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PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Eighth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary
Questions to the General Assembly at its twenty-second session

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on publications and documentation of the United Nations (A/6675) requested by the General Assembly in resolution 2247 (XXI) of 20 December 1966.
2. At its summer 1967 session the Advisory Committee had before it a preliminary report on this question, which the Secretary-General had submitted in accordance with operative paragraph 2 (a) of the aforesaid resolution. The Committee's comments on the preliminary report together with general observations on the recent history of the question of documentation are set out in paragraphs 89-109 and 302 of its first report to the General Assembly at its current session.^{1/} In the circumstances the Committee does not propose to return to the background of the question at this stage and will direct its comments specifically to the suggestions and recommendations made by the Secretary-General on the advice of the Publications Board which had been instructed:

"(a) To review the present practice of preparation and publication of Official Records and Supplements and Annexes of all organs of the United Nations, with the aim of determining whether any economy can be achieved;

(b) To review the publications programme in order to ascertain whether publications, studies and reports are prepared in accordance with pertinent resolutions of the General Assembly and other policy-making bodies, as well

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-second Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/6707 and Corr.1 and 2).

as to determine whether any publication may have lost its usefulness or become redundant;

(c) To study the documentation of the Organization with a view to suggesting possible ways and means of achieving possible economy both in extent and cost;

(d) To harmonize the publication programme of the United Nations with those of the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency, with a view to eliminating possible duplication."

3. The Secretary-General's conclusions and recommendations fall into two categories: those which can be put into effect by the Secretary-General himself, and those which call for action by the legislative bodies concerned.

4. The former category includes the scrutiny of the publications programme to determine whether valid authority still exists for the issue of publications, studies and reports, and whether any publications may have lost their usefulness or become redundant. The Advisory Committee believes that this process of scrutiny should be exercised effectively. In particular, the Committee concurs in the recommendation in paragraph 48 of the report of the Secretary-General that:

"The Publications Board should examine recurrent publications every five years to ten years, depending on the periodicity of the publication, and non-recurrent publications when reprints or revised printings are requested, on the basis of an evaluation of the publication by the substantive department under the following criteria:

- (i) A publication should be deemed redundant when the material contained in it is substantially available in another publication at a comparable price, in the same languages and, in the case of periodic publications, appearing at similar intervals;
- (ii) A publication should be deemed as to having lost its usefulness (otherwise than through redundancy) in the light of (a) changes in the concepts and principles discussed in the text, (b) availability of more up-to-date information, both of factual and conceptual nature, (c) relevancy of the publication to changing needs, and (d) current demand for the publication."

The Advisory Committee trusts that the Publications Board will exercise independent judgement in the matter since, as the Committee indicated in paragraph 102 of its first report to the General Assembly at its current session, it doubts whether it is appropriate that a decision on publishing or on redundancy should rest with the originating department itself.

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5. The Advisory Committee agrees with the suggestion of the Publications Board that, in order to harmonize the publications programme of member organizations of the United Nations system, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination should be requested:

- (i) To examine, through its sub-committees and working groups, the recurrent publications and series of the United Nations and the agencies with a view to eliminating duplication to the extent feasible;
- (ii) To ensure that, in its activity on co-ordination of the work programmes of the United Nations and the agencies, attention is given to the harmonization of the publications resulting from those programmes;
- (iii) To take appropriate action for improving inter-agency arrangements for exchange of information regarding publication forecasts plans and programmes and/or other steps which might assist in the co-ordination of those programmes, and to consider the desirability of convening an ad hoc inter-agency meeting on publications - the last such meeting having been held in 1962 - to pursue this question.

6. The Advisory Committee recommends that, as suggested by the Publications Board, before each session of a committee, commission or other body, the members of that body should be informed in writing of the policy laid down by the General Assembly regarding control and limitation of documentation, the cost of producing documents and such other information as might enlist their assistance in avoiding the preparation, translation and reproduction of documents not essential to their work. The Secretary-General should be requested to prepare a standard concise document for this purpose. The presiding officer's assistance should be particularly sought in matters of control and limitation of documentation.

7. As regards recommendations which call for action by the legislative bodies concerned, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly invite the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency to examine the extent to which their requirements for the publication of legislative material in their respective fields may be reduced by the availability of this material in the Treaty Series and other legislative series published by the United Nations.

