

UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY



Distr.  
GENERAL

A/32/272/Add.1  
7 November 1977

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-second session  
Agenda item 104

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on first-class travel in the United Nations organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

1. The Secretary-General transmits herewith the joint comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) on the above-mentioned report, which has been distributed as document A/32/272.
2. The report of the JIU on first-class travel in the United Nations organizations (JIU/REP/77/3) - the fifth in a series of reports dealing with the matter in various organizations - contains a useful summary of the current policies and practices of the United Nations system as a whole with regard to travel standards. The report recommends that existing travel standards should be reduced to allow first-class travel only to presidents or chairmen of legislative or governing bodies and to the executive heads of organizations, with exceptions only in respect of officials accompanying the executive heads and other cases justified on medical grounds.
3. It should be stated at the outset that ACC fully shares the dual concerns which have inspired this report: the need to economize as far as possible in respect of administrative expenses and the desirability to have uniform practices among all organizations in this sphere. As regards the specific recommendations in this report, it is necessary in commenting on them to distinguish between travel which comes under the authority of the executive heads and travel by members of organs or subsidiary organs of the various organizations. With regard to travel coming under the authority of the executive heads, broadly comparable rules are currently in force throughout the system, based on General Assembly resolution 3198 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973. This resolution, which was prompted by the first report of JIU on the use of travel funds (see A/8900), provides that "payment by the United Nations of travel expenses of staff members shall be limited to the cost of economy class accommodation by air or its equivalent by recognized

public transportation via the shortest and most direct route, except for the Secretary-General, Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General, provided that, when special circumstances warrant, the Secretary-General may, at his discretion, allow first-class travel".

4. Since the adoption of that General Assembly resolution, organizations which are part of the common system of salaries and allowances have generally aligned themselves with this standard. As a result, savings have been introduced within the system. In addition, whenever necessary, further restrictions have been introduced on a voluntary basis.

5. Thus, with the exception of one organization which has further changed its practices to provide that standards of accommodation for all staff members without exception should be by economy class, except when otherwise authorized, there is at present within the system full uniformity with respect to travel standards by secretariat officials, except at the most senior executive level, as provided for in General Assembly resolution 3198 (XXVIII); the application of the new standards has been kept under close control and voluntary measures have been taken to achieve further economies, whenever necessary. In the circumstances, the question arises whether the additional economies which would result from the adoption of the Inspectors' recommendations would justify the initiation of a new process of revision of the standards. A further reduction of standards, as proposed by the Inspectors, would also be likely to lead to a greater number of exceptions warranted by special circumstances having to be authorized. As noted above, such exceptions have so far been kept to a minimum and this should - to the extent possible - continue to be the practice in the future. The formal adoption of additional restrictions on first-class travel, as recommended by JIU, would also constitute a further departure from the over-all criterion that to the extent possible the same standards should be applied to international civil servants as are applied by national Governments in respect of officials of comparable rank. For these reasons, and subject, of course, to the conclusions that may be reached by the governing bodies, members of ACC are doubtful that a further revision of the standards adopted by the General Assembly in 1973 would be warranted at this time.

6. Turning to the question of standards of travel of governmental delegates to supreme legislative bodies, governing bodies, executive boards or the equivalent, and of members of subsidiary organs and expert committees, the categories in which some two thirds of the savings envisaged by the Inspectors would fall, it is evident from the Inspectors' report that rules and entitlements vary considerably from organization to organization. In many cases, the solutions which have been or are being arrived at in the various organizations are the outcome of prolonged examination and represent carefully balanced compromises designed to resolve many considerations sometimes in conflict with one another. For these reasons, it would seem difficult for the time being to arrive at a uniform procedure in this respect, and it is not possible for the members of ACC collectively to take a position on the matter. Organizations will, of course, place the recommendations of the Unit before their governing bodies for their consideration.

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7. In general, and in respect of both travel standards by secretariat officials and by members of organs or subsidiary organs of organizations, the executive heads consider it important that the matter should continue to be approached with some degree of flexibility to allow for varying circumstances, such as health, purpose of travel or seniority of an individual, judged to justify entitlement to first-class travel.

8. The following paragraphs contain a brief analysis of the way in which the recommendations of JIU would affect individual organizations and a summary of the views thereon of the executive heads concerned.

#### United Nations

##### A. Secretariat

9. The present situation is governed by General Assembly resolution 3198 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973.

