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FIFTH COMMITTEE

64th meeting

held on

Monday, 7 December 1981

at 10.30 a.m.

New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 64th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. ABDALLA (Sudan)

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

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16 December 1981

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 102: FINANCIAL EMERGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)
(A/C.5/36/L.17)

(b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. Mr. BRODININGRAT (Indonesia) said that his delegation would have voted in favour of draft resolution A/C.5/36/L.17, had it been present during the vote at the 63rd meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 100: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983 (continued)
(A/36/6, A/36/7, A/36/38 (chaps. V and VII D))

Revised estimates under section 28L, subsection 1, International Civil Service Commission, and income section 2, General income (A/36/7/Add.9; A/C.5/36/30 and Corr.1, A/C.5/36/66)

2. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee had accepted the request for an additional appropriation of \$303,500 under section 28L, subsection 1. A consequential increase of \$53,600 would have to be made for staff assessment under section 31, which would be offset by an equivalent increase under income section 1. There would be an increase of \$185,400 under income section 2 to reflect the reimbursement by the specialized agencies of their share (approximately 61.1 per cent) of the additional requirements for ICSC.

3. He drew attention to paragraph 2 of the Advisory Committee's report in document A/36/7/Add.9 and said that article 21, section 2, of the statute of ICSC provided that the latter's budget should be included in the regular budget of the United Nations. Those estimates should be established by the Secretary-General, after consultation with the Administrative Committee on co-ordination, on the basis of proposals by the Commission. The Advisory Committee believed that, if that procedure was fully complied with, it should be possible for the Secretary-General to submit budget estimates which the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee could review without being requested to consider additional proposals not included in the Secretary-General's report. The Advisory Committee was not convinced that in the case before the Fifth Committee enough talking had taken place between ICSC and the Secretary-General; the dialogue should continue until agreement was reached on what should be submitted to ACABQ and the Fifth Committee.

4. He realized that there would be occasions when complete agreement would not be possible. In that event he emphasized that the organization of the United Nations system, including the United Nations itself, should not deny ICSC requests because they disagreed with elements of its programme of work, but should do so only if they considered the requests more than adequate to implement that programme. Otherwise, the organizations risked being criticized for indirectly determining the Commission's programme of work.

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(Chairman, ACABQ)

5. The Executive Secretary of ICSC, when appearing before ACABQ, had referred to an additional P-4 post to implement the Commission's programme of work under article 14 of its statute. The Advisory Committee only considered requests by programme managers which were included in the Secretary-General's proposals, and had thus not considered the P-4 post mentioned in document A/C.5/36/66.

6. Mr. AKWEI (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission) said that the Commission was concerned to keep its budget requirements to a minimum at a time of budgetary austerity. At the same time, he must draw attention to an important omission from document A/C.5/36/30, namely the creation of an additional P-4 post for recruitment and training questions in the Personnel Policies Division, which the Commission needed to fulfil its functions under article 14 of its statute. The question was also one of procedure, since proposals made by the Commission, as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, should be fully presented to the Assembly for consideration.

7. The Commission had established a programme of work that required an in-depth examination of questions essential to effective personnel management. In the area of recruitment, such questions included geographical distribution of posts, potential savings through the institution of inter-organization recruitment procedures, and rational appointment and employment policies; with regard to training, they included the development of meaningful training policies, methods for identifying real training needs, and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of training activities. Many delegations had referred to the usefulness of ICSC's work in those fields. Moreover, the General Assembly had, in resolutions 33/119, 34/165 and 35/214, called upon the Commission to continue its work under article 14 of its statute. It should be borne in mind, therefore, that that work would suffer unless the additional P-4 post was approved.

8. Mr. RUEDAS (Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services) said that ICSC's programme and budgetary proposals, and their financial implications, had been the subject of informal consultations between the Commission and the organizations of the United Nations system and had been considered in the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions. The Chairman of the Advisory Committee had implied that such consultations should give rise to complete agreement before the Secretary-General's proposals were submitted to the Fifth Committee. That was, however, not always easy.

