

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 49th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIRSON (Belgium)

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

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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)

First reading (continued)

Section 10. Economic Commission for Europe (continued)

1. Miss BOZHKOVA (Bulgaria) said that, had her delegation been present during the vote on section 10, it would have voted in favour of the appropriation requested for the Economic Commission for Europe.

Section 11. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

2. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee was recommending a reduction of \$573,500 in the Secretary-General's estimate under section 11. In so doing, the Advisory Committee had used a method virtually the same as the one which it had adopted in considering the preceding proposed programme budget. In addition, the same approach had been adopted for the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic Commission for Latin America. ACABQ had based its recommendation on the high vacancy rate at the Professional and higher levels in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and, having noted that there had been a 14 per cent vacancy rate as at 30 March 1979, it had decided to recommend that the turnover deduction be increased from the standard rate of 5 per cent to 8 per cent. As indicated in paragraph 11.4 of the Advisory Committee's first report, there would be a consequential reduction of \$444,200 in the estimates.

3. The Advisory Committee explained in paragraph 11.9 of its report that, bearing in mind the vacancy rate, requirements for Administration and common services, which had been calculated on the assumption that all the posts would be filled, should be less than indicated. The Advisory Committee therefore recommended that the estimate be reduced by \$80,000. Lastly, the Advisory Committee was not convinced of the need for the reclassification of two posts (reclassification of one local-level post in the Trade Information Service to the P-2/1 Professional level and reclassification of the post of the Chief of the newly established Division for Shipping, Ports and Inland Waterways from P-5 to D-1) and was therefore recommending in paragraphs 11.5 and 11.7 reductions of \$42,200 and of \$7,100 in the estimates.

4. Mr. KUYAMA (Japan) said that ESCAP activities were of particular importance to his delegation for obvious reasons. It would therefore have wished the Advisory Committee to be less rigid. He would like to know the present vacancy rate and the implications for ESCAP activities of the reduction recommended in the light of that rate.

5. Mrs. GILES (Australia) endorsed the views expressed by the representative of Japan. The activities of ESCAP were of crucial importance in the region. While she welcomed the Advisory Committee's favourable recommendation concerning the

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(Mrs. Giles, Australia)

establishment of a D-1 post for a Programme Co-ordinator in the Pacific area, as requested in paragraph 11.10 of the proposed budget, she regretted its opposition to the reclassification of a local-level post to the P-2/1 level. Local staff should be given encouragement in the performance of their duties. Her delegation was nevertheless prepared to approve the Advisory Committee's recommendations.

6. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) expressed regret at the sizable reduction recommended in the appropriation requested by the Secretary-General under section 11 and noted that the Advisory Committee had recommended approval of the total amount requested under section 10 for the Economic Commission for Europe. ESCAP was one of the most active of the regional commissions and played an important part in all sectors of development in the region. As the reduction was motivated in large part by the high vacancy rate, which was no new phenomenon, it would be useful to know the reasons for the abnormally large number of unfilled posts. The Executive Secretary of ESCAP apparently had insufficient freedom of action to make the necessary appointments. He wondered who was responsible for the staffing situation: was it the Executive Secretary or had the Secretary-General failed to act on the Executive Secretary's recommendations?

7. Mr. SESSI (Italy) said that he would like to know the number and the geographical distribution of the experts who would participate in the meeting to review the impact of agricultural plans on the socio-economic conditions of farmers, for which an amount of \$23,000 was requested in paragraph 11.18 of the proposed programme budget.

8. He wondered whether it was appropriate to request, in paragraph 11.66, a provision of \$3,700 for staff travel in connexion with the monitoring of the implementation of the decision of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development. As he understood it, the Secretariat was to prepare a report on the matter.

9. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division), replying to questions raised by the representative of Japan, said that as at 31 August 1979 the number of vacancies had been somewhat lower than previously; there had been 21 vacant posts, i.e. 12.2 per cent of the total number of posts. As to the implications for programme delivery by ESCAP of the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee, the over-all reduction would have no impact on the Commission's activities, since it derived mainly from a turnover deduction. It was true that the reduction recommended under Administration and common services would create some difficulties for the Executive Secretary, but he would certainly be able to surmount them.

