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PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATION

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary
Questions to the General Assembly at its thirtieth session

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/1670) submitted in accordance with the provisions of the General Assembly decision 1/ requesting him, inter alia, to "prepare a report on the type of record or records of proceedings employed by all organs and bodies of the United Nations as well as their subsidiary bodies financed under the regular budget. The report should mention the composition of these bodies, the kind of record issued, together with comparable data on the volume and cost in all languages, including overheads. The report should also indicate the authority under which records are issued and any other relevant information. The Secretary-General should propose criteria which would be helpful to Member States in evaluating the usefulness of records and the kind of record most appropriate for each body".

2. In document A/C.5/1670 the Secretary-General confines himself to the narrower question of meeting records, i.e., verbatim records, summary records, records of testimony, minutes and notes for the rapporteur. The direct costs incurred in the preparation and production of meeting records in 1974 calculated at 1975 prices are estimated by the Secretary-General at nearly \$10 million (para. 4). This figure does not include indirect and overhead costs which the Secretary-General estimates at 25 per cent of the direct costs, i.e. \$2.5 million.

3. The Secretary-General's report advances certain measures to control and limit the mass of meeting records and includes four supporting annexes. Annex I deals with the authority for meeting records as it stems from the General Assembly and the drive to limit their volume in response to enabling resolutions and decisions.

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 31 (A/9631), item 78, p. 138.

Annex II provides information on technical procedures for producing the various kinds of meeting records. The costs of preparing meeting records are dealt with in annex III. The unit of measurement used is a meeting of average length covered in about 15 pages. Although the cost accounting methodology in this area is still at an early stage of development, the exercise reveals in depth the resources involved in support of the operation. Annex IV furnishes data on United Nations bodies and number of meetings in 1974 and estimated cost of providing them with meeting records. The list totals 85 bodies and 1,773 meetings.

4. The Advisory Committee discussed the subject and related questions with representatives of the Secretary-General. On inquiry into the magnitude of the operation of producing meeting records in relation to that of United Nations documentation as a whole, the Committee received data on the approximate total costs in 1974 at 1975 prices, the number of pages typed, the number of page units produced and the tonnage of paper used in internal reproduction, summarized as follows:

	<u>Headquarters</u>	<u>Geneva</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Meeting records share of total</u>
Total cost	\$ 25 million	\$ 15 million	\$ 40 million ^{a/}	\$ 10 million
Pages typed (all languages)	543,000	300,000	843,000	131,000 ^{b/}
Page units	558 million	207 million	765 million	not available
Paper ^{c/}	1,600 tons	590 tons	2,190 tons	not available

^{a/} Including the cost of external printing (approx. \$4 million).

^{b/} Estimated original mimeographed editions only. (Does not include corrected versions, whether printed or mimeographed.)

^{c/} The price of paper in 1974 was approximately \$600 a ton.

5. Within the terms of reference stated in paragraph 1 above, the Secretary-General suggests in paragraph 14 of his report 10 criteria for United Nations bodies to be provided with meeting records and for the type of records to be provided. The Advisory Committee examined each criterion and addressed itself to the effects of implementation. In this connexion, the Committee sought and received from the representatives of the Secretary-General specific data on quantification of the possible savings that might be realized.

Criterion 1. Meeting records should continue to be provided for the General Assembly and its Main Committees, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council and its sessional committees. The Secretary-General would pursue studies of a technical character concerning the possibility of issuing the final records by computerized editing of the provisional records or in microform, but would seek the approval of the General Assembly before making changes.

6. In criterion 1 the Secretary-General does not propose any departure from the

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current practice of providing meeting records or imply that the provision of records should be limited to the bodies listed in the first sentence of the criterion. The criterion is intended to promote studies of a technical nature on how to improve on methods of issuing the records of the bodies listed in the first sentence of the criterion. It may be recalled that a reference to studies on technological innovations to be pursued was made by the Secretary-General in his report to the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth session (A/9731, paras. 7-10). At that time the Advisory Committee agreed that the Secretary-General should pursue his search for such innovations in the field of documentation and also recommended that more conventional means of improving the operation should likewise be explored (A/9807, para. 12). The Committee was informed by the representatives of the Secretary-General that the search for technological advances by the Department of Conference Services was continuing. For example, as far as meeting records are concerned, the techniques under current examination relate to computerized text storage combined with composition capabilities for printing purposes. The concept consists of storing draft or provisional texts in the computer, introducing amendments and editorial changes through the computer and then composing final texts for reproduction through computer-related techniques. The Committee understands that the feasibility, including cost-effectiveness, of the introduction of these techniques in the documentation production process requires detailed and expert study. The Department of Conference Services is currently undertaking discussions with the Administrative and Management Service in this respect.

