



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HADWEN (Canada)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 111: PROGRAMME PLANNING (continued) (A/37/6/Add.3, A/41/6 and Add.1, A/41/38 and Corr.1 and 2, A/41/226, A/41/318 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, A/41/670)

1. Mr. MURRAY (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Community on the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) (A/41/318), commented that the existence of that Committee was now under threat because of the financial crisis and the recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts. He stressed that, whatever the fate of the Committee, the tasks that it performed (monitoring, planning, programming, evaluation and co-ordination) were crucial to the efficient work of the Organization and would all have to be entrusted to a single body irrespective of the outcome of the crisis.
2. Judging by the comments contained in its report, it was clear that CPC itself was not happy with the way the system was functioning at present. According to CPC, moreover, the information that it received from the Secretariat was insufficient and the Secretariat and intergovernmental bodies did not pay due attention to its recommendations.
3. The members of the European Community believed that the proposals for reform put forward by CPC should allow planning and programming to be improved. They agreed with the Committee's criticisms of working methods in the regional commissions. They also shared its concern at the lack of participation by Member States and the Secretariat in programme evaluation. The European Community urged Professional staff at all levels to engage in self-evaluation and to pay more attention to the findings of evaluation exercises. It supported the Committee's recommendations on improved programme descriptions in the proposed programme budget.
4. On the subject of co-ordination, the European Community shared the unease of CPC at the lack of follow-up given to the results of the cross-organizational programme analyses. It was also sorry that so little account had been taken of the recommendations of CPC in priority setting. It was important for co-ordination not to remain just a concept but to become a reality. The links between CPC and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) should therefore be enhanced.
5. The European Community supported the recommendation in paragraph 15 of the CPC report, that publication of the UN Chronicle should be suspended, and the resources released as a result used to hasten the publication of the Yearbook of the United Nations. A thorough examination of the production schedule for those two publications would be well worth while.
6. Finally, the European Community took note of the work of CPC on the revision of the medium-term plan and its preparations for the forthcoming plan.

AGENDA ITEM 117: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued) (A/41/627; A/C.5/41/2, A/C.5/41/6, A/C.5/41/12 and Corr.1, A/C.5/41/18, A/C.5/41/29, A/C.5/41/39, A/C.5/41/CRP.2)

7. Ms. KINGSMILL (Australia) said her delegation was keenly aware that three quarters of the budget of the Organization went on staff costs, and that staff represented the major resource of the United Nations. That resource must be fully utilized, and the financial crisis afforded a timely opportunity for progress to be made as the international civil service was streamlined.

8. In some areas, notably the status of women, very little progress had been made. The number of women holding decision-making positions was still tiny, and the majority of such women were in service-related occupations. The appearance of the first report of the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat (A/C.5/41/18) was, therefore, very welcome, and the Secretary-General should be urged to implement the recommendations contained therein. It was especially important to recruit women for high-level posts and to ensure that accelerated and other promotions were not set aside primarily for men. On the other hand, personal promotions to advance the status of women should not become institutionalized, as advocated in recommendation 2 (c), both because of the danger of abuse and because the system conflicted with General Assembly resolution 39/69 on the common system.

9. On the question of geographical distribution, her delegation had taken careful note of General Assembly resolution 40/258 A and the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/C.5/41/6). The Committee should follow the implementation of that resolution very closely and evaluate the progress made. Her country subscribed to the principle of equitable geographical distribution but believed that the Secretary-General must be allowed some room to manoeuvre in the interests of smooth management. It also believed that the contribution factor should be retained as the determining element in the calculation of desirable ranges.

10. On the establishment of an office of Ombudsman in the Secretariat, which was covered by document A/C.5/41/14, her country found it regrettable that consideration of the item had had to be deferred to the following year, because the current procedures were a genuine administrative and financial burden on the Organization.

11. Her delegation welcomed the steps taken by the Secretary-General to enhance the efficiency of the Secretariat and make good long-standing defects in job classification, the advancement of women, training and grievance procedures; it hoped that the reforms now under way would bring results.