9. With regard to the apparent reluctance of some specialized agencies to support ICSC's programme, it should be borne in mind that they were considering that programme in terms of their own programmes of work. The Secretary-General had always given his full support to the Commission and would continue to do so.

10. Mr. MARTORELL (Peru) said that his delegation wished to propose that provision should be made in the budget for the P-4 post in question.

11. Mr. CULLEN (Argentina) and Mrs. LISBOA (Venezuela) said that their delegations supported the Peruvian proposal.

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12. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division) said that approval of the P-4 post would have financial implications under four sections of the budget. There would be an increase of \$57,100 under section 28, and an increase of \$13,600 under section 31, with an equivalent figure at \$13,600 under income section 1. The amount to be reimbursed by specialized agencies under income section 2 was estimated at \$34,900.
13. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) expressed surprise that the International Civil Service Commission had been so late in submitting its budget proposals for the biennium and appealed to the Commission to prepare its future budget submissions in time so as to avoid the need for revised estimates, which delayed the work of the Fifth Committee.
14. With regard to the request for the establishment of a P-4 post contained in the letter addressed by the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission to the Secretary-General (A/C.5/36/66), he asked how it had happened that the request had not been included in the original budget submission of ICSC. He noted that, according to the standard costing method, the letter from the Chairman of ICSC had cost some \$400 to process - an expenditure which could have been avoided had the proposal been submitted in time.
15. As to the revised estimates as a whole, he reaffirmed his delegation's position with regard to the creation of new posts. He could not support the establishment of the new posts recommended by the Advisory Committee or, a fortiori, the P-4 post which had been requested by the Chairman of ICSC in a highly irregular manner. He requested that the revised estimates should be put to a vote.
16. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said he was convinced that the establishment of the P-4 post was absolutely vital to the work of ICSC and he therefore endorsed the Peruvian proposal.
17. Mr. HAND (United Kingdom) said that his delegation had considerable difficulty in understanding what had prompted the Chairman of ICSC to write the letter contained in document A/C.5/36/66. The budget of ICSC was agreed by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) and presented to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General on behalf of that Committee. Since the members of ACC had not seen fit to include the request for a P-4 post, his delegation could not agree that it was proper for ICSC to seek to circumvent the normal budgetary process and, whatever the merits of the case, it could not agree to action by the Fifth Committee on that request. He requested that the Peruvian proposal should be put to a separate vote.
18. Miss ZONICLE (Bahamas) said that her delegation was unable to support the Peruvian proposal for technical, procedural and substantive reasons. The Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services had confirmed the reservations expressed by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee with regard to the way the request had been put before the Committee. The work which the proposed P-4 post was intended to carry out had already been included in the programme of work of ICSC. For example, the Commission had already recommended measures to counteract

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(Miss Zonicle, Bahamas)

discrimination against specific groups of staff and to promote career development. What was needed was not further study but rather action to implement the measures and guidelines already recommended.

19. Mr. BUNC (Yugoslavia) said that his delegation supported the Advisory Committee's views.

20. Mr. YOUNIS (Iraq) said that his delegation supported the Peruvian proposal since it found the arguments advanced by the Chairman of ICSC convincing.

21. Mrs. HOUSHOLDER (United States of America) said that her delegation would vote against the Peruvian proposal because it supported the Advisory Committee's position and the views expressed by the United Kingdom representative.

22. Mr. ZINIEL (Ghana) observed that the representative of Peru had rightly pointed out that the reason why the Advisory Committee had been unable to take a position on the question of an additional P-4 post was that no formal request had been referred to it. In the light of the statement by the Chairman of ICSC, his delegation was convinced of the need for the P-4 post. While recognizing the validity of the observations of the Soviet delegation regarding the late submission of the budget estimates, his delegation would support the Peruvian proposal.