7. Similarly, the question of introducing microform, i.e., producing final records in microfiche from fair copy instead of by printing, awaits detailed studies by the Secretariat. The microform technique has been in use by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library where official records are produced in microfiche editions. The Committee was informed that, on the basis of that experience, the application of microform in the production of meeting records would result in considerable savings. As an example, the marginal cost of reproducing final verbatim records in microfiche would be about \$400 per meeting, as compared to \$3,500 by printing and that of final summary records about \$200 per meeting as compared to \$1,290 by printing. This comparison, however, does not take into account the cost of the equipment needed for the production and use of records in microform.

8. In connexion with criterion 1, the Advisory Committee urges the Secretary-General to pursue his studies on technological innovations with greater vigour. From his findings it will be possible to determine to what extent improvement can be achieved in the present traditional method of producing final records in printed form. The present method is not only very costly, but also leads to delays. For example, the final text of the verbatim records of plenary meetings held on 27 November, 4 and 11 December 1972 were distributed on 18 September 1975, i.e., after a delay of nearly three years. Excessive delays also occur in the issuance of printed final texts of the summary records of the Main Committees; thus the most recent summary records of the Fifth Committee available in printed form cover the twenty-seventh session of the Assembly. The Advisory Committee questions the utility of a system which deprives the delegations and the Secretariat of access to corrected meeting records during the period of the

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greatest usefulness of such records, and then involves the expenditure of large sums for the production of material for largely historical and archival purposes.

Criterion 2. Meeting records should continue to be provided for a limited number of selected subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly discussing matters of substantive importance, but only for meetings at which such items are dealt with. The bodies concerned should be required to dispense with such records for organizational, procedural and valedictory discussions and for the adoption of their reports, and be urged to dispense with them for substantive discussions of lesser importance. The General Assembly, in the resolution establishing a subsidiary body, should decide whether its proceedings were of sufficient substantive importance; in the absence of an express decision, records would not be provided.

9. The Advisory Committee was informed that from the application of this suggestion it would be reasonable to expect a reduction in the workload of producing meeting records by at least 20 per cent, involving possible savings of some \$500,000. The Committee endorses criterion 2.

10. The implementation of this criterion would require a process of selection among the subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of decision on which meetings or items fall within the categories described. The Advisory Committee's recommendation on questions arising from how to apply this criterion is contained in paragraph 26 below.

Criterion 3. The list in section A of annex IV should be reviewed to see if it includes bodies whose meetings do not appear to have an important substantive character or for which the cost of providing records appears to be out of proportion with the possible benefit.

11. This criterion implies reviewing about 50 bodies and subsidiary bodies related to the General Assembly to assess the nature of their meetings and the cost-effectiveness of providing their meeting records. In the absence of a list of such bodies, it was not possible to obtain a quantification of the savings that might be achieved under this heading. Nevertheless, the Advisory Committee agrees with criterion 3. In paragraph 26 below the Committee makes a suggestion on how the proposed review can be carried out.

Criterion 4. Verbatim records in final form should continue to be provided for the Trusteeship Council and for substantive matters discussed in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

12. The Advisory Committee was informed that no saving would be achieved under criterion 4. In practice, only provisional verbatim records of the meetings of the three bodies mentioned above are produced and considered as their official records, subject to the issuance of corrigenda. The criterion is intended to regularize this practice.

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Criterion 5. The Secretariat should, as an experiment in 1976, issue the summary records of subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly in initial general distribution, subject to the issuance of corrigenda to remove serious errors only. If the experiment is successful, the practice would be continued.