12. Mr. GARVALOV (Bulgaria), speaking on behalf of several States from the Eastern European Group - Bulgaria, the Byelorussian SSR, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, the Ukrainian SSR, and the USSR - said that, according to the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/41/627), the transformation of UNIDO into a specialized agency and

(Mr. Garvalov, Bulgaria)

the recruitment freeze had been particularly damaging to the interests of un- and under-represented Member States. Between 1 July 1985 and 30 June 1986, the nationals of those States had accounted for only a quarter of all appointments. The Eastern European countries had not escaped that trend, and remained under-represented, especially at higher levels.

13. Equitable geographical distribution was hampered by a number of factors. First, the recruitment freeze had not been accompanied by a freeze on promotions. As a result, staff members from adequately represented countries had been promoted, while no staff members had been recruited from the other countries. The freeze had also penalized the Eastern European countries, many of whose staff members worked on fixed-term contracts, because many such staff had not been replaced when their contracts expired. The situation was, moreover, serving to increase the proportion of permanent contracts to fixed-term contracts, to the detriment of efficiency in the United Nations.

14. The competitive examinations as currently conceived discriminated against external candidates. In order to remedy that injustice it was essential to act upon the recommendation made by the International Civil Service Commission in paragraph 262 of its report (A/40/30).

15. The geographical imbalance was further increased by the promotion of a large number of staff members from the General Service to the Professional category, to the detriment of direct recruitment from unrepresented and underrepresented States. The requirements of General Assembly resolutions 33/143 and 35/240, which stipulated that no more than 30 per cent of the P-1 and P-2 vacancies should be set aside for internal candidates while the remaining 70 per cent should be reserved for external candidates, should be implemented. In 1986, that requirement had not been met because internal competitive examinations had continued to be held despite the recruitment freeze.

16. In his report on the composition of the Secretariat and desirable ranges (A/C.5/41/6), the Secretary-General had quite rightly recalled that nationals of an overrepresented Member State would be appointed only if there were no suitably qualified candidates from underrepresented Member States. That principle must be applied in the competitive examination process and should be strictly applied in the event of a 15 per cent reduction in staff.

17. Mr. AYITE (Togo) welcomed the measures taken by the Secretary-General to improve, in the context of the medium-term recruitment plan for 1986-1987, the representation of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, to ensure the representation of developing countries in senior and policy-formulating posts and to increase the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution.

18. His delegation nevertheless noted that despite all those efforts and despite the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 40/283 A, which requested the Secretary-General to strengthen the role and emphasize the authority of the Office of Personnel Services, the situation of unrepresented and underrepresented

(Mr. Ayite, Togo)

countries, most of them African countries, was far from satisfactory. Of the 188 appointments made to posts subject to geographical distribution between 1 July 1985 and 30 June 1986, 3 (1.6 per cent) had been of nationals from unrepresented States and 42 (22.3 per cent) had been of nationals from underrepresented States, whereas 131 (69.7 per cent) had been of nationals from Member States that were within range and 12 (6.4 per cent) had been of nationals from overrepresented States. On the other hand, he was pleased to see that the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution had increased since the percentage of women in such posts had almost doubled between 1976 and 1986.

19. With regard to the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies, he recalled that between 1 September 1985 and 30 June 1986 there had been 95 cases of arrests, detentions or disappearances of international officials. Despite the commendable efforts of the Secretary-General and of the United Nations Security Co-ordinator, 20 cases remained outstanding, of which 17 concerned locally-recruited staff. However, the violations of the privileges and immunities of international officials could also take the form of interference in the contractual relations between the staff member and the organization employing him. In the view of his delegation, such violations had the same effect as arrests and detentions, namely, they hampered the smooth functioning of the organizations and prevented them from achieving their objectives. Member States must respect the privileges and immunities of international officials, and the latter, for their part, must carry out their obligations under the staff regulations and staff rules and, in particular, regulation 1.8.

