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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1978-1979

Arabic language services in the United Nations

Administrative and financial implications of draft
resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2

Eighteenth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the statement by the Secretary-General on the administrative and financial implications of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 relating to Arabic language services in the United Nations (A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1).

2. Under the terms of the draft resolution, the Secretary-General would be required to establish, on a permanent basis, with effect from 1 January 1978, an Arabic Translation Section in the United Nations Office at Geneva.

3. The proposal is intended to replace the "present arrangement" to which reference is made in operative paragraph 2 of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2. The Advisory Committee recalls that this arrangement was proposed by the Secretary-General in his report to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session (A/C.5/31/60 and Corr.1, paras. 14-25) and was approved by the Assembly in section VIII of its resolution 31/208 of 22 December 1976. It provided for an expanded Arabic Translation Service at Headquarters, which would use the pouch service and the existing facsimile transmission facilities linking Headquarters and the United Nations Office at Geneva for the dispatch of translated material to Geneva; the experience gained from the arrangement was to be reviewed at the end of the three-year period 1977-1979. 1/

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 8 (A/31/8 and Add.1-26), document A/31/8/Add.26, para. 14.

4. In operative paragraph 2 of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2, the General Assembly would specify that the Secretary-General provide the staff requirements for the Arabic Translation Section in the United Nations Office at Geneva for the biennium 1978-1979 by transferring to it the posts already established by the General Assembly under section VIII of its resolution 31/208, with the addition of a post of Chief of Section. The posts which the Assembly had authorized under the terms of its resolution 31/208 consist of four senior translators at the P-4 level, seven translators at the P-3 level and eight General Service posts for 1977 and 1978 and a further P-3 post for 1979, 2/ that is, a total of 19 posts for 1977 and 1978 and 20 posts for 1979.

5. In his statement of administrative and financial implications for 1978-1979, the Secretary-General takes into account the transfer of 19 posts (four P-4, seven P-3 and eight General Service) from Headquarters to the United Nations Office at Geneva and requests three new posts consisting of one P-5 for the Chief of Section, one P-3 for a terminologist and one G-7 for a reference clerk (A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1, table following para. 3). The Secretary-General does not refer to the P-3 post authorized for 1979 at Headquarters or to the posts for a reviser at the P-4 level and for a bilingual secretary at the G-7 level to be outposted from the Arabic Translation Service at Headquarters to the United Nations Office at Geneva for the purpose of maintaining terminological contact with the substantive staff of UNCTAD and technical liaison with the Translation Division at Headquarters (A/C.5/31/60, paras. 25 and 26).

6. The Secretary-General estimates the net additional cost for the biennium 1978-1979 at \$444,800, including \$138,200 for the three new posts, \$218,600 for the higher cost of the posts to be transferred from Headquarters to Geneva, and \$88,000 in one-time costs for the transfer itself (A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1, paras. 3, 9 and 10).

7. The representatives of the Secretary-General have indicated to the Advisory Committee that the estimates with respect to the 19 posts which would be transferred from Headquarters to Geneva are indicative only and that actual costs would depend on how many posts could be filled. The Advisory Committee understands that to date the number of vacancies in the Arabic Translation Service is 16 professional posts out of 54, but that active recruitment for 15 posts is under way. Further elements of uncertainty include the lack of experience as to the amount of work to be generated by the UNCTAD bodies, the fluctuations in the requirements for Arabic translation both at Headquarters and at Geneva, and the difficulty of interpreting the request in paragraph 4 of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 which calls for the timely provision of Arabic translation services to the General Assembly and its Main Committees.

2/ Ibid., para. 9 (b); see also A/C.5/31/60, para. 26.

8. In its examination of the statement submitted by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1), the Advisory Committee noted that normally the General Assembly, in its resolutions, addresses to the Secretary-General requests or directives on the substance of the question, while leaving it to him, in the exercise of his responsibilities, under Article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations, to submit proposals on how those requests or directives should be implemented. By contrast, draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 prescribes the organizational arrangement for the operation of a particular subdivision of the Secretariat.

9. Should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2, additional requirements would arise under the programme budget for 1978-1979 in the amounts indicated by the Secretary-General in his statement (A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1, para.10), namely \$444,800 under section 23 and \$95,500 under section 25, the latter to be offset by an increase in the same amount under income section 1.
