

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIRSON (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and  
Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 98: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981 (continued)

First reading (continued)

Section 30 - United Nations Bond Issue (continued)

Section 29 - Conference and library services (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 105: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 98: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981 (continued)  
(A/34/6 and Add.1, A/34/7, A/34/38; A/C.5/34/28; A/C.5/33/L.49, A/C.5/34/L.9)

First reading (continued)

Section 30 - United Nations Bond Issue (continued)

1. Mr. GUBCSI (Hungary) said that his delegation had been prevented by unavoidable reasons from voting at the thirty-seventh meeting on section 30 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981. He wished to make it clear that for reasons of principle he would have voted against the appropriation requested by the Secretary-General under that heading.

Section 29 - Conference and library services (continued)

2. Mr. RAMZY (Egypt) said that he would like explanations of various points arising from the documents before the Committee concerning Arabic language services for the General Assembly and its Main Committees. Firstly, paragraph 2 of document A/C.5/34/28 showed that five of the 17 interpreter posts provided in the manning table were vacant. That had been so for two or three years past, and it was difficult to understand the reasons for the Secretary-General's optimistic statement in the last sentence of the same paragraph that "the Section will be at full strength early next year".

3. With reference to paragraph 4 of the same document, he recalled that there had been complaints of the quality of Arabic interpretation since 1973, when Arabic interpretation had first been provided for the General Assembly. There had also been complaints when the relevant expenditure had been charged to the regular budget. The same question arose again in the current year. The Committee would no doubt wish to know what measures had been taken to solve that endemic problem. Paragraph 13 of document A/C.5/32/9, referred to in document A/C.5/34/28, mentioned a training programme which was to be started in Geneva to train 10 interpreters by the end of 1978. There had been no further mention of that in current documents and he wondered what had happened to that programme during the three years following the adoption of the relevant General Assembly resolution.

4. In various documents the Secretary-General referred to competition between the United Nations and specialized agencies for interpreters, and said that many of the difficulties of recruiting temporary and permanent staff were due to such competition. However, document A/C.5/31/60 referred to the possibility of providing better co-ordination between the various users of Arabic interpretation in Europe (para. 18). Moreover, in paragraph 13 of document A/31/8/Add.26, the Advisory Committee had recommended that the Secretary-General take steps to co-ordinate the work of the specialized agencies and the United Nations in developing Arabic language services. It could therefore be concluded that the problem had already been dealt with in some detail and it was therefore surprising that there had been no progress.

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(Mr. Ramzy, Egypt)

5. Turning to the matter of translation, he pointed out that different documents gave contradictory information about the number of permanent posts for Arabic translators. Paragraph 9 of document A/C.5/34/28 mentioned 34 permanent posts (23 translators and 11 revisers), whereas document A/C.5/31/60 (para. 7) had mentioned 43 posts, and document A/C.5/33/L.49 (para. 3) only 33 posts. An explanation of those discrepancies would be welcome.

6. With regard to printing and reproduction, it was surprising to read in paragraph 17 of document A/C.5/34/28 that the departure of a Professional officer from the Arabic team of the Copy Preparation Unit had created serious difficulties. Since there were three Professionals in the team, it might have been hoped that the absence of one of them would not hinder the work of the unit to such an extent.

7. With regard to library services his delegation would like more information about the 11 staff members "of Arabic mother-tongue" mentioned in paragraph 19 of document A/C.5/34/28; in particular, he would like to know whether they dealt exclusively with Arabic documentation. He would also like to know more about the "active acquisition and dissemination programme for Arabic materials" referred to in paragraph 20.

8. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said that the Department of Conference Services was one of the most important in the Organization, since it organized meetings and recorded the decisions of Member States. If the Committee sometimes appeared to be strict in its requirements, staff morale in the Department should not suffer; Member States saw problems from the angle of policy and management without in any way criticizing staff members who were doing a difficult job, which all Member States highly appreciated.