8. The Advisory Committee believes that the lack of success of earlier efforts by the General Assembly to limit the volume of documentation has been due to a large extent to the fact that they have been regarded by subsidiary organs as exhortations and, hence, often set aside by reference to the principle that the

organ is master of its own procedures. The rising cost to the Organization, in terms of scarce manpower and resources, of producing its voluminous documentation must, in the Advisory Committee's opinion, be curbed without delay, even if this were to mean that the rules of procedure of certain organs had to be modified. To that end the Committee endorses the recommendations of the Secretary-General that:

(a) The length of summary records for any single two-and-a-half hour meeting should not exceed fifteen pages unless exceptional circumstances so require;

(b) Statements made in meetings by representatives, members of the Secretariat, or others should not be reproduced in extenso in summary records, or as separate documents, unless a decision to that effect is taken by the body concerned after a statement of the financial implications involved has been submitted in accordance with Financial Regulation 13.1;^{2/}

(c) Any organ establishing an ad hoc committee or other subsidiary body should be invited to consider whether the nature and objectives of the proceedings of that body might not allow that summary records for its meetings be dispensed with, relying on an adequate reflection of views expressed and decisions reached in its final report, or being provided with minutes only. Already established bodies receiving summary records (or their parent bodies) should be invited to re-examine their need for summary records in this light;

(d) The provision of verbatim records should be strictly limited. No extension of verbatim records beyond present arrangements shall be made unless the General Assembly so decides, in knowledge of the financial implications involved;

(e) Verbatim or summary records of an organ, or extracts therefrom, should not be included in its report;

(f) The reproduction in the body of a report of summaries of views that have already been set forth in the records should be allowed only in exceptional cases and after the need to do so has been clearly demonstrated and approved by the organ concerned, the financial implications having been brought to its attention;

^{2/} This would not prevent the distribution, for example, of copies of advance texts of such statements provided by delegations or others, or when the capacity permits, as OPI press releases in the language submitted.

(g) The list of documents intended for issue as supplements should be reviewed and approved by the Publications Board periodically;

(h) All supplements should be considered for reproduction internally by offset printing from typescript, with the exception of reports of the main organs, volumes of resolutions and certain others which for technical reasons may not lend themselves to internal reproduction. This should apply to language versions in English, French, Spanish and Russian. A study should also be made to determine the extent to which Chinese language versions can feasibly be reproduced internally from calligraphy;

(i) Reproduction of supplements in both a preliminary and a final form should be limited to cases of strict necessity, for example, when a final version of a particular report cannot be produced in time for adequate consideration by the body to which it is submitted;

(j) The substantive departments concerned should strictly limit the number and length of the documents they select for inclusion in the annexes to those essential for the understanding of the relevant discussion. Further, as a specific point, no document which is already, or will be, printed or reproduced by the internal offset process should be included in the annexes. Equally, the inclusion of a document in an annex should exclude it from any separate printing or reproduction by internal offset later;

(k) The contents of the annexes and their production costs should be periodically reviewed by the Publications Board;

(l) Reports of subsidiary bodies should be submitted in good time so that the issuance of those reports, first in provisional form, and later in final printed form, may be avoided;

(m) Replies of Governments submitted in response to specific resolutions should, wherever possible, be grouped in one compilation or periodic compilations, rather than issued as separate documents;

(n) The present practice under which the technical papers submitted for conferences, seminars and workshops, are reproduced in printed form should be modified to the end that wherever possible only selected papers or summaries would be printed.

9. As regards summary records, the Advisory Committee would recall that in its first report to the General Assembly at its current session it expressed the opinion that substantial economies would accrue if limitations were imposed on the printing of summary records and on the level below which subsidiary bodies would not be entitled to summary records.

10. The Advisory Committee realizes that the volume of documentation put out by the Organization is directly affected by the schedule of meetings and conferences. It trusts that the rationalization of this schedule by the Committee on Conferences will lead to a further limitation of documentation. Lastly, the effectiveness of the measures recommended by the Secretary-General and endorsed by the Advisory Committee will depend in practice on the self-discipline of the various bodies and their membership, and on their realizing that as the production of documentation becomes increasingly costly, the ability of the United Nations to devote its limited resources to the crucial field of development is correspondingly decreased.