10. The high number of vacant posts, concerning which the representative of the Philippines had sought explanations, was due mainly to constraints arising from the implementation of relevant resolutions, concerning in particular geographical distribution. The many rules which the Secretariat must apply held up the selection and recruitment process both in ESCAP and throughout the Secretariat. It did indeed seem that the problem was more acute at Bangkok than anywhere else.

11. He had not the necessary data to inform the representative of Italy of the number and geographical distribution of the experts who would participate in the

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(Mr. Begin)

meeting referred to in paragraph 11.18 of the proposed budget. Referring to paragraph 11.66, he said that it had been realized during the preparation of the budget proposals, which had been prior to the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development, that further attention would have to be given to the programme in question. Revised estimates would be prepared in the light of the decisions taken at Vienna during the Conference.

12. The CHAIRMAN said that he was bound to echo the surprise expressed by the representative of the Philippines at the high vacancy rate in ESCAP, especially as the number of candidates applying for Secretariat posts was known to be very large. A list of vacant posts had been requested in 1978. He wondered why steps could not be taken to fill the posts at the time they became vacant.

13. Mr. AYADHI (Tunisia) said that he shared the concern of the Chairman and would like detailed explanations regarding vacancies in the regional commissions, which were supposed to be operational. He believed that the Secretariat should investigate the matter.

14. Mr. BRODODININGRAT (Indonesia) said that, since the recruitment procedure seemed to be at the root of the high number of vacancies in ESCAP, the Advisory Committee's recommendation against the reclassification of certain posts was perhaps unjustified.

15. Mr. MARTORELL (Peru) said that he too was perturbed by the problem of the vacancy rate in ESCAP. The Economic Commission for Latin America was confronted with the same problem, since 14.5 per cent of its Professional posts were vacant, and that was too high a figure. In the belief that the recruitment procedure could not be the sole cause of the problem, he would like more detailed explanations from the Secretariat.

16. Mr. RUEDAS (Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services) observed that two important and somewhat conflicting factors influenced the recruitment of personnel for the regional commissions: first, the desire often expressed by the governing bodies of the commissions to recruit more staff from their respective regions and, second, the rigid directives governing the principle of geographical distribution. He hoped that before the end of the meeting it would be possible to provide a more informative reply regarding the causes of the high vacancy rates in certain of the regional commissions. The Office of Personnel Services, as the unit responsible for recruitment, was studying the matter.

17. Mr. PAL (India) said that the ESCAP programmes and budget were of particular importance to his delegation. However, the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee were in general motivated by poor management of ESCAP and were therefore acceptable, with one exception.

18. In paragraph 11.45 of the proposed programme budget, the Secretary-General requested that one local-level post in the Trade Information Service be reclassified to the P-2/1 level. His delegation had difficulty in seeing why the Advisory Committee recommended against that request. The Secretary-General indicated in

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his budget proposals that priority had been given to certain areas of ESCAP activity, including international trade. Thus, any measure that would restrict the effectiveness of the International Trade Division must give rise to concern. His delegation would have been prepared to accept rejection of that reclassification request, as it could be argued that it would have no impact on the activities of the Division, had not the Joint Inspection Unit made some pertinent comments in its report on the United Nations information centres (A/34/379). In paragraph 55 of that document, the Inspectors recommended that persons with professional skills should be appointed as "local professionals" and paid salaries appropriate to the nature of the work in their country. They held that "the posts of Information Assistant and Reference Assistant, though classified in the General Service category, call for professional skills and qualifications. It is self-evident that persons performing these functions should be locally recruited but those who have the required professional training and experience should receive appropriate status and pay". In paragraph 57, the Inspectors said that after visiting 28 information centres they had come to the conclusion that "both the Information and Reference Assistants were, as a rule, rendering valuable service which was still not sufficiently recognized. For this reason, morale had sagged in many instances. The Inspectors therefore concur with the Secretary-General's views as expressed above and strongly recommend that action be taken rapidly along the lines suggested in paragraph 55".

19. In the same report the Inspectors stressed the fact that the regional commissions often played the role of information centres and recommended that in future they should take on their functions. The local-level post whose reclassification was recommended by the Secretary-General was not equivalent to a General Service post since, as the Secretary-General indicated in paragraph 11.45 of the proposed budget, the responsibilities of the incumbent, which were the same as those of a staff member in an information centre, included research, relations with outside users of the data bank, supervision of local-level staff and participation in training programmes for national personnel.

