

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 37th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIRSON (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 98: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981 (continued)
(A/34/6 and Add.1, A/34/7; A/C.5/34/28; A/C.5/34/L.7; A/C.5/33/L.49)

First reading (continued)

Section 9. Transnational corporations (continued)

1. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division), replying to some of the questions put by various delegations at the 36th meeting, recalled that the French delegation had asked, among other things, how it was possible to begin implementation of subprogramme 2 before subprogramme 1 had been executed. Although the Executive Director of the Centre on Transnational Corporations could give a more detailed reply, he wished to point out that the implementation of those activities of the Centre was based on the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. Regarding the question as to why the lowest priority was assigned to programme element 6 of subprogramme 1, "Transnational corporations' impact on employment", he observed that the International Labour Organisation was also involved in the implementation of that programme element. It should be noted that the section on transnational corporations was one of the few budget sections indicating which programme elements had highest priority and which lowest priority.

2. The representative of France had pointed out that table 9.12 of the proposed budget contained errors. In the line corresponding to consultants, the figure under the heading "1980-1981 estimates" should be, as the French representative had rightly said, 60.1, not 52.0 as in the table. In addition, the entry for temporary assistance staff had been omitted from the table, as had the accompanying figures, which were 5.0 in the first column, (5.0) in the column "Revaluation of 1978-1979 resource base", and (5.0) in the column "Total increase". With the inclusion of those figures, the total appearing under the various columns was correct.

3. The question of the Indonesian representative concerning the relationship between subprogrammes 1, 2 and 3 could best be answered by the Executive Director of the Centre on Transnational Corporations.

4. The Japanese delegation had expressed surprise because the rate of inflation shown in table 9.1 was 10.3 per cent. As would be seen from table 9.3, rates of inflation varied according to the duty station in which the various units were located. The rates projected were those indicated in annex IV to the foreword to the proposed programme budget.

5. The representative of the Philippines had asked whether the travel expenses of the members of the Intergovernmental Working Group on a Code of Conduct were estimated on the basis of first-class or economy fares. He observed that the travel of the members of the Group was paid by the respective Governments. However, since

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mention had been made of travel, he wished to make it clear that the requirements for the travel of representatives shown in table 9.7 had been estimated using economy fares. The remaining questions of the representative of the Philippines and those put by the delegations of Pakistan and Morocco would be answered by the Executive Director of the Centre on Transnational Corporations.

6. In reply to the representative of Belgium, who had asked whether the costs of consultants engaged to carry out methodological work were non-recurrent items, he observed that in the proposed budget under consideration the list of non-recurrent items had been reduced to a minimum for reasons of practicality and to simplify the work involved. It should be noted that zero-base budgeting had been used to work out the estimate for consultants.

7. Mr. SAHLGREN (Assistant Secretary-General, Executive Director of the Centre on Transnational Corporations) responded to various questions put at the 36th meeting. Regarding the apportionment of the reduction in the budget for consultants recommended by the Advisory Committee, he said that the Centre intended to decrease proportionately the various projects, which would mean that the number of work-months of consultants for each project would be reduced by 10 per cent on average and that the depth or breadth of the analysis would be similarly reduced. Concerning the need for consultants in 10 out of the 15 programme elements in subprogramme 3, he emphasized that most of those programme elements required specific knowledge and expertise in various fields and in different geographical regions. Because of its small staff, the Centre had largely to rely on consultants for the collection and analysis of specific information for given projects.

8. One delegation had asked why consultants were engaged in methodological work, which was said to be of a non-recurrent nature. He explained that during the biennium 1980-1981 the Centre would embark on research in completely new areas: that meant that careful attention must be given to project design and methodology, as had been pointed out also by the Commission on Transnational Corporations at its fifth session.

9. Another delegation had asked for information about the use of consultants for subprogramme 4 (Advisory services for the improvement of the capability of Governments for dealing with transnational corporations). As was known, the Centre's technical co-operation programme consisted of advisory projects, training programmes and information services. Under the programme the Centre had assisted in the formulation or revision of laws and regulations relating to the activities of transnational corporations in general, in specific sectors and on specific issues. Assistance to Governments had also involved analysing and commenting on draft agreements and contracts with foreign partners, or staff support in preparation for negotiations with transnational corporations.

10. Since the inception of its technical co-operation programme less than three years earlier, the Centre had received 62 requests for advisory projects from 31 countries. Thirty-seven projects had been completed, involving over 50 separate missions in many cases composed of more than one expert, and 25 projects were currently being implemented. To date, the Centre had organized and held

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16 training workshops - 8 of a general and 8 of a specialized nature - attended by some 450 participants from over 70 countries. Over the next 12 months, it would organize 9 general and 15 specialized workshops, with an estimated attendance of some 600 participants.

11. On the question of priorities for programme elements, he welcomed the praise given to the Centre because it had complied with the request to assign priorities to its projects. It had been a very trying experience for the Centre, as the Commission on Transnational Corporations considered all the projects as important. Regarding the simultaneous implementation of the various mandates of the Centre, it had to be said that, although the formulation of a code of conduct under subprogramme 2 drew upon studies prepared under subprogramme 1, the Commission assigned top priority to the formulation of a code and had decided that the latter work should start immediately.