9. From the point of view of language equality, there was no "problem" with the Arabic language as such. The Secretary-General had described the difficulties he was encountering and had proposed solutions and the Fifth Committee would take appropriate decisions to resolve those difficulties. The question of Arabic seemed to crop up regularly on the Committee's agenda, and that was simply because Arabic was regarded as a "foreign" language. For example, the Secretary-General said that he had agreed with the delegations of Arab countries on a solution to the present deadlock. That was not an acceptable procedure because Arabic, being an official language of the Organization, no longer belonged to the Arabic-speaking countries but to the international community. During the transition period it had been used only for General Assembly purposes, but the time had come to move on to the next stage and give Arabic complete equality with the other languages.

10. During the General Assembly session, the Department of Conference Services had to translate into Arabic within the appropriate deadline all documents to be submitted to the Assembly. If the translation work were spread evenly over the whole year, there would be fewer problems with the issue of documents in Arabic. He therefore asked the Secretariat what would be the charge on the budget for Arabic translation if Arabic were put on an equal footing with the other languages.

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(Mr. Lahlou, Morocco)

11. It could be seen from the table in paragraph 29.80 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981 (A/34/6) that the Arabic Translation Service would translate 6,400,000 words, and the Arabic Typing Unit would type 10,100,000 words during the biennium; those figures were much less than for any other language except Chinese. That might be understandable in the case of English, which was the original language of most documents, but the reasons for such great differences as compared with the other languages were not immediately apparent.

12. Foot-note 3 to paragraph 9 of document A/C.5/34/28 mentioned the "requirement to provide Arabic language services to special conferences". The Moroccan delegation would like to know what special conferences those were. In addition, the Committee had been told that the Arabic Interpretation Section was located at Geneva, which was contrary to the assurances given by the Secretariat. It did not seem appropriate, after so short an experience, to isolate the Arabic Interpretation Section and treat the Arabic language as a special case.

13. He found document A/C.5/34/L.9 completely unacceptable, since the chief point it seemed to make was that the task of the Arabic Translation Service would be easier if the Member States concerned gave up some of their rights. The language services were entirely the responsibility of the Secretary-General, who should refrain from publishing notes of that kind. While it was undoubtedly true that the Department of Conference Services made praiseworthy efforts to cope with all the situations that arose, it should bear in mind that all Member States had ever asked was that all official documents should appear in all languages at the same time.

14. Mr. AYADHI (Tunisia) paid a tribute to the staff of the Department of Conference Services who, despite all the pressures to which they were subjected, were untiring in their efforts and displayed constant dedication to their work. However, the debate on section 29 of the proposed programme budget had more dimensions than the human ones. For example, the work of many delegations was hampered by two anomalies: the delay in the issuing of documents in certain languages and, more generally, the poor quality of the documentation. The latter criticism should be addressed to the substantive departments, but it seemed appropriate to voice it in connexion with the Department of Conference Services, which was concerned with documents distribution. As far as delays were concerned, the Tunisian delegation suggested that a cut-off date should be fixed for the issue of each document, on the basis of the calendar of conferences. If the text had not been provided in time, there would be a note to that effect incorporated in the document itself. That would make it possible to pinpoint the cause of the delay.

15. It was clear from the plan of conferences that about one third of the meetings and conferences of the United Nations were held at Geneva and the rest at New York. However, the estimates for the Department of Conference Services at New York and for Conference Services in Geneva did not reflect the same ratio.

(Mr. Ayadhi, Tunisia)

The conclusion was that meetings at Geneva cost more than those at New York and that, if that was in fact the case, conferences should no longer be transferred to Geneva. The Economic and Social Council, which had shown such caution in respect of documentation, might, for example, contemplate departing from tradition and holding its summer session at New York. The Tunisian delegation would like to have some idea of the financial implications of that possible change.

16. The table in paragraph 29.9 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981 (A/34/6) gave the number of words translated in each biennium by the different language services. An additional table, giving the number of posts provided for each service would allow the efforts of the different services to be compared and permit interesting cross-checking with other statistical data.

17. If tables 29.14 and 29.18 of the budget document were compared, it would be seen that the programme of the Translation Division cost more than that of the Editorial and Official Records Division. That anomaly was perhaps one of the reasons for the deterioration in the quality of the documents.

18. The Tunisian delegation shared the views of the Moroccan delegation, which had made it clear that the question of the Arabic language was both practical and political. The fact remained that some Arab delegations were obliged to work in foreign languages because documents were issued late. If a document was issued three months after the due date, it ceased to be of any interest and its publication was merely a costly formality. He would like to know, therefore, what steps the Secretary-General intended to take to deal with the problem.

