



Statement by Mr. Jaideep Mazumdar, Counsellor, on Administrative and Budgetary aspects of the Financing of UN Peacekeeping Operations at the Fifth Committee on May 04, 2004

Mr. Chairman

We thank the Controller, Mr. J. P. Halbwachs, the Chairman of the ACABQ, Mr. Vladimir Kuznetsov, and the Mr. Pramesh Bhana, of the Board of Auditors, for the presentation of their reports to the Committee.

We appreciate the improvements made in the content, structure and presentation of the reports of the ACABQ. The integration of the Committee's reports under Agenda Item 118 (Report of the Board of Auditors) and Agenda Item 134 (overview of the administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of UN peacekeeping operations) is useful as it links outstanding work done by the Board of Auditors with the ACABQ's own observations and recommendations in this regard. The listing of reports considered by the Committee as well as inclusion in the summary information provided at the beginning of each report of the financial impact of ACABQ's recommendations, are welcome additions which will aid our consideration of the agenda items.

The total proposed budget for peacekeeping for 2004-5 amounts to US\$ 2.7 billion. This represents a marginal decline from the budget of US\$ 2.8 billion approved for the previous year. However, we are aware that a number of new missions are likely to be established or expanded during the year and we shall be mindful of this in our consideration of the proposed budget. We have noted that in preparing the requirements for the support account for peacekeeping operations for 2004/05, account had been taken of the need to ensure capacity to absorb new and expanding missions during the period and to provide for a rapid deployment capability.

At the outset, let me record our appreciation to the Secretariat for the improvements in results based budgeting format including the increase in the number of quantifiable targets and indicators of achievement presented in the budget documents. We also appreciate the increased compliance with the recommendations of the Board of Auditors on peacekeeping issues.

In our last peacekeeping session in May 2003, this Committee had initiated a resolution on crosscutting peacekeeping issues, which was a welcome development. In that resolution, reports had been sought on issues such as on functional requirements of communications and information technology for field missions, training policy and training related travel costs, and on procurement and contract management for peacekeeping operations. We are deeply

disappointed that these reports have not been presented to this Committee in this session. This will certainly affect our consideration of the budget proposals in these areas.

In resolution Resolution 57/318, on the Support Account, the General Assembly had decided that any support account posts that remain vacant for 12 months and any new posts that are not filled for 12 months would require to be re-justified. Regrettably, justification has been provided for posts that have already been filled, thereby defeating the purpose of the General Assembly resolution. We expect that during the course of this session, adequate justification will be provided to the Committee for posts that have remained unfilled for 12 months as on May 1 so that this Committee could take a decision on their continuance or otherwise. Such justification should also include information on how the functions of those posts were provided during the time that the posts were vacant.

In para 18 of Resolution 57/290 B, the General Assembly had urged the Secretariat to expedite recruitment for field missions given the delays of nearly a year that the recruitment process took to fill vacancies. We note with concern that in several Missions, especially in Africa, the vacancy rates continue to be much higher than planned. As the ACABQ has stated, timely recruitment is critical and it is incomprehensible how DPKO would take an average of 347 days to recruit professional staff. We fear that up-coming missions may well be jeopardized unless there is drastic improvement in this area. We are now told that the Galaxy system, which was to have solved this problem, is in fact itself the real problem. The OHRM target of 120 days appears to be a reasonable target that the DPKO should adhere to.

We share the views and concerns of the ACABQ regarding the proposed conversion of as many as 1600 professional and 5000 national staff from the 300 to the 100 series. We would like to emphasize that such policy decisions on staff issues should not be taken without specific authorization from the General Assembly. For those staff who would be completing 4 years service during the course of 2004, we would favour suspension of all such conversion till the General Assembly has had the opportunity to consider all its implications.

The appointment of staff in many missions at levels lower than authorized and over long periods of time inevitably raises the question whether this Committee is approving posts at the right level and whether the functions could not be performed at a level lower than sought.

While we welcome the efforts of DPKO to promote information sharing on best practices and lessons learnt, we would be more confident of their usefulness if established policies and procedures of the UN were uniformly followed in all Missions. We note with serious concern that in a number of Missions, staff associated with the procurement process were found to be unaware of procurement guidelines. In this connection, we regret that the comprehensive report on procurement and contract management sought in Resolution 57/290 B could not be submitted in time for this session of the Fifth Committee.

We note the Advisory Committee's request to the Secretariat to look into the feasibility of extending the time between rotation of contingents from the existing six months. While this will result in some savings, we believe that this should be first discussed in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping before any recommendation is made. Similarly, we share the ACABQ's concern about the living accommodation of troops and agree with its observation that financial considerations should not be the predominant factor in decisions on such matters as provision of hard-walled accommodation for troops. The same applies for provision of rations to troops where the primary consideration should be the provision of fresh, high quality food to contingents in accordance with established standards, as stressed by the Advisory Committee.

The acquisition for and the replenishment of the Strategic Deployment Stocks takes on an added importance this year on account of the several new Missions that are expected to enter the start-up phase over the next few months. We share the disquiet of the Advisory Committee at the transfer to the United Nations Logistics Base at Brindisi, of vehicles that may no longer be operational or useful in other missions and the possibility that excessive maintenance costs may be incurred in respect of those vehicles.

We concur with the Board of Auditors and the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations ensure that all missions implement an assets replacement programme in a cost-effective manner and in strict compliance with the guidelines on life expectancy of assets. We also share the concern of the Advisory Committee and question the rationale for the transfer of vehicles with high mileage from missions in Europe to missions in Africa where operating conditions would be more demanding.

We appreciate the progress made by the Secretariat during 2003 in reducing the outstanding payments due on account of liabilities for troops, contingent owned equipment and self-sustainment. However, we note that the situation with regard to troop cost liabilities has improved only marginally as compared to COE and Self-Sustainment. We deeply regret the serious situation created by the non-payment of assessed contributions for current Missions such as UNMIK by some Member States, which has resulted in non-payment for contingents on the ground for nearly three years.

We welcome the recommendation of the Board of Auditors that the Secretariat continue its efforts to search for avenues to settle amounts owed to Member States that have remained unpaid for long periods of time. In this context, we look forward to discussing during this session any such proposals that the Secretary General may make as requested in para 5 of General Assembly Resolution 57/323. We however regret that the Secretariat was unable to prepare the report on consolidation of accounts that had been sought by the General Assembly last year.

Mr. Chairman

Finally, Mr. Chairman, while we all contribute to UN peacekeeping in our own way, it is only some who put their citizens 'in harms way' as it were. My delegation therefore wishes to record its deep disappointment that the COE Working Group which met in February this year could not arrive at a consensus on important issues such as rates of reimbursement for COE and Self-sustainment as well as on the methodology for revision of the rates of reimbursement of troop costs. My delegation is of the view that this issue should be discussed in this Committee at the earliest possible, which is during the main part of the 59th Session.

We look forward to discussing all these issues during this session.

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