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## PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

### Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered a report on publications and documentation of the United Nations (A/8126 and Corr.1), which the Secretary-General has submitted in response to paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 2538 (XXIV).
2. The Secretary-General states in his report that he has responded to all of the requests addressed to him in that resolution, with one exception: the preparation of a list of resolutions of the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs which call for periodic reports, with an indication of the number of pages of each (requested under paragraph 5 of resolution 2538 (XXIV)); the Advisory Committee had been invited to submit recommendations for shortening, discontinuing or issuing less frequently such reports. The Secretary-General explains that compilation of the list has taken longer than expected, particularly since he considers that, to be of real benefit, the list should contain information on the nature and purposes of the reports called for; he therefore proposes to complete the list in time to enable the Advisory Committee to submit its comments to the Assembly at its twenty-sixth session.
3. Although the volume of documentation in the United Nations remains very large, the report shows that some progress has been made in the past year towards curbing it, or at least reducing its rate of growth. The gains made are due mainly to the positive efforts of certain organs of the United Nations and to

those of the Secretariat. Some United Nations bodies have agreed to use more concise records, and the Economic and Social Council has taken steps - many of them relating to documentation - to improve the organization of its work. As for the Secretary-General, he has, in general, carried out the tasks requested of him by the General Assembly, albeit at times not without difficulty; one initiative, namely the very substantial reduction in the volume of documentation to be prepared for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, is referred to in paragraph 19 (b) of the Secretary-General's report; the Advisory Committee has drawn attention to it in another report to the General Assembly at its current session (A/8008/Add.10, paras. 4 and 5).

4. One fact which clearly emerges from the report, however, is that the wishes expressed by the General Assembly last year in resolution 2538 (XXIV) have, all too often, not been heeded by other organs. Moreover, the fact that Member States are clearly aware of the seriousness of the documentation problem and of the impact upon it of the meetings programmes of United Nations bodies has not prevented the submission at the current session of the Assembly of a number of proposals for the creation of additional bodies which are bound to require pre-session, in-session and post-session documentation. In the circumstances, it is clearly unrealistic to expect any marked improvement in the over-all problem of documentation, unless there is a more consistent approach to it in all the intergovernmental organs concerned.

5. The Advisory Committee is aware that in recent years numerous bodies have examined the problem of documentation in totality or in part and have recommended ways of dealing with it. Although the results have so far not been impressive, the Secretary-General indicates in his report that he has no complementary recommendations to make at this time (A/8126 and Corr.1, para. 39). The Advisory Committee appreciates the energy with which the Secretary-General has sought to reduce the volume of documentation; at the same time it feels that the possibilities for new approaches at the Secretariat level may not have been exhausted, and trusts that the Secretary-General will take advantage of the Secretariat's intimate knowledge of United Nations documentation to propose imaginative initiatives. In this connexion the Committee looks forward to

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receiving the list of resolutions on periodic reports requested under paragraph 5 of resolution 2538 (XXIV), to which it has referred in paragraph 2 above.

6. As noted in the Secretary-General's report, two studies of aspects of United Nations documentation are to be presented in 1971. The Joint Inspection Unit, in response to paragraph 15 of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV), is studying "possible improvements in the system used by the United Nations in handling and processing documents before, during and after meetings, including sessions of the General Assembly, and in the organization of the proceedings at such meetings". The Advisory Committee hopes that in that study the Inspectors will take into account the need to reduce documentation, and that the Secretary-General will provide them with all relevant information. Secondly, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination has appointed two of its members as special rapporteurs and authorized them initially to survey reports and studies in the economic and social field.<sup>1/</sup>

7. In the light of the findings of the above reports and of other developments in 1971, the General Assembly will have the opportunity at its twenty-sixth session to consider whether there is a need for new directives to deal with the proliferation of documentation.

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<sup>1/</sup> Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 11 (E/4929), paras. 26-30.