20. In the light of what he had stated, his delegation invited the Advisory Committee to reconsider its decision and urged approval of the reclassification requested by the Secretary-General.

21. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that, as the information centres were part of the Department of Public Information (DPI), that Department could submit to the Fifth Committee a report on which the Advisory Committee would make comments. If DPI considered that the recommendation in paragraph 11.5 of document A/34/7 was likely to harm the effectiveness of its activities, the Advisory Committee would naturally be prepared to reconsider its position and to make a new recommendation to the Fifth Committee. In any event, the Advisory Committee had not yet been invited to consider the proposals of the Joint Inspection Unit or the related comments by the Secretary-General.

22. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities (Committee of 41) would be considering the report of the

(The Chairman)

Joint Inspection Unit in 1980. In the belief that it would be possible to take action when the Special Political Committee and the Fifth Committee had before them the recommendation of the Committee of 41, he suggested that the representative of India should revert to the subject at that time, when it could also be considered by the Advisory Committee.

23. Mr. PAL (India) agreed to the Chairman's suggestion.

24. The recommendation of the Advisory Committee for an appropriation of \$22,970,200 under section 11 was approved in first reading without a vote.

25. Mr. BRODODININGRAT (Indonesia) said that, although his delegation was not opposed to the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, it was not convinced that the vacancy situation was a sufficiently good reason to reduce the appropriation proposed.

26. Mr. NORRIES (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation supported the budget estimates for ESCAP in their entirety and particularly welcomed the new post of Programme Co-ordinator in the Pacific area, whose establishment had been requested by the Secretary-General in paragraph 11.10 of the proposed budget. Thanks to that new post the nations of the Pacific would be able to participate far more actively in ESCAP activities than in the past.

Section 12. Economic Commission for Latin America

27. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the problems encountered in section 12 were very similar to those encountered in section 11. In his comments on section 11, the representative of Indonesia had questioned the validity of the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee for that section because of the high vacancy rate. The same comments and arguments presumably also applied to sections 12 and 13. In fact the question was a technical one and was as follows: if there were, for example, 100 posts on the manning table and it was subsequently discovered that on average five posts would not be filled for the entire period of 24 months, that meant that in reality the work would be done with 95 posts and that therefore, if funds were appropriated for 100 posts, that would actually be over-budgeting. If the Secretary-General was subsequently able to prove that he could fill all 100 posts, nothing in the comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee would prevent him from doing so, since the Advisory Committee's recommendations in no way amounted to abolition of posts but simply to a reduction in the estimates submitted. Thus, if the Secretary-General filled all the posts and then returned to the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee with supplementary estimates, the appropriation would automatically be approved. Moreover, with respect to the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee on account of the vacancy rate, the situation was exactly the same as in the case of the recommendations which it had made on common staff costs in Vienna.

28. The Advisory Committee was recommending a total reduction of \$615,500 in the Secretary-General's estimate under section 12. Of that amount, a reduction of

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\$467,900 was attributable to the vacancy situation in the Commission, as was explained in paragraph 12.7 of the Advisory Committee's report. The balance of the recommended reduction, i.e. \$147,600, was motivated by the following considerations. As indicated in paragraph 12.5 of its report, the Advisory Committee had not been able to recommend acceptance of the Secretary-General's request for the addition of one local-level post; in paragraph 12.6, the Advisory Committee recommended that the reclassification of one local-level post to the Professional level not be approved; lastly, in paragraphs 12.8 and 12.9, the Advisory Committee recommended reductions in the estimates for ad hoc expert groups and for ECLA Administration and common services.

