The harmonization of policies, practices and standard operating procedures across duty stations remains prominent on our agenda. The global steering group created for this purpose continued to produce specific and sound policy recommendations in 2016 and 2017 in both meetings and documents management before being expanded to include interpretation.

24. In addition, a separate report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism (A/71/757) was issued earlier this year. It reports on, among other things, the requests made in the resolutions on the pattern of conferences. I invite you to consult that report for more information about questions relating to multilingualism and my responsibilities as Coordinator for Multilingualism.

Distinguished delegates,

25. In concluding, I should like to recall that, at the previous substantive session, the smooth conduct of the question-and-answer process through the Committee's direct interaction with DGACM managers at the four duty stations and the minimized number of requests for written answers greatly facilitated the proceedings and saved time. The Committee may wish to consider following the same practice this year. Previous years' questions and answers are posted on the Committee's website to facilitate your work. Sending questions to the Secretariat in advance would also give us time to prepare satisfactory answers.

26. We are looking forward to interacting with you and facilitating your deliberations. We stand ready to assist you and ensure a fruitful and worthwhile week.

27. I thank you for your attention and wish you a successful and productive substantive session.

* * * * *