12. Replying to the question on the programme element "Transnational corporations' impact on employment", he said that the Centre was aware of the importance of the subject but had assigned it the lowest priority because of its agreement with ILO, which made that body primarily responsible for the study of the issue.

13. As to the question of updating sales documents of a periodic nature, it should be noted that such documents remained on sale throughout the interjacent period, and that the Centre was required to update them only every second year.

14. One delegation had felt that the description of some of the activities in the proposed budget was not detailed enough. All projects listed in the budget proposals were to be regarded simply as succinct presentations of the ample discussions held in the Commission on Transnational Corporations which needed to be studied in conjunction with other documents, for example, the report of the Commission (E/1978/38) and the relevant part of the report of the Economic and Social Council (A/34/3/Add.7). In his opinion, the degree of detail contained in the section on transnational corporations was comparable to that in other sections of the proposed programme budget.

15. Another delegation had stated that too high a percentage of the resources was being devoted to the information system. Two factors were responsible: first, the information system was still in the process of being built up and required many expenses related to the computerization of information; and, second, all the extrabudgetary resources so far provided for the countries referred to by the representative of Tunisia at the 36th meeting had been earmarked for technical co-operation, so that the budget allocations needed for that purpose were relatively small.

16. Several delegations had inquired about travel expenses. Both staff and expert advisers travelled in economy class. Travel by staff was usually to service meetings away from Headquarters, attend co-ordination meetings with the joint units and other organizations working on matters of common interest, and directing and co-ordinating information and research projects in various countries. The very low rate of reply to questionnaires, combined with the need to have personal contacts with Governments for various reasons, made staff travel indispensable.

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One way of reducing travel costs was to combine vacations in the staff member's home country with meetings arranged before and after the period of leave.

17. One delegation had asked for further details on the travel estimates in paragraph 9.16 of the proposed budget. Travel of the staff was required for the conduct and supervision of case studies in home and host countries. In several projects, in order to assess the impact of transnational corporations on the economies of countries, case studies had to be conducted in a small number of countries, which provided a representative sample. Those studies were undertaken by consultants, many of whom came from the countries concerned, and by the staff at the Centre. Furthermore, the staff needed to examine in depth the experience of various countries so that it could be disseminated to others.

18. Another delegation had requested information on the project concerning the impact of transnational corporations on ESCAP countries. That project would be carried out in 1980 and 1981. Finally, with regard to the recommendation on the joint units made by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the impact on the programme budget, he said that the expanded mandate deriving from that recommendation would be considered in 1980 by the Commission on Transnational Corporations and the Economic and Social Council. If the Council took a decision on the subject, the Secretary-General would submit at the thirty-fifth session a statement of the financial implications, indicating any additional requirements.

19. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) said he was glad that the Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Centre on Transnational Corporations was present; it was only right that the heads of the departments concerned should attend during the discussion of the budget sections relating to their activities. Regarding the high cost of computerization, to which the Executive Director had referred, he asked whether it would not be feasible to use the facilities and services of the Electronic Data Processing and Information Systems Division, in both New York and Geneva, in order to achieve substantial savings.

20. Mr. SAHLGREN (Assistant Secretary-General, Executive Director of the Centre on Transnational Corporations) replied that the Centre worked closely with the Division, which provided services and expertise. The Centre nevertheless had its own specialized needs in the area of computerization, and they gave rise to expenditure. The budget of the Division contained a provision to cover the cost of services to the Centre on Transnational Corporations.

21. Mr. PAL (India) repeated the proposal made by his delegation at the 36th meeting that the Committee should approve the full amount requested by the Secretary-General for section 9 without the reduction recommended by the Advisory Committee. Section 9 already showed a negative rate of real growth. Bearing in mind that CPC had recommended that the real growth in resources for the programme as a whole should be the same as the growth for the budget as a whole, the reduction recommended by the Advisory Committee was unacceptable, as it would further restrict the scope of activities in the area of transnational corporations.

22. Mr. SADDLER (United States of America) said that, before taking a decision to reverse the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, which had been made after a

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careful examination of the justification provided in support of the estimate for consultants submitted by the Secretary-General, his delegation would need additional information. He therefore proposed that a vote on section 9 should be deferred until the Secretariat provided data on the use of the 1978-1979 appropriation for consultants under section 9. The information should include the name and nationality of the consultant, the field of expertise, the length of the contract, the amount paid, the task undertaken, the objective sought and the evaluation of the results obtained. It should cover the period from 1 January 1978 to 31 October 1979.

23. Annex VI of the foreword to the proposed programme budget indicated that, under section 9, an amount of \$1,103,800 had been appropriated for consultants for 1978-1979, and that for the next biennium an amount of \$1,267,300 had been requested. If there were valid reasons for restoring the reduction recommended by the Advisory Committee, they could be deduced from the information requested. His delegation would consider it irresponsible to reject the Advisory Committee's recommendation without a thorough examination of that information.

