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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1460 (XLVII) of 8 August 1969, requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Council at its forty-ninth session a study showing for both Headquarters and the United Nations Office at Geneva:

"(a) The respective trends over the past five years in the number and length of conferences and meetings held in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights;

"(b) The resulting changes in the number of interpretation, translation and servicing personnel for such conferences;

"(c) The estimated cost of recruiting temporary staff of this category, including their subsistence allowance, in New York and at Geneva, and the cost of travel of staff sent temporarily from New York to Geneva to service meetings held at the United Nations Office at Geneva."

2. The General Assembly, in paragraphs 6 and 7 of its resolution 2609 (XXIV) of 16 December 1969, requested the Secretary-General:

"(a) To complete the study provided for in Economic and Social Council resolution 1460 (XLVII) by widening its field of application to the whole area of conferences and meetings held by subsidiary organs of the General Assembly;

"(b) To incorporate in the study, taking into account views expressed in and suggestions presented to the General Assembly as well as other relevant considerations, 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 at Geneva;

"(c) ... without prejudice to the provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 1460 (XLVII), to present the study ... to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session."

3. The Secretary-General submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its forty-ninth session a report (E/4887) containing the information requested under its resolution 1460 (XLVII). At its 1722nd meeting, on 31 July 1970, the Council took note with interest of that report. The present report completes that study in the manner requested by the General Assembly.

Division of meetings between New York and Geneva

4. The question of establishing a firm pattern for the division of conferences and meetings between New York and Geneva dates from 1951 and resolutions establishing and modifying such a pattern were adopted by the General Assembly in 1952, 1957 and 1962.^{1/} Those resolutions had in common the principle that, as a general rule, meetings of United Nations bodies should be held at the established headquarters of the bodies concerned,^{2/} with certain exceptions, which were enumerated.

5. In a report dated 29 January 1965,^{3/} the Secretary-General recalled that the objectives which the pattern of conferences should seek to achieve were:

"(a) To bring about the most effective utilization of available facilities at Geneva and at Headquarters;

"(b) To avoid a clash of dates between meetings of the United Nations and those of the specialized agencies;

"(c) To enable delegations and the Secretariat to plan their conference work well in advance and in full knowledge of all commitments during a given year:

1/ Resolutions 694 (VII) of 20 December 1952, 1202 (XII) of 13 December 1957 and 1851 (XVII) of 19 December 1962, respectively.

2/ "'Established headquarters' might be defined as the office housing the secretariat by which a United Nations body is served." (Official Records of the General Assembly, Twelfth Session, Annexes, agenda item 41, document A/C.5/731, para. 12).

3/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twentieth Session, Annexes, agenda item 78, document A/5867, para. 5.

"(d) To explore all possible avenues of economy in connexion with meetings held away from Headquarters;

"(e) To make possible an increased use of common services by the United Nations and the specialized agencies;

"(f) To ensure a stabilized work-load and obviate undue fluctuations both at Geneva and at Headquarters;

"(g) To ensure maximum efficiency in the work of the Secretariat and the delegations."

6. By its resolution 2116 (XX) of 21 December 1965, the General Assembly established a pattern of conferences for the period 1966-1968 and enumerated certain exceptions to the principle that meetings should take place at the headquarters of the bodies concerned. Those concerning the division of meetings between New York and Geneva were as follows:

"(a) The sessions of the International Law Commission shall be held at Geneva;

"(b) The United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, as well as the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee and the Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, may meet at Geneva if the exigencies of their work so require;

"(c) The regular summer session of the Economic and Social Council may be held at Geneva provided that the closing date falls at least six weeks before the opening of the regular session of the General Assembly;

"(d) One Headquarters-based functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, to be determined by the Council, may meet at Geneva during the period from January to April;

"(e) Sessions of not more than three other Headquarters-based functional commissions or committees of the Economic and Social Council may, by decision of the Council taken after consultation with the Secretary-General, be held at Geneva during the period from September to December without overlap;

"(f) In addition, a session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs may, in exceptional circumstances and by decision of the Economic and Social Council taken after consultation with the Secretary-General, be held at Headquarters, New York; in that event, one other functional commission or committee may meet at Geneva in its place."

These exceptions differed from those provided in the previous pattern of conferences in increasing from one to four the number of functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council which might meet at Geneva and in expressly providing for the meetings referred to in subparagraph (b).

7. In its resolutions 2478 (XXIII), of 21 December 1968, and 2609 (XXIV), of 16 December 1969, the General Assembly added the following to the list of exceptions:

"The Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme may, in accordance with its rules of procedure, hold one of its sessions at the United Nations Office at Geneva;"

"The sessions of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law may be held, subject to the provision in paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 2205 (XXI) of 17 December 1966, alternately in New York and at Geneva."

8. The General Assembly has from time to time made other exceptions on an ad hoc basis. For example, resolution 2609 (XXIV) provided, in paragraph 5, that:

"(a) The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction shall hold its summer session at Geneva from 3 to 28 August 1970;

"(b) The Special Committee on the Question of Defining Aggression shall resume its work in accordance with General Assembly resolution 2330 (XXII) of 18 December 1967, at Geneva, in the second half of 1970;

"(c) The Special Committee on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States may meet at Geneva or any other suitable place for which the Secretary-General receives an invitation, at a time in the first half of 1970 to be determined in consultation with the Secretary-General."