13. In essence, criterion 5 suggests that provisional summary records, together with corrigenda, become the final records of subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly. Thus, the costs of preparing and producing the final version would be largely eliminated. It was made known to the Advisory Committee that the savings involved would be substantially as shown in paragraphs 27 and 28 of annex III of the Secretary-General's report, namely, in the order of about \$700 per meeting for subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and \$600 for subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council. The Committee was informed that, based on the same number of meetings as in 1974, the total savings that would be realized by implementing criterion 5 would amount to \$194,000 (\$120,000 for General Assembly subsidiary bodies and \$74,000 for Economic and Social Council subsidiary bodies). However, if criterion 2 were to be applied, the total savings would be reduced by about 20 per cent, i.e. from \$194,000 to \$155,000.

14. The Advisory Committee is in favour of the implementation of the suggestion contained in criterion 5. When examining the implication of this criterion, the Committee inquired into possible savings that might be achieved if its provisions were applied to the Main Committees of the General Assembly and sessional committees of the Economic and Social Council. The data provided in this connexion reveal possible savings per meeting amounting to \$4,500 for the First Committee of the General Assembly, \$1,100 for other Main Committees of the General Assembly and \$600 for the sessional committees of the Economic and Social Council. Based on these calculations and assuming the same pattern of meetings as in 1974, the Advisory Committee was informed that the total savings would reach \$694,000 (\$270,000 for the First Committee of the General Assembly, \$352,000 for the other Main Committees of the Assembly, and \$72,000 for sessional committees of the Economic and Social Council).

15. Noting that the practice prescribed in criterion 5 has worked well and at considerable savings for several bodies (for example, summary records of sub-committees of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and verbatim records of the Trusteeship Council), and in view of the substantial possible savings indicated in the preceding paragraph, the Advisory Committee recommends that the provision of criterion 5 be applied also to the Main Committees of the General Assembly and sessional committees of the Economic and Social Council. The aggregate estimates of savings to be realized under this heading would be \$849,000. Besides, the application of criterion 5 would largely improve the situation of inordinate delays referred to in paragraph 8 above.

Criterion 6. Subsidiary bodies of subsidiary bodies should cease to be provided with meeting records of any kind, other than sound recording.

16. Criterion 6 presents a tangible proposition under which many of the subsidiary

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bodies would be eliminated automatically from the roster of bodies provided with meeting records. The Advisory Committee endorses this suggestion. Estimates of savings to be expected as a result of its implementation amount to \$465,000.

Criterion 7. The other main organs should be invited to observe the same criteria in deciding whether records should be provided for their subsidiary bodies.

17. The Advisory Committee agrees to criterion 7 which calls upon the parent bodies to appraise and decide whether their subsidiary bodies should be provided with meeting records of any kind, other than sound recording. It notes that possible savings under this heading have been subsumed under criterion 6.

Criterion 8. Summary records would continue to be provided for the Trade and Development Board, the Industrial Development Board and the Executive Board of UNICEF and the Governing Council of UNDP. The question of providing records for the committees of UNCTAD should be reviewed.

18. The latter proposition under this heading calls for a review of the five committees of UNCTAD.

19. The Advisory Committee looked into the possibility of applying criterion 5 to the bodies listed in the suggestion above, i.e., having their final records consist of the initial records issued in general distribution and of corrigenda as necessary. The Committee was informed that the implementation of such a practice would result in possible savings estimated at a total of \$99,000 (\$11,000 for the Trade and Development Board, \$11,000 for the Industrial Development Board, \$7,000 for the UNICEF Executive Board, \$57,000 for the UNDP Governing Council, and \$13,000 for UNCTAD committees (if entitled to records)).

20. The Advisory Committee agrees to the suggestion contained in criterion 8, but, in the light of the foregoing, recommends the application of criterion 5 to the bodies in question.

Criterion 9. Subsidiary bodies otherwise entitled to receive meeting records for all or some of their meetings should be required to dispense with them when meeting away from recognized United Nations conference centres.