24. Mr. SWEGER (Sweden) stressed the importance of the information collected by the Centre on Transnational Corporations and its work in the area of technical co-operation and in formulating a code of conduct. The evaluation of the programme on transnational corporations carried out by CPC should further increase the capacity and effectiveness of the programme.

25. His delegation was prepared to endorse the appropriation proposed by the Secretary-General; however, if the Committee considered that the reduction recommended by the Advisory Committee should be accepted, his delegation would be prepared also to approve that reduction.

26. Mr. DENIS (France) supported the proposal made by the United States delegation because the Committee should carry out its own examination of the question in order to be able to decide between the proposal of the Secretary-General, which was reasonable but rather vague, and the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, which also was reasonable but for which there was not full justification in its report.

27. Mr. DOWSE (United Kingdom) said that chapter III, paragraph 47, of the CPC report (A/34/38 (Part II)) recommended that the real growth in resources for the programme as a whole should not exceed the percentage of real growth for the budget as a whole; in other words, it did not recommend that the growth rates should be the same. His delegation agreed with the United States delegation that additional information was required, and it was not convinced that the reduction proposed by the Advisory Committee should be rejected.

28. Mr. PAL (India) suggested that the Chairman of the Advisory Committee might be in a position to supply immediately the information required by the United States delegation. If so, the Committee could then take a vote on section 9.

29. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that in the past the Advisory Committee had sometimes been

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criticized for being too lenient, especially with regard to funds for consultants. Yet now, when the Advisory Committee was recommending a reduction of \$102,600 in the estimate for consultants under the programme on transnational corporations, some members seemed to be unhappy with the recommendation.

30. The Fifth Committee should, if that was its wish, request the Secretariat for the information concerned; such information should be supplied in a readily usable form. The United States representative had proposed that the information should be sought from the Secretariat, not from the Advisory Committee. In any event, he (Mr. Mselle) was unable to provide forthwith all the details wanted.

31. The CHAIRMAN recalled that in 1974 the Fifth Committee had adopted a decision on the use of experts and consultants in the United Nations, which had provided that the estimates in future programme budgets should be prepared with determined restraint with a view to achieving reductions in the funds requested for those activities; at the thirty-second session the General Assembly had approved a resolution on those same lines.

32. Mr. RUEDAS (Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services) said that the information requested by the representative of the United States could be supplied within the week, except for the evaluation of the results obtained by consultants, which would require more time. Moreover, it would not be appropriate for the Fifth Committee to review the individual work of each of the consultants.

33. The CHAIRMAN said he hoped that the United States delegation could do without the information on evaluation.

34. Mr. SADDLER (United States of America) said that he must insist on having the information on evaluation because the Committee was dealing with public funds. The official responsible for directing the work of the consultants must be in a position to evaluate the results of the use of the funds in general.

35. The CHAIRMAN said that, as the need was for a brief over-all evaluation, he would take it, if there were no objections, that the Committee decided to request the Secretariat to supply the information wanted by the United States delegation by Thursday, if possible, so that it could complete its consideration of section 9 before the end of the week.

36. It was so decided.

37. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) recalled that at the 36th meeting he had asked to be informed about the decision of the Economic and Social Council on paragraph 47 of the CPC report (A/34/38 (Part II)).

38. The CHAIRMAN said that the Economic and Social Council had decided to endorse the recommendations of the CPC report, and particularly the one in paragraph 47.

Section 30. United Nations Bond Issue

39. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that, although it might be expected that the estimate for section 30 would diminish gradually, the amount of \$17,056,000 requested by the Secretary-General was somewhat higher than actual expenses in 1976-1977; that was because not all of the bonds were expressed in United States dollars and, consequently, requirements were affected by fluctuations in currency exchange rates. Accordingly, the amount of \$239,000 shown as resource growth in table 30.1 of the proposed programme budget related in fact to the projected effect of currency fluctuations on interest payments and repayments of principal for 1980-1981, compared with the corresponding payments in 1978-1979.

40. Mr. SERBANESCU (Romania) said that since 1961 Romania had been questioning the legality and practicality of the United Nations bond issue, since the funds concerned had been used to meet expenses to which Romania was opposed as a matter of principle.

41. Mr. WANG Chengwei (China) reiterated the position stated by his country in the general debate at the current session of the Assembly. The Chinese delegation was opposed to the continued inclusion of the item in the budget of the United Nations and declined to assume any obligation in relation to section 30 of the proposed programme budget. It would therefore vote against the estimate under that section.

42. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) said that Italy had at one time purchased some United Nations bonds, despite the low rate of interest which they paid. It was regrettable that, because of the controversy which had arisen over the bonds, the United Nations should be deprived of a source of financing which, in his delegation's opinion, could be extremely useful. His delegation would vote in favour of the estimate under section 30.

43. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that, for reasons of principle and in strict accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Soviet delegation had systematically opposed and would continue to oppose the financing of the United Nations bond issue from the regular budget of the Organization, since the funds obtained had been used to pay for illegal operations in the Congo and the Middle East which constituted a violation of the principles established in the United Nations Charter. As on other occasions, the Soviet Union would vote against the estimate for that item.

44. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Committee would proceed to a vote on the estimate submitted by the Secretary-General and recommended by the Advisory Committee under section 30 of the proposed programme budget.

45. An appropriation of \$17,056,000 under section 30 was approved in first reading by 81 votes to 11, with 2 abstentions.

46. Mr. BRODODININGRAT (Indonesia) said that, had he been present during the vote, he would have voted in favour of the appropriation under section 30 of the proposed programme budget.

Section 29. Conference and library services

47. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that section 29 of the proposed programme budget included estimates for the Department of Conference Services at Headquarters, conference services at Geneva and Vienna, and library services at Headquarters, Geneva and Vienna. It was a major section of the budget: the total estimate submitted by the Secretary-General amounted to \$184,487,200.

48. As was indicated in paragraph 29.3 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/34/7), the estimate under section 29 did not represent the totality of the requirements for conference services in the biennium 1980-1981. Resources for language staff and/or temporary assistance for meetings were also requested under sections 11, 12, 13, 14, 17 and 18. Furthermore, the Secretary-General indicated that the proposed programme budget for conference services at Headquarters and Geneva was calculated on the basis of provisional workloads pending determination of a more complete calendar of conferences for 1980 and 1981. Additional conference servicing requirements might also arise in the other areas specified by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 29.3 of its report (A/34/7). Because of the virtually autonomous nature of the Secretariat units engaged in calculating and administering resources under section 29, it was essential for the Department of Conference Services at Headquarters to intensify efforts to promote direct links between the Department and other conference centres of the Organization, with a view to achieving greater co-ordination in the planning, programming and budgeting of conference services.

49. If that aim was achieved, the resources authorized under section 29 could be used more efficiently. In that perspective, he expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the Secretariat to improve the presentation of estimates for conference and library services. The Advisory Committee had noted that the changes introduced were in some cases a direct response to its recommendations and observations. It was to be hoped that further improvements would be made in the presentation of such estimates.

50. The Advisory Committee was recommending a reduction of \$1,667,800 in the total estimate for section 29 (A/34/7, para. 29.54), made up of the following amounts: \$928,800 for the Department of Conference Services at Headquarters, \$665,800 for conference services at Geneva and \$73,200 for conference services at Vienna.

51. In its detailed consideration of section 29 the Advisory Committee had found that the resource growth under the section was considerably higher than stated in the proposed programme budget. The understatement of resource growth (\$1 million at Headquarters; \$2 million at Geneva) was due to the following factors. First, as was indicated in paragraph 29.12 of the Advisory Committee's report, the General Assembly had appropriated an additional amount of \$2.5 million for conference services at Geneva for 1979. For 1978, an amount of \$2.5 million had been transferred to Geneva from conference services, Headquarters. The

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Secretary-General was now stating that an additional amount of \$500,000 (\$250,000 for each of the years 1978 and 1979) would be spent by the end of 1979 and the 1980-1981 resource base had been adjusted accordingly. The Advisory Committee considered that the amount of \$500,000 should have been shown as real growth at Geneva.

52. Second, as was reflected in paragraph 29.14, the Advisory Committee considered that the estimate for section 29 did not take full account of the non-recurrent factor inherent in special conferences. It estimated the value of that non-recurrent factor at \$2.5 million: \$1 million at Headquarters and \$1.5 million at Geneva. The inclusion of those amounts in the requests for 1980-1981 was equivalent to real growth.

53. The Advisory Committee had therefore concluded that, for section 29 as a whole, resource growth had been understated by approximately \$3 million, of which \$1 million related to Headquarters and \$2 million to Geneva (the additional amount of \$500,000 referred to previously and \$1.5 million for non-recurrent items). Consequently, the Advisory Committee was recommending a reduction of \$1,050,000 (\$550,000 for Headquarters and \$500,000 for Geneva).

54. Paragraph 29.14 of the English version of the Advisory Committee's report contained an error, which should be corrected. In the penultimate sentence the word "to" after "\$2.5 million" should be replaced by a colon.

55. As the Advisory Committee observed in paragraph 29.11, the Secretary-General had proposed that, because of the vacancy situation at New York, \$2.5 million should be transferred from the appropriation for conference services at Headquarters to the appropriation for conference services at Geneva.

56. The reduction proposed by the Advisory Committee under section 29 had not been based on the transfer of resources referred to. That would imply that the vacancy situation at Headquarters, which had helped to reduce costs at Headquarters, would be at the same level in 1980-1981. If that should not be the case, the Advisory Committee understood that the Department of Conference Services at Headquarters would have a reserve from which to finance temporary assistance for meetings. Thus the Advisory Committee had recommended a reduction of \$550,000 at Headquarters.

