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Fifteenth session

## BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1961

## Control and limitation of documentation

Eleventh report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its  
fifteenth session

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report (A/C.5/822) which the Secretary-General has submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 1272 (XIII) of 14 November 1958 on control and limitation of United Nations documentation.
2. Under operative paragraph 8 of the above resolution, the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee were requested to report on the operation of the resolution to the General Assembly at its fifteenth session or earlier. In this regard, the Advisory Committee gave the matter its special attention in conjunction with its consideration of the budget estimates for 1960 as well as those for 1961. The Committee's comments on these two occasions are to be found in paragraph 200 of its tenth report to the General Assembly at its fourteenth session (A/4170)<sup>1/</sup> and paragraphs 216 to 219 of its first report to the General Assembly at its fifteenth session (A/4408).<sup>2/</sup> In connexion with the latter comments, the Committee had the benefit of studying the preliminary text of the Secretary-General's present report. The observations referred to above related to such aspects of the subject as the efforts within the Secretariat for the curtailment of documentation and the improvement of its quality, including the contribution which could be made to this end by appropriate editorial control,

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1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Fourteenth Session, Supplement No. 7.

2/ Ibid., Fifteenth Session, Supplement No. 7.

the need for a strict adherence to article 13.1 of the Financial Regulations and the relevant rules of United Nations bodies concerning the presentation of the financial implications of decisions involving documentation, and the extent to which United Nations bodies have followed the recommendation in resolution 1272 (XIII) to give special consideration to the documentation question.

3. The report now submitted by the Secretary-General sets out the progress made along the lines indicated by the 1958 Committee on the Control and Limitation of Documentation (A/3888)<sup>3/</sup> and approved by the General Assembly in resolution 1272 (XIII). The report distinguishes between action taken by delegations and that taken by the Secretariat, pointing out at the same time that, in practice, these actions, to be effective, must be co-ordinated.

4. The Advisory Committee notes that there has been general compliance with the two recommendations in resolution 1272 (XIII) addressed to United Nations organs and subsidiary bodies, namely (a) that they should include the question of control and limitation of documentation in the agenda of their next session, and (b) that full use should be made of regulation 13.1 of the Financial Regulations, which provides that no Council, commission or other competent body shall take a decision involving expenditure unless it has before it a report from the Secretary-General on the administrative and financial implications of the proposal. While the specific actions taken by the different bodies have been of varying effectiveness, the general awareness of the problem has in itself probably acted as a brake to further expansion. The Committee would stress the importance of a continuous review of the problem and of making periodic assessments of procedures for keeping documentation within reasonable limits.

5. As regards the application of financial regulation 13.1, the Advisory Committee notes that there is still room for improvement, in spite of an expansion of the form in which statements of financial implications are being submitted by the Secretariat. In particular, the Committee understands that there is a tendency to be less strict in the application of the regulation in cases where, although administrative and financial implications arise, no specific additional budgetary credits are likely to be requested. The Committee would

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<sup>3/</sup> Ibid., Thirteenth Session, Annexes, agenda item 51.

observe that the total volume of documentation is as much at issue as the related costs, even apart from the fact that any unused portions of the available credits for documentation might find better use in other needy areas of activity.

6. In regard to action within the Secretariat, the Advisory Committee notes that continuing improvements are sought in respect of the economical drafting of documents. The statistics provided in paragraphs 12 to 14 (A/C.5/822) indicate reductions which have been effected in the total volume of documentation in certain sectors, by comparison with previous years. The Committee attaches particular importance to the contribution which could be made by the editorial control machinery within the Secretariat. Drafting is a skill not shared in equal measure by all, and may be especially difficult where conciseness must be sought without eliminating essential elements of information. It follows that the widest possible use of editorial control facilities should be encouraged. The Advisory Committee would therefore reiterate its long-held view that such facilities should be extended to all the main offices of the United Nations.<sup>4/</sup>

7. There are indications that, as a result of the special attention given to the question of documentation in the light of resolution 1272 (XIII), some progress has been made towards a rational control of the volume and quality of documentation. Obviously the amount of documentation produced in the Organization would, of necessity, depend on the level of its activities. While this level is on the increase, the Committee trusts that the need for an intensification of present measures and the importance of continued vigilance, both on the part of the Secretariat as well as of the competent organs requesting documentation, will not be overlooked.

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<sup>4/</sup> See, in particular, Official Records of the General Assembly, Fourteenth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/4170), paragraph 201; Ibid., Fifteenth Session Supplement No. 7 (A/4408), paragraph 219.