23. Mr. SITUSI (Malawi) said that, in its statement on the report of ICSC, his delegation had expressed concern over the performance of the Commission. It was now clear that the reason for the inadequate performance of ICSC was the lack of a P-4 post. His delegation therefore supported the establishment of the post so as to strengthen the Personnel Policies Division of ICSC.

24. The Peruvian proposal was adopted by 59 votes to 23, with 8 abstentions.

25. The CHAIRMAN proposed that, having regard to the decision just taken and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, the Fifth Committee should approve an additional appropriation of \$360,600 under section 28L, subsection 1, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1982-1983, as well as a consequential increase of \$67,200 under section 31 (Staff assessment), to be offset by an increase of the same amount under income section 1 (Income from staff assessment). He further proposed that the Committee should approve an increase of \$220,300 in the estimates of income under income section 2, to reflect the reimbursement by the specialized agencies of their share of the additional requirements for ICSC for the biennium 1982-1983.

26. The Chairman's proposals were adopted by 76 votes to 11, with 2 abstentions.

27. Mr. AKWEI (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission) thanked the Fifth Committee for the support it had shown for the work of the Commission by approving the revised estimates and, in particular, the request for an additional P-4 post. He assured the Soviet representative that the request for that post had

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(Chairman, ICSC)

not been made as an afterthought. Neither the request for that post nor the revised estimates had been delayed. The Commission had complied fully with the procedural requirements for the submission of its budget estimates to the Budget Division of the United Nations Secretariat and had transmitted them well ahead of schedule, in August. The problem of the P-4 post had arisen simply because the Secretary-General had omitted the item from the proposals he had submitted to the Advisory Committee. As the Chairman of the Advisory Committee had confirmed, that Committee had not accepted or rejected the request of ICSC; moreover, it had recognized that there was a procedural opportunity to resubmit the proposal to the Fifth Committee. The Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services had stated that there had been a full dialogue with ICSC. The Commission, for its part, took a different view. Because of the Commission's functional independence from the organizations of the United Nations system, its requests should have been transmitted to ACABQ by the Secretary-General, who could have advanced his arguments for wishing to reject it.

28. With regard to the comments made by the United Kingdom representative, he said that the Commission had felt it quite proper to address a letter to the Secretary-General. The only reason why the Advisory Committee had been unable to take a position on the request was the absence of supporting documentation, despite the references he himself had made to the matter in an earlier statement in the Fifth Committee. The letter had been sent therefore simply to comply with the Advisory Committee's desire for documentary evidence.

29. It was not, as had been suggested, the first time that a proposal for the establishment of a post had been considered by the Fifth Committee in the absence of a recommendation by the Advisory Committee. At the preceding session, the Fifth Committee had considered a request by ICSC for three new posts in the Cost-of-Living Section and had decided on the merits of the case to grant the request. It should not be thought, therefore, that by addressing a letter to the Secretary-General he had intended to circumvent the established channels.

First reading (continued)

Section 29. Conference and library services (continued)

Arabic language services (continued) (A/36/7/Add.11; A/C.5/36/54 and Corr.1 and 2)

Job classification and career development of language staff (continued) (A/C.5/36/4; A/C.5/36/CRP.3)

30. Mr. BOUZARBIA (Algeria) recalled that at the 62nd meeting he had proposed that the staffing level of the Arabic Translation Service should not be reduced by 1983, as was projected in document A/C.5/36/CRP.3.

31. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division) said that the Algerian proposal would entail an additional cost of \$681,600 under section 29A of the proposed programme budget (representing 9 posts at the P-3 level) and an additional amount of \$138,000 under section 31 (Staff assessment), to be offset by the same amount under income section 1 (Income from staff assessment).

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(Director, Budget Division)

32. The financial implications of the Cuban proposal to approve the reclassification from P-2 to P-3 of the post for the Chief of the Planning Unit, which the Secretary-General had requested in paragraph 29.16 of the programme budget but which the Advisory Committee had not endorsed, would be \$18,100 under section 29 and \$6,400 under section 31, to be offset by the same amount under income section 1.