19. Mr. AL-TAKRITI (Iraq) expressed his delegation's surprise that the question of Arabic language services was being raised again although it had been the subject of General Assembly resolutions. The problems arose from the secondary place given to the Arabic language, and the incomplete implementation of those resolutions by the Secretariat.

20. It was also surprising to learn from paragraph 2 of the Secretary-General's note issued as document A/C.5/34/L.9 that the Secretariat had consulted the Arab Member States about issuing summary records of General Assembly sessions after the closure of those sessions. That hardly seemed likely, but if there was such an agreement between the Secretariat and the delegations concerned, it would be desirable for the Committee to be informed of it. He wondered what the reaction of the other countries would be if the same arrangements were to apply to summary records issued in the other languages and what would be the point of such delayed issue, after the close of work of the General Assembly.

21. He also noted that, according to paragraph 11 of document A/C.5/33/L.49, the possibility was envisaged of recruiting 27 short-term Arabic translators and revisers. Such a solution was not logical. It would be more economical to

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(Mr. Al-Takriti, Iraq)

recruit permanent staff, who would also be able to service conferences and meetings held away from Headquarters. In that connexion, it would be useful for the Secretariat to provide the Committee with a table showing the respective costs of short-term and permanent staff.

22. He could cite other examples of the unfair treatment to which the Arabic language was subjected: the institute for training in Arabic, which the General Assembly had decided to set up, still did not exist; only 11 Arabic interpreters had been recruited at Geneva, although 17 posts had been provided; and important documents, such as the reports of the Economic and Social Council and of the International Court of Justice, were not issued in Arabic.

23. The Arabic language should be treated like the others, and the Secretariat should be asked to explain its negligence in implementing the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

A. Department of Conference Services (New York)

24. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) noted from paragraph 29.4 of the proposed programme budget that it might be necessary to revise the present estimates when the calendar of conferences for the biennium 1980-1981 was finally determined. He would like to know whether any sizable increase was to be expected in the estimates, particularly since the calendar of conferences had now been approved.

25. The CHAIRMAN noted that it was customary for the Secretariat to prepare at the end of the session a consolidated statement of conference servicing requirements, in which account was taken of proposals made by the various Committees of the General Assembly during the session. The Advisory Committee would then examine the statement very closely.

26. Mr. AYADHI (Tunisia) pointed out that in his statement the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments had omitted to inform the Committee of the part that had been played in the late distribution of General Assembly documents by the work stoppage of typists and other staff members at the beginning of the year. He sought further information on the matter.

27. He also considered that there was an imbalance in the grading of posts in the Translation Division, which had only 21 P-5 posts, as against 214 P-3 and 101 P-4 posts (table 29.14 of the proposed programme budget). There was, moreover, no provision for any new P-5 post. Was that perhaps one reason why the career of translator was unattractive? Something should be done to provide better career prospects. So long as the resultant psychological handicap was not taken seriously, and it was not without its practical consequences, it would not really be possible to solve the problems of the translation services. He wondered whether the Department of Conference Services had developed any practical proposals to attract more translators, at a time when competition to recruit was becoming steadily intense.

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28. The CHAIRMAN asked the Under-Secretary-General what steps he intended to take regarding the supervisors of the typing units, whose posts the Secretary-General was proposing to reclassify from G-5 to P-2. In paragraph 29.21 of its first report (A/34/7), the Advisory Committee recalled that it had recommended that the Secretary-General study the question with a view to formulating proposals thereon and urged him "to proceed with the study without delay and to submit his conclusions to the Assembly if possible at its thirty-fourth session".

29. Mr. KUYAMA (Japan), speaking of the size of the conference services budget, which took up more than 15 per cent of the United Nations regular budget, felt that the volume of documentation called for by the intergovernmental bodies had reached its limits if those bodies wanted to receive documentation with the prescribed deadlines. It was high time for the cost and justification of the services called for to be closely examined.

30. His delegation was surprised that, unlike the other sections of the proposed programme budget, section 29 contained no non-recurrent items of expenditure. His delegation would like to know the reason for the exception.

