



# UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Distr.  
GENERAL

A/8868  
1 November 1972

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twenty-seventh session  
Agenda item 75

## PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

### Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh session

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report by the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences and the addendum thereto which contains the calendar of conferences and meetings of United Nations organs and the principal organs of the specialized agencies for 1973 and preliminary calendar for 1974 (A/8790 and Add.1). The Committee has also taken note of chapter XXI, section B (Calendar of conferences) of the report of the Economic and Social Council on the work of its fifty-second and fifty-third sessions, 1/ which has been allocated to the Fifth Committee.

2. In paragraph 6 of his report, the Secretary-General expresses the belief "that further action on the study requested under paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) should be suspended, not merely postponed for another year". In paragraph 9, he puts forward four suggestions for action by the General Assembly, one of which is that the Assembly should "reaffirm its previous resolutions on the pattern of conferences, in particular the provisions of its resolution 2609 (XXIV)". When the Advisory Committee inquired into the apparent contradiction between the two suggestions, it was informed that paragraph 9 sought the reaffirmation of the general principles governing the venue and periodicity of conferences and meetings set out in paragraphs 8 to 12 of resolution 2609 (XXIV) and not of the resolution as a whole.

3. The Secretary-General was requested in paragraph 6 of that resolution to expand and complete in certain respects a study provided for in Economic and Social Council resolution 1460 (XLVII). The Council's objective was to obtain an analysis of trends - over a five-year period - in the number and length of conferences and meetings held at Headquarters in New York and the United Nations Office at Geneva within the Council's field of competence. The General Assembly enlarged the scope of the study to cover the whole area of conferences and meetings, and requested the

---

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-seventh Session,  
Supplement No. 3, (A/8703).

Secretary-General, in effect, to use the factual data at his disposal as a basis for making proposals "which would allow for the most rational and economic use possible of the administrative premises and staff assigned to conferences and meetings services both at Headquarters in New York and at the United Nations Office at Geneva".

4. The two resolutions underline that the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council are looking for a rational and economic model pattern of conferences for New York and Geneva which would be rooted in past decisions by intergovernmental organs. In the circumstances, the Advisory Committee is unable to subscribe to the Secretary-General's belief that work on the study should be suspended. On the contrary, the Committee believes that the study is particularly necessary at this time, as the new conference facilities in Geneva will soon become operational. Due regard must also be had to the situation in Vienna.

5. The Advisory Committee has studied the information provided in the annex to document A/8790 on the number of meetings held at Headquarters during the first eight months of 1970, 1971 and 1972. It has requested the corresponding information for Headquarters and Geneva on a full-year basis, and it will issue it as an addendum to this report.

6. The table in the annex to document A/8790 shows considerable variations from year to year in the number of meetings held in a given month. If conference staff and facilities are to be used in the most economical way such variations should be reduced to a minimum. That can be achieved only if the Secretary-General is required to indicate at the very outset to any organ contemplating the holding of a meeting or conference what the most economical venue and timing of the proposed meeting would be. An informed decision whether to follow the Secretary-General's suggestion or to choose a more expensive alternative can be reached only after all the relevant factors have been analysed; in the absence of such information a rational choice is virtually impossible.

7. Conversely, co-operation of the Member States with the Secretary-General in the preparation of the programme and subsequent adherence to it is essential if the attempt to rationalize the pattern of conferences is to succeed. It would be unrealistic to forbid all deviations from a plan. But if considerations other than the most economical use of resources were to prevail too frequently the purpose of the plan would be defeated. The fact that such co-operation has not always been forthcoming in the past may have prompted the Secretary-General to advocate a more pragmatic approach and to express the belief that further action on the study requested in General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) should be suspended.

8. The Advisory Committee agrees with the Secretary-General that standing organs - with the exception, for obvious reasons, of the Security Council - and subsidiary organs should be encouraged to adhere to a set annual or biennial pattern of meetings. This procedure which has been followed successfully for the sessions of the General Assembly and, to a large extent, of the Economic and Social Council itself would also be very helpful to national administrations in their own planning. Ad hoc bodies should as a rule meet during periods when there are no or few meetings of standing committees and commissions.

/...

9. In the circumstances, the Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretary-General, taking into account practice in recent years, the requirements of the proposed new programming and budgeting procedures and the existence of new conference facilities at Geneva, submit to the General Assembly at its twenty-eighth session a study including a model pattern of conferences for New York and Geneva. If, in his opinion, past practice makes for an uneconomical accumulation of meetings during particular periods of the year, he should submit recommendations on how the situation could be remedied. As a first step, the model need not include meetings of bodies whose sessions last less than a week and those requiring little by way of services.

10. In paragraph 6 of his report, the Secretary-General states that he has no immediate attention of increasing the total capacity of the Secretariat to service meetings. It is not clear from the report whether that undertaking applies only to the permanent conference servicing establishment or also to the volume of credits annually requested for temporary staff for meetings. The Advisory Committee believes that, when considering requirements at Headquarters and Geneva, the two should be viewed together.

11. As the new physical facilities for conferences in Geneva become operational, the Secretary-General should review the situation to determine whether the balance of staff between New York and Geneva is still appropriate and whether any change is needed in the number of established posts or the provision for temporary assistance in the languages area in Geneva. The study of this question would usefully complement the model pattern of conferences referred to in paragraph 9 above.

12. In paragraph 9 (b) of his report, the Secretary-General suggests that the General Assembly approve the programme of meetings for 1973 contained in document A/8790/Add.1. However, as the Secretary-General himself indicates that he will issue an addendum that will complete and amend the calendar for 1973, and as that calendar contains some inaccuracies, the Advisory Committee feels that General Assembly action on the recommendation in paragraph 9 (b) can be postponed until after the addendum has been issued.

13. The Advisory Committee has no objection to the recommendations in paragraph 9 (a) (as clarified in paragraph 2 above) and in paragraph 9 (c).

-----