29. Mr. BUJ-FLORES (Mexico) said that his delegation fully supported the extremely relevant arguments just advanced by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee. Having closely studied section 12 of the proposed budget and the Advisory Committee's related recommendations, his delegation considered those recommendations very reasonable and would therefore support them. However, his delegation felt bound to express its grave concern at the high rate of vacancies in the substantive departments of ECLA. In that regard, it endorsed the comments made previously by the Chairman and the representative of Tunisia, and it would like the Secretariat to inform the Committee of the results of the Secretariat's efforts since April 1979 to fill the vacancies in ECLA and to state in particular how many of the 15 vacant Professional posts mentioned in paragraph 12.7 of the Advisory Committee's report had been filled. His delegation deplored the fact that those posts had not been filled with due speed, with the result that a number of the programmes to which the developing countries gave highest priority could not be completed owing to insufficient manpower.

30. Mr. WILLIAMS (Panama) said that his delegation would vote for the Advisory Committee's recommendation on the budget proposals for ECLA. Like the representative of Mexico, he was extremely disturbed by the high rate of vacancies in ECLA, as a result of which programmes of the greatest importance to the developing countries in that region could not be completed. He would like the Secretariat to indicate how many Professionals had been recruited since April 1979 and also how many Professionals it intended to recruit by June 1980.

31. Mr. BLACKMAN (Barbados) reaffirmed that the ECLA budget was of great importance to his country and the Latin American region as a whole and said that his delegation accordingly shared the concern expressed by the representatives of Mexico and Panama at the high vacancy rate in ECLA, which affected the Commission's capacity to deliver the programmes planned for the region; the situation was all the more disquieting in that it was longstanding. Despite the explanations given by the Secretariat, his delegation was still extremely dissatisfied.

32. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the representatives of the Office of Personnel Services should make a statement to the Committee explaining the underlying causes of the vacancy problem affecting all the regional economic commissions alike. In that regard, he fully shared the concern of those who had spoken on the subject.

33. Mr. SESSI (Italy) noted that, according to paragraph 12.18 of the proposed budget, the preparation of projections for the Project 2000 would require 1.5 consultant work-months. He asked the Secretariat for further details on the Project; he wished to know in particular, whether it was an ongoing project, a new project or an activity already completed.

34. Mr. MARTORELL (Peru) said that, like previous speakers, he must express his deep anxiety over the high number of vacancies in ECLA. The work programmes of ECLA, to which his delegation accorded the highest priority, might not be carried out successfully unless the present situation was quickly remedied.

35. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division) replying to the question asked by the representative of Italy, said that Project 2000 was a programme element on which a decision has been taken by ECLA. The Commission had included the study in its work programme for the forthcoming biennium. It was thus a project whose implementation had not yet started.

36. The recommendation of the Advisory Committee for an appropriation of \$32,351,100 under section 12 was approved in first reading without a vote.

#### Section 13. Economic Commission for Africa

37. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee was recommending a reduction of \$520,600 in the Secretary-General's estimate under section 13, because of the vacancy situation in ECA. For that reason, it had applied a turnover deduction of 8 per cent, which was 3 per cent higher than the rate normally applied by the Secretary-General. As was indicated in paragraph 13.6 of its report, the Advisory Committee was also proposing a reduction of \$75,700 in the Secretary-General's estimate for Administration and common services, also because of the high vacancy rate in ECA. It was therefore recommending a total reduction of \$596,300 in the Secretary-General's estimate for the Economic Commission for Africa.

38. Mr. KHAMIS (Algeria) commended the Advisory Committee for the understanding it had shown in recommending reductions in the Secretary-General's estimates for ECA. He would, however, put two questions to the Secretariat concerning the proposed budget for the Commission. The first question concerned the Decade for Transport and Communications in Africa (1978-1988) and the manpower to be made available to ECA for the Decade, to which Africa attached very great importance. The Secretary-General was requesting the creation of only two new posts (1 P-4 and 1 P-5) for the implementation of the Decade. In view of the importance which the programme element relating to transport and communications would assume in ECA during the next few years, he wondered whether the Secretariat considered that the two posts concerned would be sufficient to enable activities of vast scope to be carried out by ECA successfully. His second question concerned the steps which had been taken to comply with General Assembly resolution 33/197, and more especially the question of decentralizing certain activities, and assigning a larger role to the regional economic commissions. It wished, in particular, to know to what extent the Population Division of ECA had been given the necessary means to enable it to be more directly responsible for the activities within its competence.