10. The Secretary-General agrees that a uniform practice among all organizations in the United Nations system is desirable. He further notes that ACC took the position in 1966 that the international civil service should apply the same standards as those applied by national Governments in respect of officials of comparable rank. On this basis, there continues to be a valid case for first-class travel at least as far as executive heads and their most senior colleagues are concerned. In the case of the United Nations, this would mean the continuance of present entitlements to first-class travel for the Secretary-General, Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General.

11. As regards similar privileges granted to staff members below these levels at the discretion of the Secretary-General because of special circumstances, it may be noted that during the period from 1 July 1975 to 30 June 1976 only three cases were involved, two of which were agreed to on grounds of physical disability. During the period from 1 July 1976 to 30 September 1977 only four cases occurred, two of which were agreed to because of the non-availability of economy-class seats at a time when it was necessary for the officials concerned to travel without delay in order to attend scheduled meetings.

##### B. Members of organs and subsidiary organs

12. The present situation is governed by General Assembly resolution 2245 (XXI) of 20 December 1966 which provides that, to the extent that members of organs and subsidiary organs were entitled to reimbursement of travel expenses in accordance with the basic principles laid down in General Assembly resolution 1798 (XVII) of 11 December 1962, "payment of travel expenses shall be limited to the cost of economy class accommodation by air or its equivalent by recognized public transport via a direct route, except that in the case of one representative of each Member State attending regular, special or emergency special sessions of the General Assembly and of all persons who serve in their individual capacities, as distinct from those serving as representatives of Governments, payment of travel expenses shall be limited to the cost of first-class accommodation by air or its equivalent by recognized public transport via a direct route".

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13. The Joint Inspection Unit, in paragraph 13 of its report, indicates that 'it appears that it is no longer appropriate for the United Nations to continue to pay the cost of travel by first class for the members of any subsidiary organ, with the possible exception of the Chairmen of major governmental bodies'.

14. Two important features of the present arrangements, as outlined above, should be noted:

(a) Entitlements to reimbursement of travel expenses or otherwise are governed by the following basic principles, as laid down in paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 1798 (XVII):

- (i) Travel and subsistence expenses shall be paid in respect of members of organs and subsidiary organs who serve in an individual capacity and not as representatives of Governments;
- (ii) Except for a number of specific cases, by way of special exception to the basic principle described in (i) above and which are enumerated in paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 1798 (XVII), neither travel nor subsistence expenses shall be paid in respect of members of organs or subsidiary organs who serve as representatives of Governments.

(b) The term "all persons who serve in their individual capacity" as used in General Assembly resolution 2245 (XXI) was intended to be understood, not in its widest possible sense, but as referring only to the members of the 19 organs and subsidiary organs enumerated by JIU in foot-note 7 to paragraph 11 of its report.

15. In view of (b) above, the inclusion by JIU, in paragraph 10 of its report, of an additional category entitled "individuals appointed by United Nations organs or subsidiary organs to undertake in their personal capacity the performance of special studies or other ad hoc tasks on behalf of the organs" is misleading and may result in a wider interpretation of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 2245 (XXI) than was intended. Reference to this category in the context of first-class entitlement is based on a misreading of General Assembly resolution 2489 (XXII) of 21 December 1968 which not only contained no reference to Assembly resolution 2245 (XXI) on first-class travel entitlements, but referred rather to the question of the payment in certain cases of honoraria. The related internal instruction (ST/SGB/107/Rev.4) referred to by JIU in this regard is admittedly ambiguous on this point and its revision is currently being considered with the co-operation of the Office of the Legal Council.

16. Present practice, as described in paragraphs 10 and 13 above, constituted a partial reversal by the General Assembly in its resolution 2245 (XXI) of 20 December 1966 of a decision taken in its resolution 2128 (XX) of 21 December 1965 to the effect that "payment of travel expenses shall, in all cases, be limited to the cost of economy-class accommodation by air or its equivalent by recognized public transport via a direct route". In the relevant report of the Fifth Committee it was indicated that the recommendation naturally left it to the discretion of Member States or individuals concerned to travel by

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whatever standard of accommodation they considered appropriate and that the new rule would merely introduce a limit on the extent to which they could be reimbursed by the United Nations. The decision by the General Assembly one year later to restore first-class travel entitlement in respect of one representative of each Member State attending sessions of the General Assembly and members of organs and subsidiary organs composed of persons serving in their individual capacities rather than as representatives of Member States was based on a submission 1/ made by the Secretary-General in which he made the following two points:

(a) That the new rule, whereby only one representative of each Member State attending sessions of the General Assembly would be entitled to reimbursement of travel costs at the first-class standard, had posed a problem for some Governments, especially those with limited means, to meet the cost of adequate attendance at the growing number of meetings and conferences at the intergovernmental level (bearing in mind that of the various principal organs of the United Nations, the General Assembly is the only one in respect of which the Organization contributes towards the cost of attendance by Member States);

(b) That, as regards organs and subsidiary organs comprised of members serving in their individual capacity rather than as representatives of Member States the following difficulties had become evident:

- (i) It had become necessary to authorize exceptions based for the most part on considerations of personal hardship because of age or health;
- (ii) The question had also arisen whether it might not be appropriate to take into account that the members of these organs and subsidiary organs were very often persons of eminence and prestige in their special fields who, with rare exceptions, were called upon to serve the United Nations without remuneration of any kind - other than payment of daily subsistence at standard rates - indeed not infrequently at considerable personal sacrifice;
- (iii) Also relevant was the fact that the bodies in question were called upon to play a vital role in the formulation, direction and control of United Nations activities, as well as the measure of assistance and expertise voluntarily contributed.

17. For these reasons, and in the interests of a simple and uniformly applied administrative procedure ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all, the Secretary-General expressed the view that the privilege of first-class travel should be reinstated in this limited number of cases. Although it would be for the General Assembly to take the final decision, and bearing in mind that the circumstances have not changed, the Secretary-General has no reason to modify his former position.

18. The alternative suggestion by JIU to the effect that possibly travel should be reimbursed at the first-class standard only in the case of 'chairmen of major

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1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-first Session, Annexes, agenda item 74, document A/C.5/1074.

governmental bodies would need more precise definition before it could be implemented. Not only would it be necessary in the case of the United Nations to define which organs would be considered major and which minor, but it would be important to bear in mind that, to the extent that the individuals concerned were chairmen of organs comprised of members serving in their capacity as representatives of Member States, the Organization is currently required, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1798 (XVII), to reimburse travel expenses only by way of special exception to a general rule, i.e. cases spelt out in paragraph 3 of the resolution referred to above. Accordingly, acceptance of the JIU proposal would imply the abrogation of a general principle which has been endorsed by the General Assembly on a number of occasions in the past.

United Nations Development Programme

19. In regard to standards of travel accommodation, UNDP until early in 1976 had adhered to the rules and practices of the United Nations Secretariat, as outlined in Staff Rule 107.10. However, in the beginning of 1976 in view of the UNDP's financial difficulties, the Administrator introduced some voluntary, further restrictions in regard to first-class travel. Thus he decided to forego first-class travel personally and his example was followed by the Deputy(ies) and Assistant Administrators in almost all instances. With the exception therefore of a very few urgent cases, mainly when economy seats were not available, first-class travel was not utilized by UNDP for some 15 months.

20. In March 1977, with the improvement in the financial situation, the Administrator considered a return to the normal United Nations practices, but decided that the duration of an uninterrupted air trip should be an additional UNDP criterion with regard to first-class travel for those otherwise entitled under Staff Rule 107.10. He therefore established the following guidelines for himself, the Deputy and the Assistant Administrators to be administered by the Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Administration:

(a) When the duration of a particular flight exceeds nine hours (by the most direct and economical route), including scheduled stops for change of planes, refuelling, etc., but excluding travel time to and from airports, first-class travel may be approved;

(b) In all other cases, economy class travel would be utilised

(c) Exceptions on medical grounds would continue to apply, regardless of grade.

21. The arrangements outlined in the preceding paragraph are still in effect. While the Administrator will loyally apply any new criteria or guidelines which may be agreed upon system-wide or decided by the competent organs, he hopes that the somewhat restrained options and flexibility reflected in current UNDP arrangements can be maintained.

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### International Labour Organisation

22. The standards and practices followed by the ILO are described in paragraphs 30 to 36 of the report of JIU. Two points, however, should have been added. Firstly, the decision to reduce travel standards for members of the Governing Body and assimilated high-level bodies taken in March 1977, although referred to in paragraph 32, has been omitted from the summary of recent legislative actions in paragraph 5. Secondly, paragraph 33 ought to indicate that the officials concerned travel in economy class for short journeys, and by first-class only for flights of five hours or more.

