



FIFTH COMMITTEE
60th meeting
held on
Thursday, 8 December 1983
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 60th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KUYAMA (Japan)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 109: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1984-1985 (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 113: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT: REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT
(continued)

Department of International Economic and Social Affairs (continued) (A/38/334 and Add.1, A/38/600; A/C.5/38/L.15)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/C.5/38/L.15, containing a draft decision sponsored by the United States of America concerning the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs.
2. Mr. FLESHER (United States of America), introducing the draft decision, said that when the Committee had first taken up section 6 of the proposed programme budget, his delegation had expressed concern at the lack of clarity in the Secretary-General's comments (A/38/334/Add.1) on some of the recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit. Clarification was required concerning the steps being taken to implement the JIU recommendations with which the Secretary-General had indicated agreement. The intention of the draft decision was to take up those recommendations on which there had been some delay and to give new impetus to their implementation.
3. After explaining the implications of various paragraphs of the draft decision, he said that his delegation had intended to propose language that would have wide support in both the Fifth Committee and the Committee on Programme and Co-ordination. Several delegations had suggested amendments which, in a spirit of compromise, his delegation would be willing to accept. Other delegations had indicated that they might nevertheless have difficulty in acting on the JIU recommendation at that time. His delegation had submitted the draft decision essentially as a courtesy to JIU in acknowledgement of its serious work in reviewing the activities of the Department, but if, any delegations believed that the subject should not be addressed in the form of a decision, his delegation would promptly withdraw its draft.
4. Mr. ORTEGA (Mexico) said that he was sincerely grateful to the delegation of the United States for its readiness to accept certain modifications which would indeed meet some of the concerns of the developing countries. However, the draft decision created certain problems, particularly with regard to the moratorium the Secretary-General had requested in legislative guidance for the administrative restructuring. While the work of JIU deserved praise it would not, in the context of that moratorium, be wise at that time to request the Secretary-General to assign definitive functions to any given section or department. His delegation therefore suggested that consideration of the draft decision should be postponed to the thirty-ninth session of the General Assembly.
5. Mr. FLESHER (United States of America) said that, in view of the opposition it had encountered, his delegation would withdraw the draft decision it had proposed.

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AGENDA ITEM 116: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued)

6. Mr. NEGRE (Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services), after beginning his concluding statement in the debate on the agenda item by thanking the delegations that had welcomed the change in the format of his introductory statement, said that he thought it was important for the Committee to have an understanding of the general principles on which his approach to his tasks of recruitment and administration of the staff and of implementation of General Assembly directives was based. He hoped that his comments would be of interest both to those delegations which had raised questions and to those which had voiced their concerns without calling for specific information.

7. Before touching on the two major themes, the representation of Member States and the status of women in the Secretariat, he would like, on the eve of Human Rights Day, to note that it was a matter of the greatest concern to the Secretary-General that a number of United Nations staff members remained in detention in spite of the provisions of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. The Secretary-General urges all Governments to respect the relevant provisions fully, just as he had demanded that staff members do likewise.

8. It was clear from the Committee's debate that representation in the Secretariat and the relationship of such representation to recruitment efforts were prime concerns to Member States. Even those near or above the top of their desirable range had advocated continued recruitment of their nationals to posts subject to geographical distribution. He appealed to such Member States for understanding and co-operation, for efforts to further the candidacy of nationals of over-represented States made it very much more difficult to achieve the objectives of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General.

9. A number of delegations had proposed a complete halt to the recruitment of nationals of over-represented countries. The Office of Personnel Services had been rather less drastic and proposed, in its medium-term plan for recruitment, to limit appointments of nationals of over-represented countries to 10 per cent of all appointments. However, the priority objectives were to bring unrepresented and under-represented countries at least to the midpoint within their desirable range and to bring the proportion of women up to at least 25 per cent.

10. The chief methods for accomplishing those goals, any combination of which might be applied to a given Member State, were: national competitive examinations; recruitment missions; publicity; consultations with Governments and non-governmental organizations with a view to soliciting candidates for general recruitment; and invitations to them to propose candidates for vacancies in specific occupational groups at specified levels. The methods employed had to be adapted to the situation of the countries concerned. Some under-represented States had large numbers of qualified candidates available while others were countries with small populations where there was a special problem in obtaining the services of unquestionably qualified candidates who were often not available because of the

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needs of the countries themselves. It was by identifying and releasing qualified candidates that unrepresented or under-represented States could help. To that end, the permanent missions concerned had been contacted and most had already responded.

11. The system of national competitive examinations had proved most successful for those under-represented States able to provide a sufficient number of qualified candidates. Where, even with the active participation of Member States, the number of available qualified candidates was limited, other methods of recruitment might have to be considered.