20. Member States must also observe subparagraph (b) of section 18 of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. It was regrettable to see several Governments adopting measures - such as contributions to emergency relief, repatriation of salaries - which amounted to taxing the salaries of staff members. Since staff members were subject to staff assessment, any form of national taxation on their income compelled the Organization to reimburse any staff member who was taxed twice and his delegation could not sanction that in the context of the current financial crisis.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1986-1987 (continued)

Revised estimates under section 2A: News Service of the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs (A/41/328; A/C.5/41/9 and A/41/7/Add.7)

21. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that, after considering the Secretary-General's report on the revised estimates under section 2A of the programme budget (A/C.5/41/9), the Advisory Committee had reached the conclusion set out in paragraph 4 of document A/41/7/Add.7, to the effect that should the General Assembly approve the continuation of the News Service of the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs in 1987 at the staffing level proposed by the Secretary-General, an appropriation of \$288,600 would be required under section 2A of the programme budget for the biennium 1986-1987.

22. Mr. MURRAY (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/41/9) was not as comprehensive as it should have been, considering that the issue had been the subject of lengthy debates both in the Fifth Committee and in the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC). He was particularly worried to see from paragraph 7 of the report that the staff who had previously been on temporary loan in connection with the Functions performed by the News Service had been redeployed to their offices of origin whereas, according to paragraph 41 of the evaluation carried out by the Administrative Management Service, the staff of the News Service had been progressively strengthened through internal redeployments, and according to paragraph 61 a body of expertise in the operation of the service had been built up and should be maintained, and according to paragraph 67 the professionals in that service had to be politically alert and to represent diverse regions. He wondered how the strengthening and maintenance of expertise could be reconciled with the return to the original number of staff of the Service, particularly since it appeared, from paragraph 4 of the report of the Secretary-General, that four daily newspapers had been added to the list of papers being reviewed without any increase in staff allocation.

23. With regard to location of the News Service, after citing various possible alternatives, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination had requested the Secretary-General to give further consideration to that issue (document A/41/38, para. 165). Yet in paragraph 5 of his report the Secretary-General simply proposed that the News Service function should be continued in the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs without really examining the issue. For all those reasons, his delegation proposed that no decision should be taken on the issue until the Secretary-General presented additional information.

24. Mr. KRAMER (United States of America) said that both the Fifth Committee and CPC had had to wait until 1986 for the report of the Administrative Management Service on the evaluation of the News Service of the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs (A/41/328). CPC had thus considered the report in detail at its twenty-sixth session and had formulated recommendations that his delegation considered well-founded. Further, CPC had asked the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly on the staffing of the News Service, taking into account its conclusions and recommendations. However, the report in question (A/C.5/41/9) did not by any means contain all the information that the Fifth Committee needed to take an informed decision on the matter.

25. The Secretary-General's report indicated that, further to CPC's recommendations, the News Service was now providing only three outputs: daily news bulletins, a daily press review, and the distribution of wire service printouts. His delegation was pleased that the number of daily bulletins had been reduced from four to three, but regretted that the wire service printouts would in future be distributed four times daily, which was double the frequency recommended by CPC. The printouts were certainly the most valuable of the three outputs, but since CPC had concluded that reading the printouts three times daily was time-consuming, it was to be hoped that the number of staff members engaged in reading them four times daily was not too great.

(Mr. Kramer, United States)

26. As for the daily press review, the report of the Administrative Management Service stated that end-users found it less valuable than the daily news bulletins, that there was a preponderance of material from Western press sources, that it could be timely only at the cost of being incomplete, and that, in any event, the Secretary-General already received a comprehensive press review prepared by his Executive Office. Accordingly, his delegation wished to know whether the articles selected for the press review were also summarized in the daily news bulletins, and which four major daily newspapers had been added to the list of papers being reviewed, since it was not clear how four additional titles could increase the utility and relevance of that output.

27. His delegation was pleased to note that the staff of the News Service had been reduced to the original core of seven staff members, but considered that most of those seven could be better utilized in other functions within the Department. Even if it was difficult to determine an appropriate level of staffing for the Service, a quick comparison of the work-load indicated in paragraph 48 of document A/41/328 and of the time returns of the Service's staff members indicated in table 6 seemed to indicate that a staff of seven could not be adequately justified. His delegation thus requested the Secretariat to provide an analysis of the Service's work-load and of the time returns of the service's staff, and to indicate the geographical distribution of the Service's staff as a whole, including those in supervisory capacities. Further, his delegation requested an estimate of staff requirements based on deletion of the daily press review and distribution of the wire service printouts only twice daily.