23. Because of its brevity, the report has not examined in detail the treatment over the years of the subject and its many ramifications by the various executive and legislative bodies of the United Nations organizations. In the case of the ILO, for example, the Governing Body's decision of March 1977 was the outcome of prolonged examination and represented a carefully balanced compromise among conflicting considerations.

24. The Director-General believes, therefore, that at this stage it would not be appropriate to change yet again the reduced travel standards as they have resulted from the Governing Body's decision. This should not preclude, however, a choice by anyone entitled to first-class to travel all or part of a long journey by economy class. In such a case, the organization would, of course, reimburse only on the basis of travel by the most direct route and of the class actually used.

### Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

25. The standards and practices followed by FAO are factually described in paragraphs 18 to 22 of the report of JIU. Mention is made in paragraph 18 of the decision of the Council to apply economy class travel to all its members, with the exception of the Independent Chairman, and to the members of the Programme and Finance Committees. Paragraph 19 records the decision of FAO's governing bodies to adhere to General Assembly resolution 3198 (XXVIII) in restricting first-class travel of staff members to Assistant Directors-General and above, except in special cases where such travel is authorized by the Director-General. In paragraph 21, reference is made to the travel standards adopted by the International Board of Plant Genetic Resources, but as correctly recorded, this is independently financed and in fact the standards of travel of members of this Board are not prescribed by the Director-General. Furthermore, the travel of the President of the World Food Council is also mentioned in paragraph 22 and included in the table on the use of first-class travel by United Nations organizations (p. 14), but this travel should be attributed to the United Nations and not to FAO.

26. It may be noted that FAO's control of first-class travel does not compare unfavourably with that of the other large organizations - United Nations, ILO, UNESCO and WHO. It will also be noted that according to the estimates given by JIU in paragraph 71 - which presumably includes the travel of the President of the World Food Council - there would have been savings of only \$31,770 in 1976, were all the travel by FAO in that year to have been at economy level. This is less than 0.004 per cent of the annual budget in total or 1.4 per cent of estimated total expenditure on travel in the year 1976.

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27. Hitherto, FAO has conformed to the "common system" in such matters, as it did in acting upon General Assembly resolution 3198 (XXVIII) on standards with respect to travel, referred to above. The views of ACC on the Inspectors' recommendations and any decision by the General Assembly will therefore in due course be conveyed to the FAO Council, together with the Director-General's own recommendations.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

28. Paragraphs 45 to 48 of the report summarizes the situation of first-class travel with regard to UNESCO.

29. The JIU recommendation that first-class travel be limited to chairmen of governing bodies, executive heads of organizations and to exceptional cases, would affect UNESCO as follows:

(a) Executive Board (73 trips in 1976) - The question of the class of travel of members of the Executive Board was the subject of resolution 40.1 adopted by the General Conference at its nineteenth session which requested "the Executive Board to examine in 1977 the question of the cost of travel of its members, with a view to effecting economies, and to report thereon to the General Conference at its twentieth session". In accordance with this resolution, the question was included in the agenda of the one hundred third session of the Executive Board (September-October 1977). After a preliminary discussion of the subject, the Board decided to postpone this item to the one hundred fourth session (April-May 1978) when it will be considered again in the light of ACC comments on the JIU report.

(b) International Institute of Educational Planning - The class of travel of members of its governing body is determined by the Institute itself.

(c) Secretariat travel - With regard to the travel coming under the authority of the Director-General, it may be noted that of the 53 cases of first-class travel in 1976, 31 could be considered to fall under the categories still accepted by JIU, i.e. travel by executive heads or exceptional cases; only 22 related to the Deputy Directors-General or the Assistant Directors-General and would be affected by the JIU's proposal. The resulting economy would therefore be minimal and would hardly seem to justify on UNESCO's part a change to the standards of accommodation for official travel as determined by the General Assembly in 1973. A decision thereon might be linked to that on the class of travel of Board members.

World Health Organization

30. This report is basically a factual description of the current policies and practices in respect of use of first-class travel by the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, which also includes some related statistical and cost data for 1976. Paragraphs 56 to 58 of the report provide information on actions taken by the fifty-ninth session of the Executive Board and the thirtieth World Health Assembly modifying the basis of reimbursement for authorized travel of Board members and Assembly delegates from first-class to tourist/economy class, other than for the Chairman of the Executive Board, and commends WHO "for taking a pioneering role in reducing costs by restricting travel by first-class".

