



UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/8172
19 November 1970

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twenty-fifth session
Agenda item 75

PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

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 the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/8138) and the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1971 and preliminary calendars for 1972 and 1973 (A/8138/Add.1).
2. The Secretary-General submitted his report in accordance with the terms of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV), which called for an extension of the study provided for in Economic and Social Council resolution 1460 (XLVII), to include the whole area of conferences and meetings held by subsidiary organs of the General Assembly. Economic and Social Council resolution 1460 (XLVII) requested a study of the trends in the number and length of meetings and conferences held in the economic and social fields and in the field of human rights, of the resulting changes in the number of interpretation, translation and servicing personnel for the conferences and of the costs of temporary assistance services related to the conferences. In addition, General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) called on the Secretary-General to incorporate into the study "proposals concerning the calendar of conferences for 1971 and following years, which would allow for the most rational and economic use possible of the administrative premises and staff assigned to conference and meeting services both at Headquarters in New York and at the United Nations Office in Geneva".

3. The report of the Secretary-General shows that the total number of meetings and conferences held by United Nations bodies at Headquarters and Geneva (excluding meetings of the specialized agencies) increased from 4,652 in 1965 to 5,959 in 1969.

4. The Secretary-General reports that there is a trend towards an increase in the number and length of meetings by the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly at New York and Geneva, primarily as a result of the creation of new subsidiary organs. The number of meetings of such organs held in 1969 totalled 1,010, compared with 465 in 1965, and the sum total of length of sessions in 1969 was 728 days, compared with 337 days in 1965.

5. The number and length of meetings held in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights which took place at Geneva also show an increase between 1965 and 1969, while those held at New York have decreased, owing to the transfer of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development from New York to Geneva in 1966 and the transfer of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization from New York to Vienna in 1967. Reference should also be made to the provision of General Assembly resolution 2116 (XX), which allows up to three sessions of Headquarters-based functional commissions or committees of the Economic and Social Council to be held at Geneva during the period from September to December.

6. The Advisory Committee notes that the number of meetings of regional groups and other informal meetings have increased both at Headquarters and at Geneva. The number of such meetings which took place at Headquarters in 1969 was 596, representing nearly a 100 per cent increase over the number held in 1965, which was 307. A total of 989 meetings were held at Geneva in 1969, compared with 756 in 1965, which represents a smaller increase.

7. To cope with the growth in the over-all programme of meetings and conferences and the corresponding volume of documentation, records and publications, the number of interpretation and translation posts at Headquarters and Geneva have been increased over the last five years. The increase at Geneva has been more marked. As a result of the transfer of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, mentioned in paragraph 5 above, twenty-eight new permanent posts for translators and revisers and eight new permanent posts for interpreters have been created at Geneva. The costs of temporary assistance to service meetings of the

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subsidiary organs of the General Assembly and meetings in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights at Geneva also showed a steady increase between 1965 and 1969. At Headquarters, temporary staff has been engaged only for the sessions of the General Assembly.

8. The calendar of conferences for 1971 and the preliminary calendars for 1972 and 1973 were established in accordance with General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) and do not include meetings which are not covered by the provisions of the resolution. Conferences which might be convened and meetings of bodies which might be created as a result of deliberations at the twenty-fifth session of the General Assembly are not provided for in the calendar.

9. The Advisory Committee notes that the calendar makes provision for some bodies, of which the duration of the sessions and the number and location of meetings have not yet been decided. The nature of some of those bodies is such that their meetings could easily be fitted in at no additional expense to the Organization. There are others, however, such as the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee and the Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, in respect of which the level of the costs could be greatly affected by the choice of dates and venue. The Advisory Committee trusts that these will be decided in the light of the over-all programme of meetings and the availability of conference servicing staff and facilities, to achieve the greatest possible economies.

10. The calendar of conferences does not take into consideration any additional meetings which might be transferred from New York to Geneva through decisions of the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session. In this connexion, the Advisory Committee recalled that the question of extending the practice of holding meetings of United Nations organs at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, where additional conference rooms are being built was discussed during the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly. The Advisory Committee has been informed that the Secretary-General will review this question in 1971. The Advisory Committee understands that whereas additional teams of interpreters could be assigned to Geneva as the facilities in the Palais extension come into use, the location of translators and typists is determined by the location of substantive staff who are responsible for the pre-session and post-session documentation.

11. In his report, the Secretary-General suggests that the question of changes in the distribution of meetings between Geneva and New York be deferred until the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly for the following reasons: (a) the study of the optimum distribution of Secretariat functions called for by General Assembly resolution 2618 (XXIV) will be submitted to the General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session; (b) the Joint Inspection Unit will submit its report on documentation related to meetings and on the proceedings at meetings during 1971; (c) the manpower survey of the United Nations Office at Geneva will be undertaken and completed by the Administrative Management Service in 1971; and (d) additional conference rooms at the Palais des Nations are expected to come into use in 1972. In this connexion, the Advisory Committee understands that the conference rooms in question may become available at a date later than that anticipated by the Secretary-General.

12. While recognizing that the widening field of interests of the United Nations family may necessitate an expansion in the programme of conferences and meetings, the Committee urges that the responsible organs exercise the utmost caution in calling for additional meetings, keeping in mind the budgetary implications of their decisions. The proliferation of conferences and meetings in recent years has aggravated the problem of priorities. In the opinion of the Advisory Committee, the Secretary-General, with his over-all responsibility for the Organization, is in the best position to suggest an order of priorities on the basis of which the competent intergovernmental organs would determine the pattern of conferences in any given year.

13. Subject to the above observations, the Advisory Committee concurs in the recommendation of the Secretary-General that the question of changes in the distribution of meetings between New York and Geneva be deferred until the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly and that the pattern of conferences as established in General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) be extended for another year.