57. The remainder of the reduction recommended by the Advisory Committee (\$617,800) related, generally speaking, to areas in which the Committee considered that the requirements submitted by the Secretary-General were not fully justified: for example, reclassification of posts, temporary assistance and overtime.

58. The CHAIRMAN thanked the Chairman of the Advisory Committee for his statement regarding section 29, which involved considerable expenditure. Since there were no proposals to amend the Advisory Committee's recommendations, he considered that the Fifth Committee did not need to vote on each item in section 29, but could vote on the section as a whole. If any amendments were proposed, it would be necessary to reconsider the situation.

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59. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) asked why the Library was included in the section, since it was separate from Conference Services, and should have its own financing.

60. Mr. AYADHI (Tunisia) said that, since during the current session the Main Committees would be adopting decisions which would have additional financial implications and the calendar of conferences would be adopted, the Fifth Committee should perhaps postpone consideration of the section until it was given the relevant information to enable it to base its consideration on a full knowledge of the facts. Nevertheless, if such a postponement was to upset the work of the Committee, his delegation would not insist.

61. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee should consider the substance of section 29 without delay, on the understanding that at the end of the current session it would be given recapitulatory data for conference servicing costs. In addition, the Secretary-General's report and the Advisory Committee's report already contained estimates of supplementary expenditure. He suggested that the Committee should proceed to hear a statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services.

62. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said that the question of Arabic language services for the General Assembly and its Main Committees was already on the Committee's agenda and had been dealt with in two documents issued by the Secretariat (A/C.5/34/L.9 and A/C.5/34/28). For that reason, he did not intend to speak on the matter at that stage, and hoped to have an opportunity to reply to the questions which would no doubt be raised in the Committee.

63. On the matter of documentation, he wished to explain in detail the reasons why it was felt that a crisis existed. At first sight, it might seem that sufficient resources existed, since for New York and Geneva alone 2,000 established posts had been approved for the biennium, plus a substantial provision for temporary assistance. It was well known that the United Nations produced a mountain of publications each year; for example, again taking into account only New York and Geneva, it was estimated that during the current biennium approximately 250 million words would be translated, some 697 million words would be typed, some 1.8 billion pages would be reproduced by internal means and, in connexion with external printing, some 310,000 manuscript pages would be typographically copy-prepared and 110,500 pages would be proofread.

64. The trouble was that, although the Department could manage everything in the end, it was finding it increasingly difficult to meet the deadlines which existed for documentation needed by United Nations organs and subsidiary organs in order to do their work. The frequent delays in producing documents simultaneously in all the required working languages embarrassed the Secretariat and frustrated the Member States.

65. The problem could not be solved simply by reducing the volume of documentation (although that would help) or by increasing the staff; the problem was a special one calling for special remedies. For that reason, there should be a clear understanding of the complicated sequence of events involved in the production of that type of documentation and of the careful timing and co-ordination which were required from start to finish.

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66. The process normally began with a decision taken by an organ or subsidiary organ or by the Secretariat itself. Subsequently, based on information elicited from the author department as to the estimated number of pages and the estimated date of completion, the future document was included in schedules maintained by the Department of Conference Services for the purpose of advance planning and the establishment of priorities, taking into account the processing capacity of those services, on the one hand, and the deadlines for ultimate distribution, on the other. After submission to Conference Services, the text passed through many, but nevertheless essential, hands. Thus, with a documents control unit keeping track, the text had to be edited, checked for material already available in translation to which the language staff could be referred, translated into the other working or official languages, as required in each particular case, typed in all those languages, reproduced in the required number of copies by either internal or external means and, finally, distributed simultaneously in the required number of languages. Many documents had to be distributed at 6 a.m. in the six official languages, and the number of documents was very high.

67. Such a complicated and interrelated sequence of events from start to finish was naturally subject to many setbacks. Any weakness or delay at any of the various stages had an immediate chain reaction which adversely affected the final objective, which was for all language versions to be ready by the appointed time. Unlike the marathon, which the whole long and arduous process resembled, the race was not won until the last of the runners had staggered into the stadium and crossed the line.

68. He would go into some aspects of the matter in a little more detail, beginning with advanced planning. In the internal document issued in May 1979 by the Division of General Assembly Affairs, an attempt had been made to predict the documentation requirements for the current session of the General Assembly. That 51-page document included the details of which documents were foreseen at that time, how many pages they were expected to contain - a total of more than 11,000 pages - and when the texts would be submitted for processing by the Department of Conference Services. On the basis of that forecast, the Department had had to plan its work for the current session of the Assembly. To the extent the forecast contained unusual items which might create difficulties, the departments concerned had been advised of any problems foreseen. However, the Department had not been surprised to see in the forecast that the report of the International Law Commission on its session, which would finish only in late July or early August in Geneva, would not be received until 1 September (since it had to be edited and placed in final form), that it would consist of no less than 350 pages and that, because neither Arabic nor Chinese were used in the meetings of the Commission, the Department would not receive the translations in those languages. That happened every year, and every year it was a major undertaking in New York to reproduce the document in the form of a supplement in six languages in no less than some 8,000 or 9,000 copies, yet the document was already late for the work of the Sixth Committee. It had taken Conference Services five days to turn the text received from Geneva into the final document, and still further time had been required to fit that immense tome into the already heavy workload of the Arabic and Chinese Services in an attempt to provide versions in those languages as early as possible. That sequence of events reflected the normal situation, which was fully known to the members of the Sixth