39. Mr. P. FALL (Senegal) expressed his delegation's disappointment at noting once again the high vacancy rate of established posts at ECA as at 30 April 1979. In view of the longstanding nature of that situation, his delegation urged the Secretariat to give the precise reasons for such a state of affairs, if possible, for all the regional commissions. In addition, it would be interested in knowing the actual number of vacant posts at ECA, given that the figure in the Advisory Committee's report was a percentage.

40. Mr. ZINIEL (Ghana) said that his delegation had no hesitation in approving the recommendations of the Advisory Committee but associated itself with the concerns expressed by the delegations of Senegal and Algeria. It was indeed worrying to learn that there was such a high vacancy rate, given the importance and wide range of ECA activities for the developing countries of the region. His delegation wondered if the two new posts requested by the Secretary-General in connexion with the plan of action for the implementation of the Transport and Communications Decade in Africa would be sufficient to ensure the attainment of the goals of the Decade.

41. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) said he welcomed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee that the Secretary-General's request for two new posts for the transport programme be approved but, like the representatives of Algeria and Senegal, his delegation was concerned about the number of posts provided in connexion with the Transport and Communications Decade in Africa. Counting the establishment of the two posts recommended by the Advisory Committee, the Economic Commission for Africa would have a total of 193 posts at the Professional level and above for the biennium 1980-1981, of which only 12 would be used for work on the Decade. That would seem to be a very small number, and he therefore requested details from the Secretariat on how it intended to utilize human resources to ensure the success of activities related to the Decade.

42. In paragraph 13.5 of its report, the Advisory Committee had stated that it believed that the high vacancy rate in ECA justified a turnover deduction of 8 per cent. His delegation again wished to draw the attention of the Secretary-General to that disturbing situation, as it had done the previous year, and to request an explanation of the underlying causes.

43. Mr. MASDOUKI (Morocco) said that his country followed the activities of ECA with much interest and co-operated with it in various ways. It had acted as host to the fifth session of the Conference of Ministers of ECA in March 1979, at which a number of resolutions had been adopted relating to the structure and machinery of the Commission (abolition of the Executive Committee and of the Technical Committee of Experts of ECA; establishment of a Technical Preparatory Committee to consider items submitted to annual meetings of the Conference of Ministers; convening of the Conference of Ministers annually instead of every two years, and the holding biennially of a Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers).

44. The responsibilities of the Economic Commission for Africa were considerable, and it was essential to strengthen its resources. For that reason, his delegation had hoped that the Advisory Committee would recommend approval of the appropriation

(Mr. Masdouki, Morocco)

of \$27,624,200 requested by the Secretary-General under section 13. The Advisory Committee justified the reduction it was recommending by the high vacancy rate, but the Fifth Committee had not been given sufficient information on the number of vacancies and the reasons for them.

45. Mr. MBAPILA (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the recommendations and explanations provided by the Advisory Committee were totally convincing. His delegation was seriously disturbed to note that ECA had been unable to fill a large number of posts. It looked forward to the explanation of the representatives of the Secretary-General, especially in regard to the measures which they intended to take to remedy the situation. ECA must utilize fully all the resources at its disposal if it was to carry out its task successfully.

46. Mr. HOUNA GOLO (Chad) said that he endorsed the serious concerns already expressed by other delegations from African countries about the vacant posts in ECA. His delegation reserved the right to speak later, if necessary, once the representatives of the Secretary-General had indicated what measures they intended to take in that regard.

47. He noted that the Advisory Committee had recommended approval of the establishment of two new posts requested by the Secretary-General for the implementation of the Transport and Communications Decade in Africa. His delegation considered that request extremely modest and hoped that the establishment of those two posts was merely a beginning, given the importance attached by African countries to the Decade and to the wide range of programmes related to it.

48. Mr. RAOELISOLO-FOMANANA (Madagascar) said that the Secretariat should provide a written report on the question of vacant posts in ECA. If the existing posts were not filled, the planning of activities became somewhat spurious.

49. Mr. RUGWIZANGOGA (Rwanda) said he was surprised to note that ECA, which was supposed to be stepping up its development programmes, had still not been provided with the necessary staff. His delegation hoped that the vacant posts would be filled as soon as possible and, in the meantime, it requested the Secretariat to explain the reasons for such a state of affairs.