12. In order to ensure the full co-operation of heads of departments and offices within the Secretariat, the Secretary-General had informed them that the implementation of recruitment plans should be a Secretariat-wide exercise involving, under their personal responsibility, close co-operation with the Office of Personnel Services. At the same time, the Secretary-General had instructed the Office of Personnel Services, within the framework of General Assembly resolution 35/210, to include in its annual work plan of recruitment specified targets as well as the means and procedures to be used, including the allocation of posts. Accordingly, the plan for 1984 would allocate a minimum of 40 per cent of posts at the P-3 level and above, to be filled by nationals of unrepresented and under-represented countries, exclusively for such candidates. Thus, the policy of earmarking, which had been so successful for the P-1 and P-2 levels following competitive examinations, would be partially applied to all the vacant posts reserved for the two priority groups. In that way, the 40 per cent target established by the General Assembly would be observed and the objective of bringing all unrepresented and under-represented countries within their desirable range by the end of 1985 could be brought within reach.

13. Indicative planning figures for the improvement of the internal geographical distribution of each department and office had been conveyed to all heads of department. The figures were based on the difference between the actual and the desirable position of each region and adjusted to take account of the fact that the General Assembly had determined that up to 75 per cent of the staff of the regional commissions could be nationals of the region in question. Each department and office had been asked to establish plans and specific targets for increasing the number of women at all levels over the three-year period of the medium-term plan. The progress made would be monitored by the Secretary-General on the basis of information on the position as at 30 March and 30 September each year. Further, he wished to assure the many delegations which had referred to the question of posts at the D-2 level and above that their comments had been duly noted and ways of improving the distribution of such posts were under consideration.

14. The recruitment of more women was the other major objective and it had been emphasized by most speakers while some had qualified it as a goal to be achieved within the overall objective of equitable geographical distribution. The problem was not one that the Secretary-General could solve on his own. While women had achieved positions of distinction in a number of Member States, in most of them they were not as well represented at all levels as men. The same was true for the Secretariat. Progress had been made since 1970, when only 15 per cent of the staff in posts subject to geographical distribution had been women. Currently, more than

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22 per cent of such posts were held by women, and some departments and offices had even exceeded the 25 per cent target. In conformity with General Assembly resolution 37/235 B, Member States could help the Secretariat by proposing suitable women candidates, particularly at the higher levels. It should be noted that the nationals of 51 States in posts subject to geographical distribution included no women at all.

15. A number of delegations had requested information on recruitment procedures and had commented specifically on the length of the recruitment process. Recruitment was a complicated process involving interaction among the Office of Personnel Services, departments, advisory appointment bodies, the candidates themselves and often Member States. The need of OPS to meet the wishes of the General Assembly for as wide a distribution as possible of vacancy announcements and for the identification of qualified candidates from priority groups, together with the legitimate desire of Member States for sufficient time to reach nationals in their countries, often conflicted with the desire to offer an appointment as soon as the department was satisfied it had found the right candidate, selected from however narrow a base. The need to recruit from more than 150 countries for posts at offices spread around the world did not make matters easier. Nevertheless, efforts had been made to improve the ability to project vacancies, to identify candidates from priority groups at an earlier stage and to monitor the recruitment process through computerized information on the status of recruitment.

16. A few delegations had suggested that the appointment of an ombudsman might improve staff-management relations. That might be an interesting idea, but since changes had recently been introduced in appeals procedures and grievance panels, it would be well to see how they worked out before venturing in a new direction.

17. In concluding, he reiterated that it was necessary to integrate and consolidate in one general plan all the essential aspects of a rational management of the Secretariat's human resources. While decentralization was necessary to such management, it must be accompanied by firm central control, which was necessary also for the implementation of General Assembly directives. The authority of the Office of Personnel Services over all personnel questions needed to be strengthened, and he greatly appreciated the many expressions of support in the Committee in that regard.

18. Mr. YONIS (Iraq) said that his delegation attached great importance to the question of the regional economic commissions. He requested clarification of the Assistant Secretary-General's statement that 75 per cent of their staff should be locally recruited, especially as his delegation was concerned about the situation of the vacant posts.

19. Mr. NEGRE (Assistant Secretary-General, Office of Personnel Services) explained that the proportion of 75 per cent was not an absolute obligation. It was in fact preferable for the unity of the Commission secretariat for the percentage to be lower. The United Nations policy was to encourage the recruitment of nationals of the region up to a maximum of 75 per cent, provided they were not nationals of over-represented countries. In the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA), for example, it was difficult to maintain a balanced recruitment

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policy because the conditions of service offered by the United Nations were of minor interest to nationals of the rich Gulf States so that the other countries of the region were over-represented. He had discussed the matter in Baghdad in June 1983 with the Executive Secretary of ECWA and efforts were being made to plan an interim arrangement to enable the posts to be filled without destroying the balance of geographical representation in the region. Nationals of all countries in a region must be represented and language questions must also be taken into account.

20. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said that his delegation, which had traditionally supported the Office of Personnel Services, had hoped in vain for improvement in recruitment. He would like to know why the mandate given to the Secretary-General concerning representation at the higher levels had not been implemented and why the document submitted was absolutely contrary to the letter and spirit of the General Assembly's decision. The many delegations which had expressed concern on that point should be given an explanation of the problems encountered. His delegation was ready to support the new personnel policy outlined by the Assistant Secretary-General but it requested an answer on that particular point.

21. Mr. HOUNGAVOU (Benin) supported the representative of Morocco on the question, which the Assistant Secretary-General seemed to have skirted in his reply. States under-represented at the decision-making level would at least like to know what steps would be taken to rectify the matter under the new personnel policy. Another question with which the Assistant Secretary-General had not dealt was that of the authority of the Office of Personnel Services as the central entity responsible for developing and implementing personnel policy. He understood that the Secretary-General intended to strengthen its authority. He wished to know if the Assistant Secretary-General considered the current situation satisfactory and if not what measures were being contemplated to rectify the matter, in the framework of co-operation with the heads of departments.

22. While he understood the difficulties encountered with respect to recruitment, he wished to draw attention to his country's under-representation. Of the 11 Beninese staff members, only six held permanent posts, the others having been recruited under contracts which were coming to an end. Other States no larger than Benin had many more nationals on the staff. The long-awaited recruitment examinations had not yet been organized in Benin and he would like to know what to say to the numerous candidates who were assailing his department.

23. Mrs. de HEDERVARY (Belgium) requested information about certain staff members who were still in prison in a European country contrary to the provisions of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the commitments entered into with the Secretary-General.

24. Mr. NEGRE (Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services) wished to stress that staff members had been arrested or imprisoned in spite of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, but not contrary to it. Since the matter had legal implications, he would ask the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs to provide more information. In any event, because of its sensitive nature, the question must be discussed with a great deal of caution.

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25. On the subject of recruitment, he wished to dispel an apparent misunderstanding on the part of a number of delegations with regard to the difference between a desirable range and a quota, two distinct concepts. A desirable range was indicative of intent and allowed the Secretariat some leeway in the recruitment of staff from a given country. In contrast, a quota represented an obligation to recruit a specific number of persons. For example, if the desirable range for a particular State was 2-14, it was often assumed that that State was entitled to be represented in the Secretariat by 14 staff members. That was not the case however. In fact, if a country achieved representation at the mid-point of its desirable range, the Secretariat considered that it was well represented.

26. He agreed that the Office of Personnel Services did not have complete authority in the matter of recruitment. It should be borne in mind, however, that in a large organization where the notion of consensus was very important, no single group was able to impose its will on the system. Recruitment matters had to be discussed with the departments and offices of the Secretariat, whose concerns must be accommodated along with those of the Office of Personnel Services. The interventions of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management with the Secretary-General were particularly helpful in that regard. The Secretary-General himself was well informed of the personnel situation, as evidenced by the circulars on personnel questions he had issued in January and May 1983, in which he had drawn the attention of heads of departments to the need to co-operate with the Office of Personnel Services in the matter of recruitment. While it was difficult to change prevailing attitudes, many heads of department had shown themselves willing to co-operate. Obviously, any action in such matters must take into account the factor of bureaucratic ponderousness.

27. Appointments to posts above the D-2 level were made directly by the Secretary-General because of the political considerations involved. The Secretary-General was well aware of the need for a better geographical distribution of those posts, and negotiations were currently under way to that end. However, posts at the D-2 level were professional rather than political in nature. They were generally filled through the promotion of career officials; consequently, external candidates were seldom considered. Moreover, the majority of those posts were occupied by persons holding permanent contracts who could not be summarily dismissed in order to achieve a more equitable geographical distribution. However, many of the individuals concerned would be retiring shortly and the Secretary-General was aware of the need to diversify the geographical distribution of those posts as they became vacant.

28. Mrs. de HEDERVARY (Belgium) said that her question regarding imprisoned staff members referred only to the procedures which should be followed vis-à-vis Member States when staff members were arrested.

29. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said that the foremost concern of the Secretariat with regard to its composition should be its political balance. While he was reluctant to speak for other Member States, he was able to state that Morocco, which had been a Member State since 1956 and had actively participated in many aspects of the Organization's work, was severely under-represented, a fact which his delegation considered politically unacceptable. The primary responsibility of the Secretary-General should be to ensure that such a situation was corrected.