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31. The information on first-class travel entitlements for members of the WHO secretariat, as contained in paragraphs 59 and 60, is no longer valid since it does not include the changes decided by the Director-General at the time the matter of Board and Assembly travel was reviewed at the fifty-ninth session of the Executive Board. Since 1 March 1977 the standard of accommodation for all staff members is tourist/economy class, except where first-class travel is considered necessary or appropriate and is so authorized by the Director-General or the regional directors concerned.

32. As a result of the above described limitations on first-class travel, the Organization's air travel provisions fully meet the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit on first-class travel (p. 18), and even go further as concerns the Director-General and the President of the Assembly.

#### International Telecommunication Union

##### A. Travel by members of the Administrative Council

33. Since the establishment of the Administrative Council, which is the governing organ of the Union in between Plenipotentiary Conferences, the provisions of the International Telecommunication Convention have covered "only the travelling and subsistence expenses incurred by the representative of each Member of the Administrative Council". This applies only when attending the Council which meets in formal session once a year. In this regard, in many instances each such member is assisted by other officials of his country, but their expenses are the responsibility of their administrations.

34. The actual reimbursement of travel expenses has been governed by decisions of the Plenipotentiary Conference, and in particular, resolution No. 18 of the Plenipotentiary Conference, (Montreux, 1965) which specifies that "... Travel to Geneva shall be first-class by the most direct and economical route ... fares and subsistence while travelling shall be paid on this basis."

35. Reimbursement by the Union in regard to the level of first-class travel has, however, been temporarily suspended by the Administrative Council. Thus, the budget provisions for 1976, 1977 and 1978 for travel to the Administrative Council session were made on the basis of economy travel. A number of members, however, continue to travel first-class, with the difference being met by their administrations, having regard to their individual travel standards for senior officials. Under such national travel arrangements, other officials who assist the representatives at the Council would continue to travel first-class.

##### B. Permanent staff members

36. Since 1974, and following consideration of the first JIU report on the use of travel funds by the General Assembly, the Union amended its Staff Rules which previously authorized officials "in grade D.1 category and above" to travel "by first-class" in order to bring the conditions into line with general conditions in the Common System. ITU's present rules specify that "travel expenses shall be limited to the cost of economy class". However, "when circumstances warrant it, the Secretary-General may, at his discretion, allow staff members to travel first-class."

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C. Elected officials

37. The Union has a unique structure which dictates the election by Governments of nine officials to carry out specific functions and to occupy posts in the organs of the Union in accordance with the provisions of the International Telecommunication Convention. They are drawn from senior posts in national administrations and are specifically nominated by Governments through an election process by the competent conference or assembly of members of the Union.

38. The conditions of employment and Staff Regulations for elected officials provided that they are "entitled to first-class accommodation when travelling by air".

39. However, in most cases, they now travel by economy class within the European continent. Apart from appropriateness of treatment for such senior officials, it is to be noted that, when travelling long distances, elected officials are called upon to work upon arrival and the practical possibility for rest stopovers are limited. Were rest stopovers to be arranged automatically, there would be a need to extend the duration of missions, with consequent increase in both time and cost.

40. In the case of ITU, the actual amount spent on first-class travel is relatively modest in the context of the budget. The financial savings inherent in more effective utilization of senior officials' time and less "per diem" payments would, on long trips, tend to offset the additional travel costs concerned.

41. The other administrative circumstances of their travel would necessarily require consideration before any changes were made in the particular staff regulations.

World Meteorological Organization

42. Regarding the references in the report to WMO, two specific comments should be made. Mention is made in paragraph 64 of the sessions of the Congress (WMO legislative body); it should be added that these sessions are held once every four years. In paragraph 63, reference is made to the fact that members of the WMO Executive Committee are entitled to first-class travel for attending sessions of the Executive Committee; this is also relevant with regard to paragraph 76.

Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization

43. As far as IMCO is concerned and as stated in the report, the travel provisions of IMCO are in line with General Assembly resolution 3198 (XXVIII). To the extent that IMCO pays the cost of travel of non-staff members, such travel is normally economy class air. IMCO has not so far paid the cost of travel of presidents or chairmen of its governing bodies.

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