



Republic of Fiji

Chairman of Pacific Islands Forum

Australia  
Fiji  
Kiribati  
Federated States of Micronesia  
Marshall Islands  
Nauru  
New Zealand

## Pacific Islands Forum Group

Palau  
Papua New Guinea  
Samoa  
Solomon Islands  
Tonga  
Tuvalu  
Vanuatu



Pacific Islands Forum

United Nations Member States

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**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. AMRAIYA NAIDU,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FIJI TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
AND CHAIRMAN OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM GROUP  
TO THE GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE  
ON ITEM 116: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES  
24 OCTOBER 2002, UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

Mr Chairman,

It gives me great pleasure to speak today on behalf of Pacific Islands Forum countries represented at the United Nations, namely Australia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and my own country, Fiji.

We extend our thanks to the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Mr Chen, for introducing the reports under this item and to the Chairs of the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for their respective reports.

Let me also extend our compliments to all UN staff working in the conference management area. Your skills and commitment allow us to do our work and are an integral part of the UN system. While less visible than those who sit at the front of the room, your professional expertise is important, and valued, by Pacific Islands Forum delegations. Thank you for your contribution and facilitation of our work.

We have read with interest the reports under this item. The Secretary-General has signalled a major shift in the way in which conference services will be managed in future. It is our view that he has made a compelling case for change, underpinned by the necessity of improved performance and quality. We welcome these ideas, and look forward to seeing the concrete benefits of their implementation.

There are two key principles that relate to this item that have prompted us to speak today. They are: participation, and partnership. It is on the basis of these principles that we offer the following comments.

Our group comprises mostly small countries represented by small Permanent Missions. We belong to the UN because we believe in its role and want to participate in this Organisation. On a political level, our participation is guaranteed by virtue of our membership. In practical terms, however, we are constrained by the size of our delegations. Paragraphs 49 and 50 of A/57/289 resonate strongly with delegations of the Pacific Islands Forum group. We agree that the UN has a chronic problem with excess documentation. The difficulty faced by member States in absorbing and acting adequately upon reports due to their volume and late submission is particularly acute for small delegations. We face a mountain of official documents and an ever-expanding UN agenda and schedule of meetings.

Mr Chairman,

The choices available to us under the existing system are to stretch our resources across the full spectrum of UN issues, meaning staff must cover multiple committees and run between meeting rooms, or to make decisions about what issues matter most and restrict our coverage to a select few. In the face of this challenge, a profound change in the operations of conference management is justified and necessary. We fully support the efforts by the Secretary-General to streamline the number and length of UN documents, and to establish systems to ensure we receive reports in good time. We would like to see related reports and issues being consolidated further, including the increased use of joint debates to streamline paperwork and conference time. Collectively, these initiatives will help our delegations to participate more meaningfully in the work of the Organisation.

The second concept that we welcome under this item is partnership. The Secretary-General concludes his report on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs & Conference Services (DGAACS) by stating “overall, the changes will take time but, when completed, should make the Department a more responsive, productive, efficient and useful partner to Member States and substantive entities .” This reminds us that we share responsibility for how the Organisation functions with the Secretary-General and his staff. Member States and the Secretariat each have the ability to implement changes that will lessen the burden on the system created by so many meetings and documents. In response to the advice that each set of UN documents requested by Permanent Missions adds up to an annual volume of

87,500 pages the delegations of the Pacific Islands Forum group will review the number of sets we currently request with a view to reducing their number. We would encourage other member States to do likewise.

We would also like to comment on the sample meeting statistics contained in A/57/228. There may be disagreement about what we can meaningfully discern from data on finishing meetings early. But there can surely be no confusion about the waste of resources that results from starting meetings late. Our delegations view the almost 120 hours of lost time during UNGA56 across Plenary, the 6 main committees and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping due to late starts as a stark reminder of our responsibility. Rather than apportioning blame, we see the collection of this data as an opportunity for us to move forward in an informed and constructive way. This data is not just relevant for the 5<sup>th</sup> Committee. We would like to see it brought to the attention of all Committees so that member States can approach the remaining meetings of the current session with a more conscious appreciation for the cumulative impact of meeting management. We warmly welcome the advice that in future the Department of Conference Management will work more closely with the Secretaries, Chairs and Bureaux of committees to improve meeting management. This, together with the advice that the Committee on Conferences will raise the general rate of meeting time utilisation with committees that fall short of the benchmark for 3 years or more can only strengthen our sense of shared ownership of the functioning of the UN.

Mr Chairman,

It has been a great pleasure for me to address the Committee on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum group on this important issue today. Member States and the Secretariat share the opportunity to benefit from improved conference management in the UN. For our group, we see the additional benefit that efficiently managed meetings and shorter reports provided in good time offer for small countries and delegations. The Organisation's systems need to be responsive to changes in demand and technology so that they can support the intergovernmental process in a way that maximises the skills of UN staff and the participation of member States. We consider the Secretary-General's response to the challenges and opportunities under this item to be appropriate and well timed. He has the full support of the Pacific Islands Forum group.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.