50. Mr. KHAMIS (Algeria) said he was puzzled by the fact that the total requirements under the headings of consultants (\$560,000) and travel of staff to meetings (\$146,400) were presented at the beginning of paragraphs 13.73 and 13.74 of the proposed programme budget. Elsewhere, it was indicated that it was proposed to include the amounts of \$21,200 and \$37,600 respectively in the regular budget, implying that the balance would come from extrabudgetary sources. He wondered why the total requirements had been shown first, instead of the amounts that were actually being requested under the regular budget, which should have been given prominence.

51. The CHAIRMAN said he would like to know what the practical results had been for ECA of the decentralization called for by CPC and the General Assembly in the area of transport.

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52. Mr. ADEDEJI (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa) said that following that decentralization ECA had been given one P-4 post. ECA was the lead agency for the implementation of the Transport and Communications Decade in Africa, with responsibility for co-ordination of activities, programming and follow-up. The first pledging conference for the Decade was due to take place shortly. Resources amounting to almost \$9 billion had to be mobilized for phase I of the Decade. The Transport, Communication and Tourism Division of ECA currently had only seven Professional staff, not counting the two new posts requested by the Secretary-General and recommended for approval by the Advisory Committee. The extra staff would undoubtedly improve the ability of ECA to fulfil its functions in respect of the Decade. However, those additions to the staffing table were merely a beginning, and the Secretary-General would, doubtless, in due course, submit proposals to increase the Division's resources. It should not be forgotten that the Division had to continue the Commission's normal transport and communication work at the same time as co-ordinating activities for the Decade.

53. Mr. HOUNA GOLO (Chad) observed that some of his questions had not been answered. He was pleased that the establishment of two new posts in the Transport, Communication and Tourism Division represented only a first step.

54. Mr. UCHUNO (Nigeria) said that, given the magnitude of the problem of communications in Africa and the fact that ECA was the lead agency for the Decade, the establishment of two additional posts did not seem commensurate with the tremendous needs in that area. He wished to know what other organizations, apart from ECA, were participating in the implementation of the Decade.

55. Mr. ADEDEJI (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa) said that the difficulties which ECA was experiencing in recruitment, especially in Africa, had existed for quite some time. However, ECA had managed to achieve a sizable reduction in the vacancy rate in the past three or four years. Recruitment was an area in which change could be very rapid, and very often statistics lagged behind the real situation. The position with regard to vacancies was currently much more satisfactory than it had been during the period covered by the report of the Advisory Committee. For example, there were no vacant posts in the Transport, Communication and Tourism Division, with the exception, of course, of the two new posts proposed. ECA was making every effort to fill as rapidly as possible a number of posts which had become vacant as a result of transfers or resignations, despite the difficulties it was currently experiencing in attracting staff to Addis Ababa.

56. Referring to the question asked by the representative of Nigeria, he said that several organizations were co-operating with ECA, within their respective spheres of activity, in the implementation of the Decade, including ITU (telecommunications), UPU (postal services), IMCO (maritime transport) and UNESCO (broadcasting and education). In addition, a number of intergovernmental organizations, such as the Union of African Railways, the port management associations founded by ECA in various areas of Africa and the recently created Pan African Telecommunications Union, were participating in the preparation of programmes for the Decade and would doubtless be involved in their implementation. However, because of its multisectoral and multidisciplinary character, ECA would ensure co-ordination of the activities of the Decade.

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57. Mr. MBAZOA (Central African Republic) referring to the subprogramme on intra-African links of the transport programme, in connexion with which it was stated that the Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway would be operational by the end of 1980, asked what the current status of the project was.

58. Mr. ADEDEJI (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa) said that, according to information provided by the intergovernmental organization established by the Member States participating in the project, the Lagos-Mombasa Trans-African Highway should be completed at the end of 1980 if the necessary resources could be raised. The highway would pass through six African States: Kenya, Uganda, Zaire, the Central African Republic, the United Republic of Cameroon and Nigeria. A large part of the highway was already in use; most of the work that remained to be done was on the segments in Zaire and the Central African Republic. Numerous efforts had been made in recent years to assist Zaire and the Central African Republic to muster the necessary resources to carry out the project. Despite the regional nature of the project, resources had to be raised at the national level, since it had originally been decided that each country would be responsible for the construction of the highway in its own territory. It should be noted that the project was among the priorities of the phase I (1980-1983) of the Transport and Communications Decade.