#### B. Conference Services (Geneva)

31. Mr. PAPENDORP (United States of America), referring to the steps taken to standardize the organizational structure of conference services in New York and Geneva, said that although there had been progress, much still needed to be done to solve that important question. He would like to know what additional measures were planned.

32. Mr. RUEDAS (Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services) stated that the report of a working group set up to standardize nomenclature throughout the Secretariat would appear soon and would contain a section on conference services.

33. Mr. DENIS (France) expressed surprise at the size of the rates of real growth given in table 29.17 of the proposed programme budget, which were much higher than those given for New York. He sought an explanation, and also wanted to know the significance of the figures given in parentheses. He wondered about the justification for the major increase of some 14 per cent that appeared in table 29.8, where it was shown that the number of established posts required would rise from 667 to 761. In conclusion, he would appreciate an explanation on the amounts requested for overtime and night differential, which came to \$402,000, which was more than double the 1978-1979 appropriations, as noted by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 29.45 of its report (A/34/7).

34. Mr. RAMZY (Egypt) asked what had happened in response to the offer made by the Swiss Government in 1978, through its Permanent Observer, to make the International Conference Centre at Geneva available to the United Nations free of charge, subject to the approval of Parliament.

35. Mr. RUEDAS (Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services) replied that the Swiss Government had submitted to Parliament the arrangements for use of the International Conference Centre at Geneva by the United Nations and the specialized agencies with headquarters in that city. Generally speaking, it was intended that the Organization would be responsible for covering the cost of only those items of expenditure other than operating costs during normal hours. However, Parliament had yet to take a decision on the subject and for that reason it had not been possible to take into account use of the Centre in drawing up the proposed programme budget for 1980-1981.

36. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division), replying to the questions of the representative of France, stated that the figures given in parentheses were minus values. As to the rates of real growth given in table 29.27, they reflected the conversion to established posts of posts earlier financed from appropriations for temporary assistance, as stated in paragraphs 29.61 *et seq.* The conversion involved a decrease in the estimate for temporary assistance under the heading "Executive direction and management". Conversely, the new established posts were charged against the various divisions, and that explained the rates of growth given in table 29.27. In fact for Conference Services, Geneva, as a whole, there was a negative rate of real growth of 0.1 per cent. The conversion of temporary posts to established posts also explained the increase in the number of the latter that could be seen in table 29.28.

37. The size of the amount referred to in paragraph 29.45 of the report of the Advisory Committee was due to the requirements of UNCTAD, which had been calculated on the basis of past experience.

38. Mr. PAPENDORP (United States of America) expressed the hope that the conversion to established posts of 93 posts hitherto financed under appropriations for temporary assistance in Conference Services at Geneva would result not only in savings in administrative costs but also in increased productivity of the staff members concerned so that there would be less need for additional staff.

39. Mr. AYADHI (Tunisia) said that his delegation, which had no hesitation in supporting the recommendations by the Advisory Committee on the need to bring the nomenclature of the New York and Geneva Services into line with one another, very much hoped that the nomenclature of the Department of Conference Services in New York would be based on that of Geneva and not vice versa. The Geneva Conference Service should be used as an example because the structure was less top-heavy and had fewer subdivisions: unlike the New York Department of Conference Services, it had no executive office, yet it seemed to function just as well. It was not simply a problem of structure; it was also a matter of posts, since what was involved was nothing less than an additional unit for departmental administration.

40. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that he appreciated the comments made by the representative of Tunisia. Bringing into line the organizational nomenclature had been the objective sought by the Advisory Committee when it had made its



(Mr. Mselle, ACABQ)

remarks on the harmonization of conference services at New York and Geneva (A/34/7, paras. 29.4 and 29.5). The Secretariat had made some progress in that area with deliberate dispatch. More information should, in his view, be provided by the Secretariat, which was in a better position to reply to the question of the representative of Tunisia.

40a. Mr. AYADHI (Tunisia) asked what action the Secretariat intended to take in the light of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

41. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said that the question was more important from the standpoint of streamlined management than from the budgetary standpoint.

