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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Co-operation between and management of libraries
of the United Nations systemReport of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on co-operation between and management of libraries of the United Nations system (A/39/299). The Committee also had before it the related comments of the Secretary-General (A/39/299/Add.1) and of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) (A/39/299/Add.2).
2. In section I of the report (A/39/299), the Inspectors note, inter alia, that the libraries of the United Nations system have never been studied comprehensively. An overview of the current state of operations of some 78 libraries surveyed is provided in section II. Taking into account variations in size, level of development and resources, the Inspectors identify several weaknesses shared in common by the libraries.
3. The findings of the survey lead the Inspectors to conclude in paragraph 44 that "The main avenue for improvement of [the] library services lies in co-operative actions in acquisition, in information tools, in use of these collections and tools, in greater scope of services to users, and in the progressive creation of a network of libraries of the United Nations system." These conclusions are elaborated upon in section III, where the future prospects of the libraries are discussed. In section III, paragraphs 125 to 139 of the report, the Inspectors also draw attention to management and operating problems of the United Nations library services in Geneva, in respect of which "... a thorough management review and subsequent reorganization is urgently needed." Following a summary of their conclusions, the Inspectors submit in section IV, four recommendations for improving co-operation between and management of libraries of the United Nations system.

4. Recommendation 1 (A/39/299, paras. 163 (a) to (f)) calls for the establishment of an inter-library panel which would "... meet periodically, establish a practical co-operative work programme, and report jointly back to the organizations on actions taken and needed". In this paragraph, the Inspectors list possible topics for consideration. The related comments of the Secretary-General are contained in paragraphs 6 and 7 of document A/39/299/Add.1, and those of ACC, in paragraphs 2 to 7 of document A/39/299/Add.2.

5. The Advisory Committee concurs with the Inspectors' view that there is need for closer co-operation between libraries of the United Nations system. At the same time, the Committee notes from the comments of the Secretary-General and ACC that, while there is acceptance in principle of the need for such co-operation, there is also hesitation about the proposed inter-library panel, particularly in respect of its possible organizational and financial implications. In the circumstances, the Advisory Committee recommends that ACC should be invited to review further the proposal to determine whether or not such an approach would best achieve the JIU objective of co-ordinating and harmonizing the system's library services. Should ACC decide subsequently that an inter-library panel be established, the Advisory Committee recommends that the terms of reference for the panel should define clearly its scope, objectives and functions. The Committee also recommends that meetings of the panel, if constituted, not be held too frequently, and suggests that ad hoc meetings every three or four years may be sufficient to meet the objectives outlined by the Inspectors.

6. Recommendations 2 and 3 (A/39/299, paras. 164 (a) to (c) and 165) are concerned with management improvement efforts and the introduction of new technology that could be undertaken by individual libraries of the United Nations system. The Advisory Committee notes that these recommendations are generally endorsed by the Secretary-General and ACC in their related comments (A/39/299/Add.1, paras. 20 to 37 and A/39/299/Add.2, paras. 8 to 15).

7. Recommendation 4 (A/39/299, para. 166) deals exclusively with problems related to United Nations library services in Geneva. In his comments, the Secretary-General agrees that "... most of the problems mentioned in the JIU report do exist to varying degrees" and suggests that "the inspectors might wish to undertake further studies to look into two important questions for the Library: space requirements and staffing and grading of the UNOG Library personnel" (A/39/299/Add.1, paras. 38 to 42). As regards the latter question, in response to its enquiries, the Advisory Committee was informed by representatives of the Secretary-General that the Classification Section has recently conducted a classification review of Professional posts in the UNOG Library, the results of which were under study. The Committee trusts that prompt action will be taken by the Secretary-General to address the problems of the United Nations library services in Geneva.

8. Should the Secretary-General submit recommendations concerning the United Nations library services in Geneva, or other proposals for improving management or introduction of technological innovations in United Nations libraries, the Advisory Committee will consider them in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1986-1987, bearing in mind the report of JIU on the subject.