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Committee but which never failed to give rise to complaints as though it was the first time it had ever happened. What had definitely not helped Conference Services on that occasion was that, in spite of the forecast, which had been bad enough, the actual outcome had been more unsatisfactory than ever. Conference Services had not received the four language texts from Geneva until 17, 18, 20 and 28 September, respectively, and the number of pages had been not 350, as estimated, but rather 540 in one language version and as many as 727 in another. Complaints were often made on similar grounds which naturally affected the morale of the staff, who in fact had to make great efforts to expedite the work.

69. As soon as material was received by the Department of Conference Services, the work was scheduled by the Documents Control Section, in co-operation with the editorial units, the six translation services, the six typing units, the Reproduction Section and the Distribution Section, and of course, in consultation with the submitting office. Each document was controlled by job cards. For the normal processing of a General Assembly document in six languages, 83 such cards had to be prepared and issued in order to alert units that the job was on the way. As the required distribution date approached, the document was listed on a priority list. That list seldom contained any documents not required for the next morning or for the next two or three days unless it was a particularly long document. For example, a priority list issued on Wednesday, 31 October, contained 66 documents whose length varied from one page to 590 pages and, taking into account the languages required, involved a total of 260 jobs. Moreover, that list included only documentation, and not summary or verbatim records. Many were items, mostly draft resolutions, required for Thursday's work which were received in the Department on Wednesday as late as 9.30 p.m. with the requirement that they should be ready for distribution at 6 a.m. so that they could be placed in the delegation boxes for pickup between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m.

70. Documents Control could not accept any document that had not passed through the appropriate editorial procedures. Those editorial functions were carried out in various units of the Secretariat. If there had been any failure in procedures, the document must be returned to the editorial unit involved. That was not sheer bureaucracy; there were rules and regulations established by the General Assembly itself which must be followed in respect of documents, and it was part of the job of those units to make sure that that was done.

71. The documents must then be referenced, since they often quoted from or paraphrased previously issued documents. Quotations must be reproduced word-for-word, while in the case of paraphrased wording it was of assistance to the translators if the previous material was made available. From reference, a copy of the original text of the document went with the reference material to each of the six translation services. In each one, it was assigned to one or more translators, taking into account the size of the document, the time available for translation and the specialities of each translator. Checking any terminology points that might be involved and using the reference material as appropriate, the translator dictated on tape a draft translation. In that process, the translator might have to check with the author to clarify parts of the text. The tape cassette was then sent to the typing unit involved, where the draft was transcribed.

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The translator then reread the draft, edited it and amended it as necessary and passed it on to a senior translator for final approval. If the entire text of the document was translated by one translator, then the work of the senior translator was simply to check the translation for accuracy, to make such changes as might be called for and to give final approval. If the document had been split among several translators, then the task of the senior translator was much more difficult in that at least a minimum of consistency of style and usage within the document must be ensured.

72. When the translation was complete the corrected text went back to the typing unit for final typing on a stencil or in fair copy and then for reading. The reading was a very important function, because it was the last check for accuracy: the stencil or fair copy that left the typing unit would be reproduced and distributed in that form.

73. The stencils or fair copy of the document then went from each typing unit to the Reproduction Section. There, decisions had to be made concerning the method to be used for reproducing the document, taking into account the number of pages, the number of copies required, when the document was required and the availability of staff and equipment. Fair copy would be reproduced by offset, but for the bulk of the work an opaque stencil was prepared that could be used on a mimeograph machine or, alternatively, an offset plate could be made from it directly.

74. The material which came out of the Reproduction Section then went to distribution and it was there that the principle of simultaneous distribution assumed its most concrete and evident form. Obviously the various language versions were never all completed exactly at the same time; so the Distribution Section had to have all the language versions before starting distribution, unless it requested special permission to distribute the versions which were ready. At peak periods there simply was not space, particularly in the case of bulky documents, to hold all the language versions until the last one was ready, so that distribution had to be started simply in order to make space and avoid citations from the Security and Safety Service. Distribution to the delegation boxes started very early in the morning, so that documents could be available from 8 a.m.

75. In addition to the parliamentary type of documentation which he had mentioned, verbatim records had to be produced for bodies entitled to them; that meant four meetings a day in each of the six languages when the General Assembly and First Committee were holding their maximum number of meetings. There were also summary records, of which there might be up to 10 a day in each of the six languages during Assembly sessions. The production of verbatim records might impinge on the production of other documents since it required the services of typists from the typing units. The summary records were written and translated by translator/précis-writers; that also affected the capacity of the Department of Conference Services, since the workload fluctuated unpredictably, intruding on the planning of documentation.