42. The Office of the United Nations that had been established at Geneva in the aftermath of the Second World War had in some ways been a successor to the League of Nations. Its structure had therefore been influenced by that of the League of Nations and by certain perceptions of administration, which explained why United Nations Headquarters in New York and the Office at Geneva had adopted different nomenclatures. The Fifth Committee had nevertheless decided from the outset that, though the Office at Geneva should exercise autonomy in its activities, the New York Secretariat should remain the Headquarters, Geneva conference services forming part of the United Nations conference services as a whole. As the difference in nomenclature caused problems, conference services in both New York and Geneva gave their total support to the efforts of the Administrative Management Service to standardize nomenclature in areas where activities were comparable. The results of those efforts were the subject of a report to be submitted by the Secretary-General on the nomenclature of Secretariat units. Yet the question raised by the representative of Tunisia was not solely concerned with differences in nomenclature but also with the difference between administrative methods in Geneva and New York - a much more complex problem resulting from different civil service traditions.

43. Mr. AYADHI (Tunisia) said that the United Nations must have a single administrative system, to be used at Headquarters and in all United Nations offices, which could be improved if necessary. If the nomenclature used at Headquarters in New York and at the Geneva Office for services performing similar functions was not the same, the one that was most operational and economical should be determined. For that reason, he wished to know why the Department of Conference Services in New York comprised a separate Executive Office for departmental administration, which should instead be part of Executive direction and management, as in Geneva. Although it might be that Executive direction and management should have more posts in New York than in Geneva, it was not clear why the Department of Conference Services in New York should comprise an additional office.

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54. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division) said that the estimate for joint activities was set out in paragraph 29.104 of the proposed programme budget, which showed that, under the agreement made between the United Nations, IAEA and UNIDO, the United Nations would bear part of the cost of reproducing in-session documents. On the question of the difference between the headings "General temporary assistance" and "Temporary posts", resources provided under the first heading covered staff employed during part of the biennium, only, while the estimates for the second covered staff members employed during the full two-year period. To the extent therefore that the Secretariat requested extensions for the whole of the 1980-1981 biennium in respect of temporary staff approved by the General Assembly for the end of the 1978-1979 biennium, the related amounts would be shown under the heading "Temporary posts".

D. Library, Headquarters

55. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) asked why the estimates relating to the libraries, like the estimates for conference services, were to be found under different sections of the budget. It would be preferable in the future to submit separate estimates in respect of the libraries in New York, Geneva and Vienna.

56. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland) said he had noted that the Advisory Committee had approved the estimate for the Library in New York. He wondered why two estimates had been included under the same heading ("Library books and supplies"), one for \$2,900 for Executive direction and management (table 29.48), the other for \$574,700 under Library and documentation services (table 29.50). He also wished to know whether the estimate (\$9,400) for official travel of staff under Executive direction and management, which as stated in paragraph 29.108, was for the purpose of ensuring participation of senior librarians in a number of meetings, also covered staff members in the Library and documentation services programme.

57. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division) said, in reply to the last question raised by the representative of Poland, that the method employed in submitting estimates for staff travel was dictated by the fact that travel resources were administered centrally.

58. Mr. DENIS (France), referring to the last sentence of paragraph 29.108 ("Visits to depository libraries by staff members in conjunction with home leave will also be undertaken ... ") inquired why such an estimate was necessary because, when the Secretariat entrusted a mission to a staff member on home leave, it did so for reasons of economy. Moreover, the figure of 3,500 books which the Library expected to purchase annually (para. 29.111) seemed to be very substantial.

59. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division) pointed out that, when a staff member on home leave was asked to undertake a mission, the cost of travel was saved but not the subsistence allowance. For that reason, it had been necessary to request resources to cover such missions.

## AGENDA ITEM 105: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION (A/34/30)

60. Mr. AKWEI (Acting Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission) reminded the Committee that, a year earlier, the Commission had drawn attention to the serious strains to which the United Nations common system of salaries and allowances had been subjected as a result of unsettled economic and monetary conditions and, in particular, the loss of value of the United States dollar. The General Assembly had then asked ICSC to devote special attention to one aspect of the problem, namely the anomalous consequences which currency fluctuations and inflation had had on the pensionable remuneration of staff members and on their pension entitlements. ICSC had devoted most of its time to that problem, which the Fifth Committee would be considering later, when it would also have before it the related report of the Joint Staff Pension Board.

61. ICSC had been able to devote little time to its consideration of the post adjustment system with a view to seeking improvements in its operation. It would study that important question as soon as possible.