33. Mrs. HOUSHOLDER (United States of America) asked what the effect would be on the other language services of retaining the nine posts in the Arabic Translation Service.

34. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said that it might be useful to review the background of what should properly be called the restructuring of the language services rather than the reclassification of language posts. The restructuring exercise, which had embraced all language staff, namely, interpreters, translators, editors, proof-readers and verbatim reporters, had been undertaken in response to the problem of the poor promotion prospects of language staff. The language staff of the Organization were recruited through a rigorous (and costly) screening process, which included an exacting competitive examination. All were graduates of institutions of higher learning, and many held two or more university degrees. The transfer of such experienced staff to other parts of the Secretariat in search of improved career prospects represented a considerable loss for the Organization, which invested heavily in both the selection and training of language staff.

35. References had been made in the course of the discussion to one or another language being "young". To all intents and purposes, all languages were equally young or equally old. An effort was made to attract young people to make a career in the language services. In the case of the Russian and Chinese Translation Services, where there was a slightly higher turnover, the Secretariat co-operated with the training courses organized in Beijing and Moscow. Translators who came to the United Nations from such training courses were naturally beginners and received on-the-job training.

36. Revision had been discovered to be the main reason for the increasing slowness of the translation process, and it had a negative impact on the morale of the staff concerned. In his opinion, there was no need to revise every single piece of translation. Contacts with other organizations, both within the United Nations system and outside it, had revealed a growing movement towards the elimination of revision, which was cumbersome, costly and inefficient. When the question had been discussed with the translation services, the Chinese had raised the same problems as were currently being raised with regard to Arabic and had cited the particular intricacies of their language. Senior members of the Chinese Translation Service had stated that they would rather give up the benefit of restructuring and maintain the number of translators at the P-2 and P-3 level. That would have put the Chinese Translation Service in an unequal position and the members of the Service might have felt that their chances of promotion were worse than those of their colleagues in the other language services. However, the members of the

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(Under-Secretary-General for Conference
Services and Special Assignments)

Service as a whole had voted in favour of restructuring. The staffing table for the Chinese Translation Service showed that, while the over-all number of posts would be reduced by 10 between 1980 and 1983, there would be 10 more posts at the P-5 level and 9 more at the P-4 level. That considerable increase at the more senior levels would give Chinese translators proportionally the same opportunities for career development as members of the other translation services.

37. He pointed out that, as far as the number of posts was concerned, the Arabic and French Translation Services were of equal size, although the latter Service had the heaviest workload of all the translation services. He stressed that the staffing tables had to be seen in the light of the note at the end of document A/C.5/36/CRP.3 and said that the Arabic Translation Service would have to be strengthened when the General Assembly decided to extend Arabic language services to the Economic and Social Council or when it was decided to use Arabic in the Security Council.

38. He recalled that, at the thirty-fifth session, there had been a strong feeling in the Fifth Committee that all language services should be treated equally. As to the question posed by the representative of the United States, he must reply that it was not for him to say whether the other five translation services should be treated differently from the Arabic Translation Service or whether those services would raise the same problems as the Chinese had done the previous year. The Secretariat had endeavoured to apply the principle of equal treatment, which had been strongly supported at the previous session, but if the Committee wished to change that principle, the Secretariat would act accordingly.

39. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco), referring to the question raised by the representative of the United States, said that since no balance existed in the use of languages in the Secretariat, his delegation wanted a balance to be established and the weaker language services to be strengthened. There were two main reasons for that. First, since the more a language was used for original drafting, the less translation was done into that language, it was essential to establish a balance between drafting and translation. Secondly, the Arabic language services faced a problem of adapting and familiarizing themselves with the Organization. Arabic had only recently been introduced as an official language and it was therefore essential to help it to develop until it had reached the stage where it could be treated in the same way as the other languages. His delegation had reluctantly consented to the principle of self-revision as long as that did not have an adverse effect on translation into Arabic. The Arabic Translation Service should therefore be maintained at the 1980 level of 73 posts. He stressed that his delegation was not asking for any special favours with regard to Arabic but simply wished to ensure that, given the adoption of draft resolution A/C.5/36/L.22 on the simultaneous distribution of documents in the different languages of the United Nations, no problems would be created for the other five languages because the Arabic Translation Service was not able to fulfil its role.

40. Mrs. HOUSHOLDER (United States of America) said that her delegation supported the expansion of the Arabic language services as proposed by the Secretary-General

(Mrs. Housholder, United States)

and slightly modified by the Advisory Committee. The nine additional posts called for by the representatives of Algeria and Morocco appeared to be nine posts more than the Secretary-General deemed necessary. She therefore asked the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services whether those posts would improve the functioning of the Arabic Translation Service.

41. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said that he was unsure whether the representatives of Algeria and Morocco wished to keep the same ratio of revisers to translators as had existed in 1980 in the Arabic Translation Service. If the 1980 complement of posts was to be maintained, then the 1980 ratio of translators to revisers had also to be maintained. However, he warned that if that happened some members of the Arabic Translation Service would be extremely unhappy. He said that the figures for 1983 in document A/C.5/36/CRP.3 would provide all the services concerned with the means necessary to do their job. If the Committee decided to exclude the Arabic Translation Service from the exercise, it would be necessary to preserve the status quo and maintain the number of translator and reviser posts at the 1980 levels. He would like to know whether the Committee was in favour of that solution or whether it wanted to give the members of the Arabic Translation Service the same career development opportunities as the members of the other translation services.

42. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) pointed out that it was difficult to find temporary assistance for Arabic since the demand for Arabic translators far exceeded the supply. He drew the attention of the Committee to the sixth preambular paragraph of General Assembly resolution 35/225, which stated that the more recently introduced official languages required particular attention. In the near future, Arabic would be used in the Economic and Social Council, the Security Council and in 280 United Nations organs. He was therefore attempting to help the Department of Conference Services by suggesting ways of coping with the difficulties that would be faced.

43. Mr. BOUZARBIA (Algeria) said that his delegation had no wish to single out Arabic in relation to other languages. It had supported resolution 35/225 and felt that it should be applied to all languages. To say that all languages were equally young was simply playing with words. The point was that Arabic was a newcomer to the United Nations. With regard to temporary assistance, the only reason for seeking such assistance would be that there were not enough permanent staff. In any event, free-lance translators proficient in Arabic were hard to find.

44. Mr. YOUNIS (Iraq) noted that General Assembly resolution 34/226 had requested the Secretary-General to bring the Arabic language services up to a level equal with the services of the other official and working languages of the General Assembly and its Main Committees. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of that resolution (A/C.5/35/18) was quite clear. Paragraph 7 of that report listed the number of posts in the various Arabic language services, including the translation service. However, paragraph 29.11 of the proposed programme budget indicated that the implementation of self-revision would result

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(Mr. Younis, Iraq)

a decrease of 46 Professional posts in the Translation Division, including 9 Arabic translation posts. His delegation felt that that reduction was a result of a misinterpretation of General Assembly resolution 35/225 and considered that the Secretariat should take steps to remedy the situation. He emphasized that his delegation was not asking for new posts but simply that the number of posts should be maintained at the level indicated in document A/C.5/35/18. In conclusion, he pointed out that the nine posts whose abolition was being proposed were still vacant; if they had been filled, there would have been no problem.

45. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said he had taken note of the points raised with regard to helping the development of newly introduced languages. Nevertheless, he felt bound to point out that, although the Spanish and Arabic Translation Services had similar workloads, their respective number of posts were: 60 and 73 for 1980; and 53 and 64 for 1983.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.