28. With regard to the placement of the News Service, most members of CPC had felt that it should be absorbed by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General or the Department of Public Information, while some had called for its abolition and others had supported its retention in the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs. The Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts, in recommendation 18, had stated that the dissemination of news and political analysis activities in various departments should be rationalized and co-ordinated.

29. His delegation thus requested the Secretary-General to reconsider the appropriation requested in document A/C.5/41/9, and to seek to further reduce the staff and costs of a Service which had been of questionable value since its inception.

30. Mr. AKPLOGAN (Benin) welcomed the redeployment to their offices of origin of the staff who had been on temporary loan to discharge the functions performed by the News Service, since, as stated in paragraph 6 of the Secretary-General's report, the proposed outputs could be delivered by the original core of seven staff members working under the general supervision and guidance of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for the Department. His delegation supported that step, provided that the principle of the equitable geographical distribution of posts and responsibilities was respected and that, accordingly, the staff member responsible for supervising the News Service in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General was a national of a different region to that of the P-4 staff member in the News Service.

31. Mr. LOZA (Egypt) said that, while the evaluation team of the Administrative Management Service had concluded that the distribution of raw wire service printouts was the most valuable output of the News Service, the Service, if maintained should be absorbed by the department most competent in such activities, namely the Department of Public Information. With regard to the staffing level of the Service, he noted from table 4 of document A/41/328 that between 1980 and 1985 six posts from other administrative units had been transferred to the Service. The Secretary-General's report stated that the staff members concerned had been redeployed to their offices of origin prompting him to wonder whether those offices still needed the posts in question and whether they had needed them at the time of the original transfer. Paragraph 42 of document A/41/328 stated that any transfer of posts would have required approval by ACABQ and that the Department had thus used an extended loan arrangement (six years in the case of one post). His delegation wished to know whether the practice was widespread and what the Advisory Committee's position was on the matter.

32. Mr. KAMAL (Pakistan) supported the Secretary-General's proposal to maintain the News Service of the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs. Given the changes made in the News Service's outputs, his delegation wished to know what measures were being taken to use the services of news agencies in developing countries in order to provide the Secretary-General with more comprehensive and more balanced information on the world situation and major international problems. Moreover, given the importance of the functions discharged by the Service it was necessary to identify the authority that would orient and supervise its day-to-day functioning.

33. Mr. LADJOUZI (Algeria) said that he, too, wished to know to what extent the News Service made use of news agencies in developing countries. That aside, his delegation supported the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report and the eighth report of ACABQ as a whole, as well as the evaluation report relating to the News Service. Finally, his delegation supported the recommendation made by the representative of Benin, and trusted that the Secretariat would take it into consideration with a view to improving the functioning of the News Service.

34. Mr. JOSHI (Nepal) said that his delegation was in favour of maintaining the News Service as recommended by the Secretary-General. However, he wished to know who would be in charge of the News Service in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Security Council Affairs and hoped that the principle of equitable geographical distribution would be duly taken into account.

35. Mr. HARAN (Israel) observed that the Administrative Management Service, in paragraph 60 of its report, indicated that the News Information Service was only one among many sources of information available to the Secretary-General. His delegation, therefore, considered that its usefulness was only marginal, especially since it did not operate around the clock, and - as had been pointed out by the Administrative Management Service in paragraph 10 of its report - since the Secretary-General relied primarily on his collaborators and representatives at Headquarters and in the field for information. He therefore concluded that maintaining the News Service, which would cost more than \$250,000, was unnecessary.

