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PROBLEMS OF THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Note by the Secretary-General

1. At its twenty-third session, the General Assembly, in resolution 2398 (XXIII) of 3 December 1968, decided to convene a United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 and requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development, to submit to the General Assembly, at its twenty-fourth session, through the Economic and Social Council, a report concerning:

- "(a) The nature, scope and progress of work at present being done in the field of the human environment;
- (b) The main problems facing developed and developing countries in this area, which might with particular advantage be considered at such a conference, including the possibilities for increased international co-operation, especially as they relate to economic and social development, in particular of the developing countries;
- (c) Possible methods of preparing for the Conference and the time necessary for such preparations;
- (d) A possible time and place for the Conference;
- (e) The range of financial implications for the United Nations of the holding of the Conference."

In preparing the report, the Secretary-General was requested to consult Governments of Member States of the United Nations and members of the specialized

agencies and of the International Atomic Energy Agency and appropriate organizations of the United Nations system, and to draw on contributions from appropriate intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

2. The Secretary-General's report is before the Assembly in document E/4667. It was considered by the Economic and Social Council at its forty-seventh session, and an account of the discussion in the Council will be found in chapter V, section D of its report to the General Assembly at the twenty-fourth session.^{1/}

3. The Council adopted resolution 1448 (XLVII) on 6 August 1969 on the problems of the human environment, in which it recommends a draft resolution for adoption by the Assembly. The Council resolution reads as follows:

The Economic and Social Council,

Having considered with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on the problems of the human environment, 2/

Reaffirming the importance and urgency of those problems and underlining the necessity for the complete preparatory arrangements for the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment to become operative as soon as possible,

Believing that it is important that the following considerations be borne in mind during the further preparations for the Conference:

(a) A small conference secretariat should be established as soon as possible, by drawing particularly upon, with the agreement of the specialized agencies concerned, regular staff of the United Nations system, specially qualified in the environmental field;

(b) In order for the Conference to achieve its objectives it is essential that its agenda be selective, its organizational structure be simple and efficient, and that the documentation be kept reasonably limited;

(c) All efforts should be made to reduce the costs of the Conference,

Recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/7603).

^{2/} E/4667.

"The General Assembly,

"Recalling its decision in resolution 2398 (XXII) of 3 December 1968 to convene in 1972 a United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and to begin immediately preparations for the Conference,

"Having considered with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General 2/ called for in the above-mentioned resolution,

"Recognizing the important work on the problems of the human environment that is at present being undertaken and planned by organizations in the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and national Governments,

"1. Endorses in general the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General regarding the purposes and objectives of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment; 3/

"2. Affirms that it should be the main purpose of the Conference to serve as a practical means to encourage, and to provide guidelines for, actions by Governments and international organizations designed to protect and improve the human environment, and to remedy and prevent its impairment, by means of international co-operation, bearing in mind the particular importance of enabling developing countries to forestall the occurrence of such problems;

"3. Entrusts to the Secretary-General the over-all responsibility for organizing and preparing for the Conference, bearing in mind the views expressed during the debates of the Economic and Social Council at its forty-seventh session 4/ and of the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth session;

"4. Establishes a Preparatory Committee to advise the Secretary-General consisting of highly qualified representatives nominated by the Governments of....;

"5. Further requests the Secretary-General to set up immediately a small conference secretariat and to appoint, at the appropriate time, a Secretary-General of the Conference;

"6. Moreover requests the Secretary-General to consult with Governments of States Members of the United Nations and members of the

3/ Ibid., paras. 82-92.

4/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-seventh Session, 1529th, 1530th and 1532nd meetings.

specialized agencies, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development, to take account of the results of other international conferences such as the meeting of governmental experts on the problems relating to environment, organized by the Economic Commission for Europe, to be held at Prague in 1971, and to draw on contributions from appropriate intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations;

"7. Invites States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies and of the International Atomic Energy Agency to participate actively in the preparations for the Conference;

"8. Invites the specialized agencies, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development to collaborate closely with the Secretary-General in the preparations for the Conference and to assist, as appropriate, in the work of the Preparatory Committee;

"9. Invites the intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned to lend every possible assistance in the preparations for the Conference;

"10. Requests the Secretary-General, in collaboration with the Preparatory Committee, to take the necessary steps, as part of the preparations for the Conference, to bring to public attention the nature and importance of the problems of the human environment;

"11. Invites all States Members of the United Nations or members of the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency to participate in the Conference;

"12. Expresses the belief that it is essential that all invited countries should be enabled to take an active part in the preparations for the Conference and in the Conference itself, and requests the Secretary-General to investigate what concrete steps could be taken to that end;

"13. Takes note of the outline on the range of the possible financial implications for the United Nations of the holding of the Conference presented in the Secretary-General's report 5/ and requests the Secretary-General, in the light of the views expressed during the debates of the Economic and Social Council at its forty-seventh session and of the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth session, to make all efforts to reduce the costs of the Conference.