Number and length of conferences and meetings

9. The trend over the past five years in the number and length of conferences and meetings held by subsidiary organs of the General Assembly and in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights is as follows:

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Table I

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
<u>Meetings held by subsidiary organs of the General Assembly</u>					
Number of meetings: ^{a/}					
New York	357	628	534	634	788
Geneva	108	162	210	148	222
Length of session (days): ^{b/}					
New York	261	408	399	523	593
Geneva	76	130	120	108	135
<u>Meetings held in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights</u>					
Number of meetings: ^{a/}					
New York	569	577	530	445	430
Geneva	1,588	1,469	1,796	2,458	2,065
Length of session (days): ^{b/}					
New York	407	353	286	255	290
Geneva	654	647	831	763	836

^{a/} Half-day meetings. The amount of conference servicing involved (interpretation, meeting records, documentation) varies substantially among commissions, committees, working groups, informal meetings of regional groups etc. Figures do not include seminars, training programmes, interagency secretariat meetings or meetings of an institutional or administrative nature.

^{b/} Sum total of length of sessions of all bodies.

10. The above figures illustrate the following:

(a) The trend to an increase in the number and length of meetings by subsidiary organs of the General Assembly at New York and Geneva, due primarily to the establishment of new subsidiary organs of the General Assembly;

(b) The trend to an increase in the number and length of meetings in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights at Geneva, and a decrease at New York, due primarily to three factors:

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- (i) The transfer from New York to Geneva of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1966 and the subsequent increasing activity of that organ;
- (ii) The transfer from New York to Vienna of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization in 1967; and
- (iii) The holding of sessions of up to three Headquarters-based functional commissions or committees of the Economic and Social Council at Geneva during the period from September to December.

11. The Secretary-General believes that it may also be useful to provide the following information, which shows the trend over the past five years in the number of meetings held in New York and at Geneva, respectively, by United Nations bodies other than those dealt with in paragraph 9:

Table II

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
<u>New York</u>					
General Assembly (including its Main Committees).....	579	591	628 ^{a/}	633 ^{b/}	588
Security Council and its subsidiary organs.....	155	97	72	105	117
Trusteeship Council and its subsidiary organs.....	34	37	41	21	19
Other organs.....	199	187	204	106	145
Regional groups and other informal meetings.....	307	465	547	635	596
Total	1,274	1,377	1,491	1,500	1,465
<u>Geneva</u>					
Other organs, regional groups and informal meetings.....	756	791	890	725	989
Grand total of all United Nations meetings held at Headquarters and Geneva					
New York.....	2,200	2,582	2,555	2,579	2,683
Geneva.....	2,452	2,422	2,896	3,331	3,276 ^{c/}

- a/ Including 25 meetings of the fifth special session and 36 meetings of the fifth emergency special session of the General Assembly.
- b/ Including 60 meetings of the resumed twenty-second session of the General Assembly.
- c/ Does not include meetings of specialized agencies, of which 733 were held in the Palais des Nations in 1969.

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Changes in the number of posts of interpreters and translators

12. In New York, the number of permanent posts for the Interpretation Section and for the Translation Service has been based, and adjusted as necessary, on the annual programme of meetings as it has developed over the years, including an undetermined number of meetings of the Security Council and of some other organs, and on the corresponding translation work-load for documentation, records and publications. Only for the General Assembly have temporary staff (mainly interpreters) been engaged.

13. At Geneva, the permanent language staff establishment has been based for many years, and adjusted from time to time, on the following assumptions:

(a) That the size would be limited essentially to that required for the servicing of meetings of Geneva-based bodies;

(b) That additional staff would have to be provided by means of temporary assistance to the extent that other meetings were added (mostly meetings of New York-based organs and special conferences and meetings), since this was the most economical way of providing the required services; and

(c) That it was desirable to maintain a reasonable balance (say 60 per cent to 40 per cent) between permanent and temporary language staff.

14. In New York, the number of permanent posts for interpreters (Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) has been gradually increased from 55 in 1965 to 68 in 1969. The corresponding figures for Geneva (English, French, Russian and Spanish), including UNCTAD were 21 in 1965 and 38 in 1969. The number of permanent posts for translators and revisers (Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic) increased in New York from 280 in 1965 to 293 in 1969, and in Geneva (English, French, Russian and Spanish), including UNCTAD, from 65 in 1965 to 99 in 1969.

15. The above indicated increases, both in New York and at Geneva, were requested by the Secretary-General and approved by the General Assembly by reason of the growth in the over-all programmes of conferences and meetings and the corresponding volume of documentation, records and publications. It is therefore not possible to attribute changes in the number of permanent posts for interpreters, translators and revisers to any particular field of activity or any particular meetings and documentation. The only increase that can be clearly identified is the creation in

1967, at Geneva, of 28 new permanent posts for translators and revisers and 8 new permanent posts for interpreters, due to the establishment of UNCTAD.^{4/}

Estimated cost of recruiting temporary servicing staff for meetings and the cost of travel of staff sent temporarily from New York to Geneva

16. As explained above, no cost has been incurred in recruiting temporary staff at Headquarters to service meetings of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly and meetings in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights. (Substantial costs, amounting to \$1,069,465 in 1969, have been incurred during sessions of the General Assembly itself.)