62. It would be seen from the report that the Commission had effectively assumed the responsibilities entrusted to it under the various articles of its statute: those concerning remuneration set out in articles 10, 11 and 12, which embraced not only salaries and allowances but all other benefits making up the compensation of the Professional and higher categories as well as of the General Service and other locally recruited categories; and those concerning conditions of service other than remuneration, referred to in articles 13 and 14.

63. The Commission could thus be said to be fully operational and had attained that full level of activity with the limited budgetary and staffing resources which the Fifth Committee had approved five years previously for the initial start-up period. It would be recalled that, at that time, the Fifth Committee had stated that the level of resources deemed necessary for the Commission's full operation would be authorized when the Commission had shown that it was ready to exercise the full range of its responsibilities. He expressed the hope that the Fifth Committee would bear that in mind when, under another item of the agenda, it examined the proposed programme budget for the Commission for the next biennium.

64. With respect to the conditions of service of the Professional and higher categories, he drew attention to chapter IV.A.2 of the report, in which the Commission had reported on the study requested of it by the General Assembly the previous year. The study related to grading equivalencies between the United Nations common system and the national civil service of the United States, which served as the comparator, in application of the Noblemaire principle, for establishing the level of remuneration of the Professional and higher categories.

65. The previous year the Commission had recommended grading equivalencies from the level of P-1 up to and including D-1; the General Assembly had accepted that recommendation and had requested the Commission to continue to seek to identify appropriate equivalencies for the grades of Director (D-2) and Assistant Secretary-General and, at the same time, to examine the feasibility of identifying posts of equivalent functions and responsibilities for the post of Under-Secretary-General.

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(Mr. Akwei, ICSC)

66. As was to be expected, the study made by the Commission showed that, at those levels where, both in the national service as in the international, the grade assigned to a particular post was determined not only on the basis of an objective determination of the difficulty of the post and the level of the responsibilities attaching to it, it was much less easy to establish equivalencies. Nevertheless, the Commission had felt able to recommend equivalencies at the D-2 level which were no less valid than those recommended the previous year; it therefore recommended that in future the comparison of remuneration at the D-2 level should be included in the computation of the margin.

67. Equivalencies had also been identified at the Assistant Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General levels but, given the difficulties of precise comparison of posts of that kind, the Commission believed that such equivalencies should be regarded only as approximations and should not be taken into account in the over-all comparison of the remuneration of the two services; in any case their effect would be negligible, given the small number of staff members at those levels. It would be noted also that the comparison had been further complicated by changes occurring on the United States side, in the form of the creation of a Senior Executive Service; the pay in that Service was to be determined according to the individual merit of an officer rather than the level of responsibilities of the post, which would make it difficult to determine the kind of post-to-post comparisons required for the Noblemaire comparison.

68. The recommendation that the D-2 grade be included in the calculation of the margin was the only recommendation submitted by the Commission calling for specific action by the General Assembly.

69. Doubts had already been expressed, in the Fifth Committee and elsewhere, about whether the United States Civil Service should continue to be used as a comparator. It would be noted in that respect that the ICSC was making preparations for a study to find out which national civil service was the best paid. That question was of course highly complex as it involved comparisons between countries with different economic and social systems. In order to be able to evaluate accurately the differences between systems as far as taxes and social security benefits were concerned, a methodology would have to be worked out which would make it possible to apply the comparison to total compensation. Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties involved, the Commission was convinced that the study should be carried out so that the Noblemaire principle, which was the foundation of the whole United Nations salary system, could be correctly applied.

70. In the meantime, therefore, the Commission had continued to monitor the evolution of the margin between remuneration in United Nations organizations and in the United States Civil Service. It could be seen, from the table following paragraph 101 of the report, that the margin, which had fallen to 9.3 per cent in the previous period, had risen to 13.9 per cent in the last 12 months studied. The widening of the margin was due almost exclusively to technical reasons, namely the adoption of new grading equivalencies and the fact that the cost of living in Washington was tending to approach that of New York. The evolution

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(Mr. Akwei, ICSC)

corresponded more to a new perception of the margin, therefore, than to an actual increase; at all events, the margin remained within the limits which had hitherto been regarded as reasonable by ICSC. It remained to be seen whether that would be so in the coming 12 months, given the current rate of inflation in New York.