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30. With regard to the question of promotions, he said that while promotions of staff members to the upper echelon of the Secretariat might occur sporadically, that was hardly the right of all staff members. As it was the Secretary-General who was responsible for appointments to the upper echelon, he must do everything in his power to ensure that all countries were given equal consideration when such appointments and promotions were made.

31. Mr. HOUNGAVOU (Benin) said that his delegation had been involved in the negotiation of desirable ranges used in the recruitment of staff from Member States; thus he was fully aware of the meaning of that term. He wished to draw attention to the fact that, the explanation of the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Affairs notwithstanding, Benin remained under-represented within the Secretariat by any standard.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PROGRAMME PLANNING (continued) (A/C.5/38/L.18*)

32. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/38/L.18 in his capacity as Vice-Chairman of the Committee, said that the draft had been prepared on the basis of numerous consultations held with delegations. Before commenting on its substance, which was divided into two parts (A and B), he wished to draw attention to a change in the structure of part B. The seven numbered operative paragraphs of that section should be considered as constituting section I of that part of the resolution; and the paragraphs headed as parts C and D should be renumbered as sections II and III of part B.

33. The two main parts of the draft resolution reflected the major concerns of Member State with regard to programme planning. The preamble of part A recalled several relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, pertinent reports of the Secretary-General and, in the last four preambular paragraphs, the concerns expressed by delegations during consultations.

34. In part A, section I, of the draft resolution, which concerned the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989, the reference to the Third Committee in that paragraph was based on the fact that subprogramme 5 of programme 1 of chapter 21 of the medium-term plan had been submitted to that Committee for its observations.

35. Part A, section II, paragraph 7 provided guidelines to ensure rapid implementation of General Assembly requests to the Secretary-General in connection with programme the programme implications of draft resolutions.

36. Part A, section III reflected in paragraph 1, in particular, the concern that many Member States had expressed with regard to the need to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations evaluation units and system and the timetable for the review of the evaluation programme.

37. With reference to part A, section IV, he pointed out that the provisions of paragraph 2 did not preclude the submission of comments by the UNDP Governing Council and by the Industrial Development Board, as recommended in paragraph 35 of the CPC report (A/38/38 (Part I)).

(Mr. Tommo Monthe, United
Republic of Cameroon)

38. Referring to part B, section I, he observed that paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 were directed towards enhancing the effectiveness of the Joint Meetings of CPC and ACC. The purpose of the request in paragraph 5 was to ensure that the report of the cross-organizational programme analysis was in line with what CPC and the Economic and Social Council had wanted. Part B, section II was designed to ensure that the CPC recommendations concerning the programmes of the Joint United Nations Information Committee were not left pending.

39. Since the draft resolution was the result of lengthy negotiations and represented a compromise, he expressed the hope that, like a similar resolution adopted the previous year, it would be adopted by consensus.

40. Mr. DITZ (Austria), referring to part A, section II, paragraph 1, asked what kind of action the Secretariat would envisage in order to comply with that paragraph, particularly since the budget was already sufficiently voluminous.

41. Mr. RUEDAS (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) pointed out that clarity and brevity could go hand in hand with careful analytical work, and paragraph 1 should be interpreted in that light. While the current programme budget contained programme analyses for the economic and social sectors, most delegations felt that the analyses should be extended in so far as possible to the political and common services areas. The Secretary-General intended to proceed on that basis.

42. Mr. BELYAEV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic), referring to the second preambular paragraph of part A, suggested that a reference to resolution 3534 (XXX) should be inserted after the reference to resolution 3199 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973.

43. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) said that he saw no objection to that suggestion.

44. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America), referring to part A, section II, paragraph 8 asked whether that paragraph would make it difficult for the Secretariat to implement existing resolutions on the termination of activities that were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective or to redeploy resources among activities of a general nature.

45. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) observed that, during earlier discussion of the draft resolution, the same question had been answered in the negative. The Secretariat would still have sufficient room to manoeuvre. Moreover, the paragraph was based on a specific mandate from the Assembly.

46. Mr. RUEDAS (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) endorsed the comments made by the representative of the United Republic of Cameroon. The Secretary-General would obviously not eliminate any activity or programme that was based on a specific mandate but would have the necessary latitude to propose any reduction considered to be valid. In the case of activities which were not based on any specific mandate, the Secretary-General could indeed redeploy resources and would then report to the legislative bodies on the action he had taken.

47. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America), supported by Mr. van HELLENBERG HUBAR (Netherlands), said that his delegation had no objection to the draft resolution but since it had just been circulated he requested that the Committee should defer its decision on it to the next meeting.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.