59. Mr. TUNSALA (Zaire) said he was pleased that there had been a marked improvement in the vacancy situation in ECA. He wondered whether the Advisory Committee's recommendation of a reduction of nearly \$600,000 in the estimate for ECA would not create difficulties for the functioning of the Commission.

60. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Fifth Committee had two alternatives: either it could consider the vacancy situation in ECA to be satisfactory and assumed that it would continue to be so for the entire biennium, in which case there would be no need for the reduction recommended by the Advisory Committee; or - the alternative which he considered preferable - it could approve the Advisory Committee's recommendation, it being understood that the Secretary-General would be authorized to make such expenditure as was necessary for the posts to be filled and would report back on the matter in the performance report for the biennium 1980-1981. The Committee had taken just such an approach when the estimates for the various regional commissions for the biennium 1978-1979 had been reduced.

61. The CHAIRMAN said that the suggestion put forward by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee seemed to be perfectly satisfactory.

62. Mr. TOMMO MONTHÉ (United Republic of Cameroon) said that his delegation favoured the second alternative mentioned by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee. He noted with satisfaction that the Executive Secretary of ECA considered the establishment of two additional posts in connexion with the Decade to be only a first step and that additional resources would be requested during the Decade.

63. The recommendation of the Advisory Committee for an appropriation of \$27,027,900 under section 13 was approved in first reading without a vote.

Section 14. Economic Commission for Western Asia

Revised estimates under section 14 (Economic Commission for Western Asia).  
Transfer of the headquarters of ECWA to Baghdad (A/34/7/Add.5; A/C.5/34/11)

64. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) explained that the problem of vacancies also arose in ECWA and that the Advisory Committee had therefore considered it advisable to recommend that the turnover deduction applicable to the Professional category and above be increased from 5 per cent to 7 per cent; as indicated in paragraph 14.9 of its report (A/34/7), there would be a consequential reduction of \$173,200 in the Secretary-General's estimates.

65. It was unlikely that the amount of \$250,800 requested by the Secretary-General for staff travel costs would be spent in its entirety, since the Commission would be busy for much of the year transferring to Baghdad. In paragraph 14.8 of its report, the Advisory Committee was therefore recommending a reduction of \$52,800 in the Secretary-General's estimate for those costs.

66. With regard to the question of the transfer to Baghdad of the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Western Asia, he referred to the revised estimates issued under the symbol A/C.5/34/11 and to the relevant report of the Advisory Committee (A/34/7/Add.5). The Advisory Committee had studied the question very carefully, and heard the views of the representatives of the Budget Division and of the Office of Personnel Services. It had concluded that the revised estimates submitted by the Secretary-General could be reduced by \$204,500. It had seemed to ACABQ that a total appropriation of \$1,600,000 would be sufficient to cover the expenses of the transfer of ECWA from Beirut to Baghdad.

67. Mr. BUJ FLORES (Mexico) expressed the gratitude of the international community to the Iraqi Government for its generosity in providing ECWA not only with premises but also with all the necessary equipment and furniture, as indicated in document A/C.5/34/11, paragraph 12. His delegation endorsed the observations of the Advisory Committee on the question of transferring ECWA to Baghdad, and supported the recommendations made on that subject in the sixth report of ACABQ (A/34/7/Add.5).

68. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should take a single decision on the appropriations requested by the Secretary-General under section 14 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981 and on the revised estimates following the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council at its first and second regular sessions in 1979; taking into account the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee, the respective figures were \$12,706,600 and \$1,600,000. Total appropriations for ECWA would thus amount to \$14,306,600.

69. The recommendation of the Advisory Committee for a total appropriation of \$14,306,600 under section 14 was approved in first reading without a vote.

70. Miss MILGROM (Israel), explaining her delegation's position, stated that it was Israel's principle to oppose the financing of the Economic Commission for

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(Miss Milgrom, Israel)

Western Asia. The composition of that Commission was discriminatory and so devised as to prevent one Member State of the region from belonging to the Commission, in flagrant violation of the "principle of the sovereign equality" of all Member States, enshrined in Article 2 of the Charter.