76. In addition to all the documents he had mentioned, the Department had other obligations such as the publications programme - which included official records,

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recurrent publications and studies and reports for sale - and, finally, a substantial body of internal material such as administrative instructions and forms.

77. It would thus be seen that the processing of documents was a complicated process based on a delicate balance. However, no organization in the world was comparable to the United Nations as regards efficiency in the processing of documents.

78. One solution that might be suggested for the various problems was an increase in staff. The solution seemed simple but it was not. It must be understood that there was a balance between the languages, according to the requirements of rules of procedure. If the staff of one translation service was increased, the others had to be increased too and a corresponding strengthening would also be needed in the typing, reproduction and distribution facilities. For example, an increase of 10 translators in one language would mean the addition of 60 translators, 30 senior translators and 60 typists, or a total of 150 staff members, not counting the other services which he had mentioned. The financial implications would obviously be very great and to them would be added the problems of lack of space and the difficulty of finding qualified staff.

79. In his view, there should be no increase in staff until every possible effort had been made both by the Secretariat and by Member States to reduce the volume of documentation and, more important still, to ensure the more timely submission of material for processing.

80. Among other potential remedies, members of the various bodies should assist the Secretariat by keeping under review the need for existing documentation of a recurrent nature and should request new documents, whether of a recurrent or non-recurrent nature, only when absolutely necessary. When new documentation was required, a reasonable time should be allowed for its production.

81. As far as author departments and offices were concerned, the time had come to insist on stricter observance of the existing rule that reports and studies prepared by the Secretariat for the various organs should in no case exceed 32 pages. Secondly, a far more determined effort must be made to complete texts by the estimated dates and to ensure that they had the estimated number of pages initially indicated to Conference Services.

82. One of the many examples of failure to meet those requirements was the proposed budget itself. Although problems in the Department of Conference Services had contributed to some degree to the delay, the major problems had occurred in other departments for reasons which it was often difficult to avoid in the case of such a complex and comprehensive document. Whatever the reasons, the fact was that by 1 June Conference Services had received only about one third of the total of 2,400 pages, and some parts had not been received until the very end of the Advisory Committee's session, so that ACABQ had had to complete its work on the basis of some texts in the original language only. It should be remembered that the initial plan for the budget document had been for 1,500 pages, to be submitted progressively during April and May.

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83. Documents submitted late to the Department of Conference Services became urgent. The date of the meeting of the organ concerned tended to become the only criterion for priority, regardless of when Conference Services had received the document. That was the very antithesis of planning. Moreover, because previously planned production schedules were upset, the Department was obliged to lower its standards in an effort to catch up. Larger documents had to be divided among a larger number of translators and parts given to translators who might not be familiar with the subject-matter. Delay also adversely affected the physical condition of manuscripts. Sometimes referencing had to be forgone; typists and reproduction staff had to work overtime. Moreover, late submission precluded recourse to contractual translation and typing. The over-all result was a waste of capacity. There was no way of measuring the capacity which was lost but it would not be an exaggeration to say that it was equal to the capacity lacking because of vacancies. Moreover, the documents which had to be put aside were precisely those which had been submitted in time and in respect of which it would have been possible to make a respectable showing.

84. An example of such more satisfactory cases was the documentation of the Statistical Commission. The documentation was voluminous and difficult, but it had been submitted so far in advance that it had been possible to withstand all the intrusions on its priority and make it available in good time in all the required languages. That showed that it was possible to do things in the proper way.

85. It must be acknowledged that in some cases author departments had real problems, but it was to be hoped that a new awareness of the problems caused by late submission would lead to a general improvement. In that connexion, he noted with satisfaction the Secretary-General's undertaking to the General Committee that he would intensify his efforts to instil within the Secretariat a greater respect for deadlines. Such discipline was all the more important because, even if everything proceeded according to plan, there could still be acute conflicts of priority.

86. There were, however, cases in which the work was entirely unplannable. One example was communications circulated as official documents at the request of Member States. The General Committee was considering ways and means of limiting the extent of that problem, which had been specially brought to its attention by the Secretary-General. The question was a delicate one; the fact was that documents in that category, especially when they were lengthy and their distribution was considered urgent, tended to complicate the task of conference services at particularly busy periods. It must be borne in mind that the material for circulation was normally provided in only one language and therefore had to be translated into the other official languages. As far as the current year was concerned, 383 such documents had been circulated as part of the material to be considered by the General Assembly at its current session. Since those documents had comprised a total of 2,183 pages of original text which had needed to be translated into the other five official languages, that had clearly involved a considerable workload which could not have been anticipated.

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87. Another factor which affected the capacity of Conference Services to meet deadlines was the increasing tendency to convene conferences and meetings away from the main headquarters locations. Host Governments met the additional expenses, but it remained the responsibility of the Secretariat to ensure that conference servicing arrangements met the required standards. That was generally done by a combination of temporary assistance under the guidance of a nucleus of established staff. The absence of the latter staff from their duty station, sometimes for a considerable period, always upset the planning of the rest of the work.