5/ See E/4667, paras. 139-143.

"14. Decides that the Conference should be of approximately two weeks' duration and requests the Secretary-General to take full account of that duration in preparing for the Conference;

"15. Accepts with appreciation the invitation of the Government of Sweden 6/ to hold the Conference in Sweden in June 1972;

"16. Requests the Secretary-General to submit a brief progress report to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session through the Economic and Social Council at its forty-ninth session."

4. The attention of the General Assembly is also drawn to a note by the Secretary-General (A/7514) which transmits to the Members of the General Assembly a communication, dated 17 February 1969, from the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations.

5. With regard to the financial implications of the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report (E/4667), it should be pointed out that the report was prepared after extensive consultations with the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development, appropriate United Nations agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations active in the field, and with a number of distinguished specialists. All Governments of Member States of the United Nations and the United Nations agencies were invited by letter to provide their comments and suggestions on the Conference. In the light of these consultations, the purposes and objectives of the Conference were formulated as they are contained in the report. Thus, the financial implications of the Conference were prepared with the objective of providing services and conditions consistent with the purposes and objectives of the Conference formulated as a result of the above consultations. The Economic and Social Council has recommended that these should be endorsed in general by the General Assembly.

6. In the light of the belief of the Economic and Social Council that all efforts should be made to reduce the costs of the Conference, the Secretary-General has now re-examined the financial implications of his proposals. It should be emphasized that the final decisions on the agenda of the conference, and, by the same token, the exact details of background documentation required, must be subject to the recommendations of the Preparatory Committee in the light of the general directives

6/ A/7514.

it will be given by the General Assembly. Consequently, more precise estimates of costs within the budgetary provision approved by the General Assembly may have to be established after the Preparatory Committee has considered the agenda and documentation in further detail. However, at the present time, reductions in the estimates of costs could be effected as follows:

(a) Preparatory Committee. Should the General Assembly adopt the draft resolution recommended by the Economic and Social Council, a Preparatory Committee composed of representatives nominated by Governments would be established instead of a committee of experts recommended by the Secretary-General in his report (E/4667). In accordance with General Assembly resolution 2489 (XXIII), the travel and subsistence costs of the members of the Preparatory Committee would not be borne by the Organization. As a result, the financial implications appearing in chapter III H for this item would be reduced by approximately \$74,000.

(b) Documentation. A reduction in the amount of the background documentation initially proposed in the report submitted by the Secretary-General could also contribute to reducing the costs of the Conference. Such a reduction would involve a corresponding decrease in the requirements for related services (translation, typing, copy preparation and printing) as well as in the requirements for consultants in producing background papers. Documentation for the Conference is of the utmost importance, forming the definitive basis for the principal objective of the Conference, namely "to focus the attention of Governments and public opinion on the importance and urgency" of the problems of the human environment, and also to "identify those aspects... that can only or best be solved through international co-operation or agreement". These objectives of the Conference, by concentrating public interest on the field, can only be achieved on the basis of accurate, authoritative and up-to-date information in the numerous areas involved in the problems of the human environment. While bearing in mind the views expressed at the forty-seventh session of the Council, the Secretary-General feels that it would not be possible, without seriously limiting the effectiveness of the Conference, to reduce the proposed documentation by more than 20 per cent. By such a reduction, a saving of approximately \$280,000 could be effected.

7. These combined savings, using a Preparatory Committee consisting of government representatives and reducing documentation by 20 per cent, would therefore result in a reduction of \$354,000 in the total estimated cost, that is, from \$1,981,000 to approximately \$1,564,000.

8. A breakdown of the reduced estimated costs on a year-by-year basis is given below:

(In US dollars)

	1970	1971	1972	1973	Total
(a) Cost of preparatory committee (conference servicing)	16,700	8,600	9,700	-	35,000
(b) Temporary Conference secretariat	81,000	160,000	120,000	-	361,000
(c) Travel of staff	5,000	5,000	10,000	-	20,000
(d) Experts and consultants	68,500	51,500	37,500	-	157,500
(e) Substantive background documentation (translation, editing, reproduction, copy preparation and printing)	-	689,600	-	-	689,600
(f) Conference servicing costs (travel and subsistence of substantive staff from Headquarters, temporary Conference servicing staff, in-conference documentation and final report, general expenses)	-	-	123,800	-	123,800
(g) Public information services	-	-	58,500	-	58,500
(h) Printing of final report and proceedings (report, summary of discussions, and papers submitted to the Conference)	-	-	-	118,600	118,600
Total	171,200	914,700	359,500	118,600	1,564,000