36. Mr. LEMERLE (France) requested the Secretariat to explain why it had been decided to increase to four times daily the frequency of distribution of raw wire-service printouts, although the CPC had recommended that it should be cut to twice daily.
37. Mr. DEVREUX (Belgium) said that the Committee must be guided by the cautious approach adopted by ACABQ, which had not reached any decision on whether the News Service should be kept. He asked the Secretariat and ACABQ to indicate whether the content of paragraph 8 of the evaluation report, concerning the mandate of the News Service, conformed to the legal definition of a mandate and, if so, whether that definition was satisfactory. Furthermore, he wondered whether the diversity that the Service ensured by offering an additional source of information was worth the high price of \$288,600 per annum given the current financial crisis. Lastly, although CPC had requested that the location of the News Service should be given further consideration, no information had been provided on that subject. Consequently, his delegation fully supported the proposal put forward by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago.
38. Mr. BREEZE (United Kingdom) expressed concern at the increased frequency of distribution of wire-service dispatches, which was contrary to the recommendation made by CPC. His delegation, like others, considered that the Secretary-General's report had not taken duly into account the CPC recommendations that the News Service should be either absorbed into the Executive Office of the Secretary-General or into the Department of Public Information, or simply eliminated. He, too, was in favour of postponing any decision on that question.
39. Mr. MELTKE (German Democratic Republic) supported the Secretary-General's observations concerning the News Service, and said that it should be kept because it was useful.
40. Mr. TAKASU (Japan) asked why the recommendations of CPC concerning the absorption of the News Service, and distribution of wire-service printouts had not been implemented. He wondered whether, in view of the financial crisis, it might not have been preferable to redeploy the six staff members loaned to the News Service elsewhere than to their offices of origin, since those offices had apparently been able to manage without them for a quite a long time.
41. Mr. MOUSSAKI (Congo) said that the News Service must be maintained, especially since the far-reaching changes that had been made should satisfy the Fifth Committee.
42. Mr. VISLYCH (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) pointed out that the Charter made it incumbent upon the Secretary-General to inform the Security Council on all matters relating to international peace and security. Since the News Service was the only body equipped to enable the Secretary-General to discharge that important duty, there could be no doubt about the need to maintain it. However, his delegation would also welcome replies to the various questions that had been raised and, therefore, would not object to postponing the decision, provided that the Secretariat answered those questions without delay.

43. Mr. DEVREUX (Belgium) said that it would have been useful to have a report from the Secretariat and from the Advisory Committee. However, the Committee could take a decision after hearing the Director of the Budget Division.

44. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya) said that he did not object to postponing the decision to the following day. However, if that was to be done, he would request clarification of the proposal put forward by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago.

45. The CHAIRMAN said that, the following day, when the Committee came to take a decision, after hearing the Director of the Budget Division answer the questions raised, the representative of Trinidad and Tobago would be able to clarify his proposal.

46. Mr. VISLYCH (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that he failed to see why the proposal should need further clarification; the Committee had already adopted it by deciding to postpone its decision the next day.

47. Mr. MURRAY (Trinidad and Tobago) said that he had proposed that the decision should be postponed in order to give the Committee an opportunity to obtain all the necessary information. If the Director of the Budget Division provided the information, the Committee could take a decision. If not, his proposal would stand.

48. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya) expressed the hope that the Chairman would ask the Committee to take a decision as soon as it had heard the Director of the Budget Division.

49. Mr. KRAMER (United States of America) pointed out that his delegation had, in fact, made a proposal when it had invited the Secretary-General to reconsider the appropriation requested and to try to make further reductions in staff. Before taking a decision, it wished to be assured that it had indeed reconsidered his proposal.

50. Mr. LADJOUZI (Algeria) said that he was still waiting for information concerning the utilization of the services provided by the news agencies of the developing countries. He also asked whether there would be any budgetary implications if the Committee postponed its decision.

51. Mr. ANNAN (Director, Budget Division) said that the appropriation made in 1985 for the News Service covered 1986 only. If the Committee failed to reach a decision, financing would indeed be a problem as from 1 January 1987.

52. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy), referring to paragraph 3 of the Advisory Committee's report, believed that - as had been suggested by the representative of Japan - instead of re-assigning the staff members in question to their offices of origin, which had been able to do without them for some time, it might be preferable to transfer them to offices in which they would be of greater assistance. He hoped that the Director of the Budget Division would reply to all the questions that had been raised, including those which were not directly related to the budget such as questions concerning the usefulness of the services provided.

53. The CHAIRMAN said that at the next meeting, after hearing the Director of the Budget Division, delegations would be able to submit their proposals and possibly take a decision.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.