71. With regard to General Service staff, it would be recalled that the Commission was required, under article 12 of its statute, to carry out surveys and to recommend appropriate salary scales. At the moment, it was doing so only in cities where one or more organizations were headquartered. In 1979, the Commission had made surveys in London and Montreal and transmitted its recommendations to the organizations concerned. A survey had also been started in New York, but the Commission would not examine the results until its February session, so as to leave sufficient time for all the interested parties to study the data. At the same session, the Commission would also study the results of a survey just completed in Rome. The Commission would thus have completed the first round of surveys in headquarters duty stations and would be able to make preparations for the second Geneva survey, which the General Assembly had asked it to carry out in 1980 instead of 1981. Preliminary discussions had already been held on the matter, which ought to make it possible to avoid many of the difficulties encountered in 1976.

72. Unfortunately, the Commission, having had to make four surveys in a year, had not had time to make any progress towards developing a general methodology, but it intended to devote itself to that matter as soon as possible.

73. Although questions concerning remuneration had loomed large in its work in 1979, the Commission had not neglected its longer-term functions. It would be seen from chapter VII of its report that it had made good progress in respect of job classification, by adopting a common classification of occupational groups that would also better permit inter-organization comparison and harmonization in many areas of personnel administration. The Commission had also started the preparation of a system of classification standards, which would serve initially to establish grading standards for jobs that were to be found in several organizations. The Commission was thus equipping itself to play its statutory role in the area of establishing common classification standards and recommending their use to the organizations, though not of course intervening in the actual administration of staff by each organization.

74. ICSC had explained in its previous reports how it intended to carry out its mandate under article 14 of its statute, in respect of career development, personnel training and recruitment policy. In section B of chapter VII, the Commission presented a series of recommendations for the various organizations, which they were asked to take into account in their future practices and policies. He hoped that the Fifth Committee would find in them a response to the concerns expressed at the previous session regarding personnel policies of the United Nations Secretariat.

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(Mr. Akwei, ICSC)

75. He had followed with interest the recent discussions in the Fifth Committee on the organization of competitive examinations for the advancement of General Services staff to the Professional category. It would be recalled that under article 14 of its statute ICSC was to make recommendations to the organizations in that connexion. It was ready to study the various aspects of the question and make recommendations on the subject, in consultation with the parties concerned.

76. The Commission was fully conscious of the difficulties of its task, in particular the heavy burden that monetary and economic instability imposed on the common system. The usefulness of the Commission lay in its ability to serve as an impartial and independent forum to harmonize the concerns of staffs and administrations as they strove to carry out the wishes of Member States.

77. Mr. SCHMIDT (Federal Republic of Germany) recalled that, in resolution 33/119, the General Assembly had requested "the Secretary-General and his colleagues on the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to study the feasibility of establishing a single administrative tribunal for the entire common system and to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session". He would like to know whether a report was in fact going to be submitted to the Committee.

78. Mr. DEBATIN (Under-Secretary-General for Administration, Finance and Management) said that the matter had been considered by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination at its last session, but that for the time being the report was not ready for submission to the Fifth Committee. He was willing, however, to describe the various aspects of those discussions in greater detail if delegations so desired.

79. Mr. SCHMIDT (Federal Republic of Germany) confirmed that his delegation would like to know how matters stood.

80. Mr. GOSS (Australia) referred to paragraphs 20 to 25 of the ICSC report, on the repatriation grant, and more specifically to paragraph 24, which indicated that the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat had said that, in so far as the United Nations itself was concerned, there was no express or implied provision that only those who actually made use of the travel entitlement should receive the grant. That opinion, surprising as it might seem, was of considerable importance, in that it made the repatriation grant appear to be an acquired right. It would be advisable for the Fifth Committee to take the opinion into account when it tried to find an interim solution to the problem of pensions, a solution that might also later become an "acquired right". He would like the Secretariat to prepare a conference room paper setting out in greater detail the opinion of the Office of Legal Affairs, recalling the relevant provisions of the Staff Rules and indicating when and in what form that opinion had been presented to the General Assembly. The Committee would thus be in a better position to decide between the various points of view expressed in ICSC, with a view to determining whether the retroactive application of the relevant staff rule was justified or not.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

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