21. In response to inquiries the Advisory Committee was informed that, in practice, "recognized United Nations conference centres" include New York, Geneva, and the headquarters of the regional commissions. The Committee endorses the principle suggested in criterion 9 in view of the costs incurred and the difficulties experienced in securing and deploying language staff at places away from recognized United Nations conference centres. The resort to taping the proceedings constitutes a practical alternative. Savings would be achieved not only on the costs directly involved in the production of meeting records, but also through the elimination of travel and allowances of the necessary staff whether defrayed by the Organization or the host country. The Committee was informed that

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the amount of possible savings as a result of implementing criterion 9 for one year is approximately \$50,000. This is based on the experience of holding meetings of a few subsidiary bodies in places away from recognized United Nations conference centres during 1973-1975.

Criterion 10. The principle should be reaffirmed that the summary records of the main organs should be limited to 15 pages per meeting of 2 1/2 to 3 hours and efforts should be made to reduce the summary records of subsidiary bodies to 10 pages per meeting of the same length.

22. The Advisory Committee is in favour of the guidelines embodied in criterion 10. It views the introduction of a 10-page limit per meeting as the optimum length of summary records of subsidiary bodies compatible with the 15-page limit of the main bodies which has already been approved by the General Assembly. The effect of applying this criterion would depend on the implementation of the other criteria suggested by the Secretary-General. In the circumstances, the Committee was informed that potential savings under this heading could not be determined at this stage.

Criteria recapitulation

23. The Advisory Committee endorses in principle the 10 criteria proposed by the Secretary-General and recommends that they and the stipulations given in paragraphs 15 and 19 above be implemented. While recognizing the tentative nature of the cost quantification exercise by the Secretariat, the Committee notes that the magnitude of potential savings to be derived in one year would reach a minimum of \$1,963,000 (about one fifth of the total costs of meeting records) summarized as follows:

Criterion 1:	undetermined, pending result of technical studies
Criterion 2:	\$500,000
Criterion 3:	contingent
Criterion 4:	no savings
Criterion 5:	\$849,000
Criterion 6:	\$465,000
Criterion 7:	accounted for under other criteria
Criterion 8:	\$99,000
Criterion 9:	\$50,000
Criterion 10:	undetermined

Minimum total savings: \$1,963,000 (at 1975 prices).

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Other suggestions

24. In addition to the 10 criteria, the Secretary-General reiterates in paragraph 12 of his report the suggestion to reconsider the question of providing meeting records for closed meetings whose records remain restricted in both provisional and final form to participants only. The Advisory Committee sees merit in the suggestion, considering that the proceedings of these meetings are registered in sound recordings which could be referred to as needed. However, the question should also be examined in the light of the requirements of the bodies concerned. The Committee was informed that there are three such bodies, namely, the Security Council Committee established under Security Council resolution 253 (1968) concerning the question of Southern Rhodesia, the Security Council Committee for the Admission of New Members and the United Nations Council for Namibia, and that the costs of their meeting records are currently estimated at \$152,000, \$10,000 and \$78,000 a year respectively.

Concluding observations

25. The Advisory Committee shares the Secretary-General's concern in regard to the multiplication of meeting records. It also recalls his warning last year that the savings achieved since 1970 by introducing a quota system for documentation have been eroded primarily as a result of the increases in meeting records (A/9731, para. 6). The success of the quota system was in areas of documentation over which the Secretary-General has direct control as distinct from records of proceedings which are governed by the meetings programme. While the control of conferences and meetings is a basic aspect of the question of publications and documentation, other ways and means must also be sought to control and limit the volume of meeting records.

26. On the whole, the Secretary-General's proposals are intended to reduce meeting records in ways that would not impair the effectiveness of the work of the bodies concerned. They call for reviewing the requirements of committees, categorizing their proceedings, selecting among subsidiary bodies and assessing the cost of providing meeting records in proportion with benefits derived and extent of use. The Secretary-General does not indicate how the review and selection exercise should be carried out. The Advisory Committee recommends that the Committee on Conferences be entrusted with this task and monitor the application of the proposals.

27. The Advisory Committee suggests that all the proposals discussed above be tried out on an experimental basis in the biennium 1976-1977 (and not just criterion 5 in 1976, as proposed by the Secretary-General) and requests the Secretary-General to present a performance report to the General Assembly at its thirty-second session.