71. Mr. AL-TAKRITI (Iraq) commented that the transfer of ECWA to Baghdad had been approved by the Economic and Social Council at its first and second regular sessions in 1979. The representative of Israel had just accused the Economic and Social Council of taking discriminatory decisions. The fact of the matter was that those decisions were the expression of the wishes of Member States, that the Palestine Liberation Organization took part in the work of ECWA, and that the Arab Member States did not recognize the existence of the Zionist entity in the Middle East.

72. Mr. DAHLER (Jordan) reminded the representative of Israel that ECWA was earnestly involved with the question of the Palestinians who had suffered from her country's policy. Israel had cut itself off from the international community, which was why it was so vindictive.

Question of vacancies in the regional economic commissions

73. Mr. GIRALDO (Colombia) stated that, after the approval of the appropriations under sections 11, 12, 13 and 14 of the proposed programme budget, it should be clearly understood that, if the vacancy situation in the various regional commissions changed, the question of the resources allocated to those commissions could, if necessary, be reopened.

74. Mr. JONAH (Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services) explained that the large number of vacancies in the regional economic commissions was attributable to various factors. First, many vacant posts were highly technical ones, which were difficult to fill owing to the lack of specialists. Potential candidates had, moreover, to meet certain conditions relating to the local language and conditions: for example, they must speak Arabic for ECWA or Spanish for ECLA. Secondly, the move to decentralize administration made recruitment procedures longer and more difficult: the regional economic commissions had been authorized to recruit staff members in grades P-1 to P-4. Ultimately, however, they had to consult Headquarters, and communication difficulties delayed the final decision. Lastly, account had to be taken of the principle of geographical distribution of Professional posts.

75. As the Executive Secretary of ECA had said, the situation was improving. Thanks to the steps taken and the collaboration of the regional commissions themselves, it seemed certain that further progress would be made.

76. Mr. HOUNA GOLO (Chad) said he had the impression that the percentage of vacancies in the regional economic commissions, far from diminishing, was tending to increase. He hoped the Fifth Committee would have an opportunity to consider that persistent problem in more detail and discuss the steps taken to control it.

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(Mr. Houna Golo, Chad)

77. As far as the Economic Commission for Africa was concerned, it was his delegation's understanding that, if new staff needs developed there, the Commission could request additional posts. He would like the Secretary-General to confirm that interpretation.

78. Mr. JONAH (Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services), referring to the first point raised by the delegation of Chad, stated that most of the steps taken to control the vacancy problems were internal rearrangements and were chiefly a response to the need to co-ordinate recruitment procedures, particularly as regards the announcement of vacancies and publication of bulletins. He assured Committee members that OPS was determined to solve the problem; the Secretary-General would doubtless submit an encouraging report on the matter at the following session.

79. Mr. BEGIN (Director of the Budget Division), replying to the second question by the delegation of Chad, said that it was impossible at the current stage to foresee the staffing requirements of the regional commissions or of any other Secretariat unit in the biennium 1982-1983. Requests from departments would not be centralized until the beginning of 1981, and only then could the Secretariat have some idea of requirements for the future programme budget.

80. Mr. DE FACQ (Belgium) said he had noted the reasons for the large number of vacancies in the regional commissions. To him they seemed convincing, and he was inclined to add that the qualifications required of candidates were so technical and so specific that it must be almost impossible to fill the posts in question. For the Economic Commission for Africa, for example, the Secretary-General stated in paragraph 13.72 of the proposed programme budget that a P-5 post was intended for a "multimodal transport economist", and a P-4 post was for an "inland water transport economist engineer". Such specialists were extremely difficult to find even in the most developed countries.

81. Mr. KHAMIS (Algeria) endorsed the comments by the representative of Belgium but said he was convinced that the technical skills mentioned could be found within the Secretariat. United Nations staff mobility should be enhanced, as the General Assembly had emphasized in resolution 33/143. If, as the General Assembly had recommended, posting away from Headquarters was taken into consideration in the promotion of the staff members concerned, there would certainly be more volunteers. There was perhaps an incidental problem of post adjustment, which dissuaded New York staff from serving in the regional commissions. The Fifth Committee should some day study all aspects of that particular problem, which had already been raised by other bodies.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.