88. The management and work methods of the services involved could certainly be improved and the Department was constantly attempting to improve procedures. Moreover, the Department enjoyed the dubious distinction of being the most surveyed, administratively investigated and inspected unit of the Secretariat, by the Administrative Management Service, by the Joint Inspection Unit and by private consultants which the Department itself had employed. The Department had been receptive to workable ideas and to constructive criticism. It was, however, doubtful whether any of those surveys had added anything to its productive capacity. What had helped over the years had been the Department's own attention to what might appear to be minute details. Perhaps one further improvement would be the declaration of a moratorium on surveys of the Department and its functions, if only for the reason that each survey required the accumulation of statistics and information as well as discussions and consultations which only detracted from the work.

89. There were other weaknesses but, on those, the Department needed a little help. First there was the fact that, because of a high turnover of staff and because of difficulties in obtaining qualified replacements, especially at short notice, as well as the time it took to organize the examinations on which the recruitment of certain categories of staff was based, troublesome vacancy situations frequently arose in particular areas and, as a consequence, the process as a whole was slowed down.

90. The vacancy problems to which frequent reference had been made, was very real. In the previous month of July, out of 53 conference typist posts in the French Typing Unit, 22 had been vacant. In a spirit of great co-operation, the Office of Personnel Services had recruited - either as regular staff members or on short-term appointments for the General Assembly - a sufficient number of French typists to fill all posts, both permanent and temporary, for the General Assembly. It was to be hoped that the experience would not repeat itself the following year, although of course the vacancy problem would continue to arise. The Department was consulting the Office of Personnel Services on possible steps to avoid a recurrence of the disastrous situation which had developed earlier in the current year. The answer might possibly be found in continuous recruitment rather than in annual recruitment campaigns. That might cost money but the savings in overtime and improvement in performance that would result from maintaining the staff at its authorized level would certainly far outweigh that cost.

91. Even those efforts might not fully solve the problem. There had been much talk about the over-payment of United Nations staff members. That might or might

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not be true in a number of cases, but it certainly did not apply to large areas of the General Service staff. Again, referring to the French conference typists - although he did not restrict his comment to the conference typists - many of the newly-recruited typists to whom he had referred had arrived in New York in September, to find that up to one half of their take-home pay would have to be spent on housing alone. In due course and after gaining familiarity with the surroundings, they might have found less expensive, but still satisfactory, housing. Nevertheless, the initial impact could be imagined.

92. The question also arose as to what staff members of the General Service category could look forward to. For the majority of them, the career prospects in their job were limited by the restricted number of useful grades in the General Service category, so that it was possible to obtain only two promotions in an entire career. The Department of Conference Services had for many years espoused the concept of an extended General Service category. It was his understanding that the administration agreed. But the staff members themselves had objected. He appreciated the philosophical reasons but would have to ask whether the staff had fully considered the practical consequence, which would seem to be to reserve for the selected few the possibility of advancing to the Professional category at the expense of the majority of the staff whose position, at least in monetary terms, could be improved.

93. Finally, he continued to be convinced that real progress in the management of the documentation problem could be made only following the introduction of modern technology into the various phases of the process.

94. Leaving aside the area of word processing in which, as the Committee was aware, difficulties had been experienced and were still under negotiation, the introduction of modern technology was inevitable simply because that was where the future lay. A large European manufacturer of typewriters had recently announced that it would discontinue typewriter production and would turn instead to word processing techniques. Such technological advances were by no means limited to the rather restricted area of typing. Anyone who had read newspaper accounts of such developments would be aware of the revolution which was taking place on a number of fronts. An advertisement on local television, for example, had indicated that a telephone call made in New York to a particular airline might be handled by a reservations clerk in Chicago or elsewhere, if his line was free the soonest. The clerk in turn could obtain in a split second information on the status of reservations for any of the flights of the airline.

95. It would not be science fiction to envisage the day when, after the first draft of a report had been prepared in an author unit of the Secretariat, there would be no need for it to reappear in typed or printed form until it was actually distributed to delegations. Such advances would come and would improve the work of the Department of Conference Services, mainly by enabling the staff, at all stages of the process, to utilize more fully their talents and their abilities by removing from their routines those time-consuming and often frustrating tasks that the new technology could handle.

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96. He hoped that he had succeeded in giving the Fifth Committee a better idea of the serious problems which had arisen as far as the documentation of the Organization was concerned and of the directions in which possible solutions lay. It was also his hope that it would be possible to maintain the impetus engendered by the recent decisions of the Economic and Social Council, the recommendation by the Fifth Committee that the General Assembly follow essentially the same procedures, and the positive reaction in the General Committee to a number of proposals submitted to it by the Secretary-General in that context. As always, a joint and sustained effort by the Secretariat and Member States was required and, for his part, he pledged the co-operation of the services for which he was responsible.

97. The CHAIRMAN thanked the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services for his clear and valuable statement.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.