17. The cost of temporary assistance to service the meetings of the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly, and meetings in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights for the period 1965 to 1969, has been as follows:

Table III
(In United States dollars)

	<u>Meetings of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly a/</u>	<u>Meetings in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights b/</u>
	\$	\$
1965	1,001,051	309,345
1966	1,233,329	164,977
1967	1,677,578	279,832
1968	1,560,684	587,507
1969	1,763,113	253,135

a/ Included with these figures are temporary assistance costs for the special meetings and conferences and for UNCTAD under sections 2 and 20 of the budget in the following amounts: 1965 - \$941,051; 1966 - \$1,153,966; 1967 - \$1,617,613; 1968 - \$1,506,485; and 1969 - \$1,705,832.

b/ Included with these amounts are temporary assistance costs for special meetings and conferences under section 2 of the budget as follows: 1965 - \$89,795; 1966 - nil; 1967 - \$39,138; 1968 - \$360,348; and 1969 - \$42,241.

^{4/} Ibid., Twenty-first Session, Supplement No. 5 (A/6305), table 20-17, p. 140.

18. The costs of travel and subsistence of staff sent temporarily from New York to Geneva to service meetings held at the United Nations Office at Geneva over the years 1965 through 1969 are indicated in table IV below.

Table IV
 (In United States dollars)

	<u>Meetings of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly a/</u>	<u>Meetings in the economic and social field and in the field of human rights b/</u>
	\$	\$
1965	22,895	58,526
1966	85,754	62,163
1967	83,899	76,661
1968	112,388	117,739
1969	70,918	93,468

a/ Included with these figures are the costs of staff who travelled from New York to Geneva to attend the special meetings and conferences, under section 2, and UNCTAD meetings in the following amounts: 1965 - \$11,658; 1966 - \$53,914; 1967 - \$74,423; 1968 - \$102,938; and 1969 - \$45,848.

b/ Included with these figures are the costs of staff who travelled from New York to Geneva to attend special meetings and conferences under section 2 in the following amounts: 1967 - \$4,800 and 1968 - \$49,961.

Proposals concerning the calendar of conferences for 1971
and following years

19. During the meetings held by the Fifth Committee at the twenty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly on the question of the pattern of conferences, certain delegations felt that there should be an extension of the practice of holding meetings of United Nations organs at Geneva. It was noted that additional conference facilities would become available at Geneva in the near future and it was suggested that there should be a corresponding redeployment of staff servicing conferences.

20. The Secretary-General understands that the addition of a significant number of new conference rooms in the Palais des Nations calls for a detailed review of

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the present pattern of conferences and the related deployment of conference services staff in New York and at Geneva. However, he wishes to note that the following actions undertaken at the request, or with the approval, of the General Assembly during the past two years will affect the review of the pattern of conferences:

(a) In paragraph 3 of its resolution 2618 (XXIV) of 17 December 1969, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to undertake a further study of the optimum distribution of Secretariat functions between United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United Nations Office at Geneva and any other location which may be appropriate, bearing in mind not only the construction projects in progress or envisaged, but all other pertinent factors as well, and... to submit a study to the General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session";

(b) In paragraph 15 of its resolution 2609 (XXIV), the General Assembly took note of the comments of the Joint Inspection Unit in paragraph 198 of its report (A/7576 and Corr.1, annex) on the need for improving the United Nations meetings system, and requested the Joint Inspection Unit to submit a report to the General Assembly setting forth its views on 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 (which is expected to be submitted in 1971);

(c) The survey of utilization and deployment of staff in the United Nations Office at Geneva will be undertaken and completed by the Administrative Management Service in 1971.

21. In the light of the above-mentioned actions and in view of the fact that additional conference rooms in the Palais des Nations will only be available for significant use in 1972, the Secretary-General suggests that it might be of advantage to revert to the question of changes in the distribution of meetings between New York and Geneva at the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly, thus providing an opportunity in 1971 to evaluate the results of any of the actions involved. Should this suggestion prove acceptable, the General Assembly might wish to extend the relevant provisions of its resolution 2609 (XXIV) for a

further year. The Secretary-General believes that, in the meantime, changes in the conference pattern for 1971, as established by that resolution would not be warranted.

22. The Secretary-General therefore recommends that the pattern of conferences as established in resolution 2609 (XXIV) should be extended for another year.

23. The calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1971 and preliminary calendars for 1972 and 1973 will be submitted to the General Assembly, as an addendum to the present report, later in the course of the current session for its approval. The later submission is required in order to permit the Secretary-General to reflect in the calendar, as fully as possible, any conferences or meetings which may result from decisions made by the General Assembly during the twenty-fifth session.
