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PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on  
personnel problems in the United Nations

Note by the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions

The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has received the preliminary comments of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on personnel problems in the United Nations (A/8454). The Committee transmits them herewith to the General Assembly.

Preliminary comments of the Secretary-General on the report of  
the Joint Inspection Unit on personnel problems in the  
United Nations

1. In his note transmitting the report on personnel problems in the United Nations (A/8454), prepared by Mr. Maurice Bertrand of the Joint Inspection Unit, the Secretary-General indicated that he would submit his preliminary comments on the report at a later date. He further suggested that, since the Special Committee for the Review of the United Nations Salary System might wish to consider the report when it resumed its work in 1972 and since the Administrative Management Service had not yet surveyed the Office of Personnel, his initial comments on the report might have to be supplemented by a fuller submission to the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh session.
2. The Secretary-General decided upon this course of action in consideration of the mandate of the Special Committee, which covers many of the issues dealt with in Mr. Bertrand's report, and of the relation between some of its proposals and the tasks assigned to the Administrative Management Service in the review of staff utilization and deployment. Among the issues which are of particular concern to the Special Committee, because they affect the operation of the United Nations common system as a whole, are those relating to the basic concepts underlying the personnel policy of the United Nations, the structure of the staff and its emoluments. From the Special Committee's report to the General Assembly,<sup>1/</sup> it is apparent that the review of the salary system will not be completed before the middle of 1972. With regard to the Administrative Management Service survey, it is similarly not expected to be concluded before that date. In the circumstances, the Secretary-General believes that comments on the substance of Mr. Bertrand's report should be deferred to the next session. The present note is accordingly limited to the immediate question of the steps that the Secretary-General considers necessary to enable him to prepare such comments and to work out any proposals for action in 1972 that may be appropriate.

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<sup>1/</sup> Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 28 (A/8428).

3. The Secretary-General regards the report as a timely contribution to the continuing search for efficient methods of securing and managing the staff required by the Organization. As noted in paragraph 42 of his report on the composition of the Secretariat<sup>2/</sup> submitted to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session, questions on the adequacy of existing recruitment practices in the Secretariat had in recent years been raised by a number of United Nations bodies. Those questions ranged not only over the standards and methods of recruitment, including the possibility of introducing competitive examinations and more accurate assessments of the equivalence of academic degrees, but also touched on the relationship between recruitment and such phases of staff administration as training, remuneration, promotion and retirement. It was in response to those questions that several initiatives had been taken "to re-examine current policies with a view to reporting to the General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session".<sup>3/</sup>

4. The initiatives referred to in that report included the study of personnel problems in the United Nations undertaken at the beginning of last year by Mr. Bertrand and a series of measures, approved by the Secretary-General on the recommendation of the Director of Personnel, which were designed to facilitate the study.

5. Among those measures were:

(a) The distribution of a first note on the subject, prepared by Mr. Bertrand, to all heads of departments or offices for any comments they might wish to make;

(b) A detailed questionnaire to all Directors in the Secretariat inviting their views on specific points;

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<sup>2/</sup> Ibid., Twenty-fifth Session, Annexes, agenda item 82, document A/8156.

<sup>3/</sup> Ibid., para. 42.

(c) Establishment of a committee<sup>4/</sup> of officials drawn from the departments most directly concerned, entrusted with the task of examining the assumptions and suggestions contained in the note and of advising the Director of Personnel on the procedure to be followed in carrying out the studies envisaged in it.

6. Special arrangements were also made to provide Mr. Bertrand with the large volume of statistical and other information required for the inquiry both in regard to the administration of the staff of the Secretariat, particularly in the Professional and higher categories, and to the functioning of the Office of Personnel.

7. In making these arrangements, care was taken to avoid duplication or overlapping between the study undertaken by Mr. Bertrand and the survey to be carried out by the Administrative Management Service.

8. The report contains a critical analysis of the methods currently used in the recruitment, training, promotion and administration of the staff as well as an assessment of the reasons for the difficulties encountered at present. This assessment is of particular importance in that it has been arrived at in collaboration with the Office of Personnel itself. The recommendations arising from it fall into five broad categories:

(a) Revision of the basic concepts underlying the present personnel policy: occupational groups, level of qualifications, career posts and average rate of advancement (recommendation No. 1);

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<sup>4/</sup> The Committee consisted of the following officials: Mr. Mohamed H. Gherab, Director of Personnel, Chairman; Mr. W.W. Cox, Secretary, International Civil Service Advisory Board; Mr. Sidney Dell, Director, New York Liaison Office, UNCTAD; Mr. Raymond Gieri, Chairman, Staff Committee; Mr. Ismat T. Kittani, Deputy to the Assistant Secretary-General and later Assistant Secretary-General for Inter-Agency Affairs; Mr. A. Lethbridge, Secretary, Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions; Mr. Patrick J. Loftus, Director, Statistical Office, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Mr. David Miron, Assistant Director for Special Assignments, Office of Personnel; Mr. Robert G. Muller, Director, Executive Office of the Secretary-General; Mr. Robert J. Ryan, Director, Administrative Management Service; Mr. R.J.B. Rossborough, Chief, Personnel Services, United Nations Office at Geneva; and Mr. Nikolay Stukalov, Director for Policy Co-ordination, Office of Personnel.

(b) Modernization of administrative practices: institution of a long-term recruitment plan (recommendation No. 2); compilation of a reserve recruitment roster (recommendation No. 4); introduction of an assignment planning system (recommendation No. 9); adoption of a computerized, integrated system of personnel management (recommendation No. 11); revision of the staff rules (recommendation No. 18); reorganization of the Office of Personnel (recommendation No. 19);

(c) Reform of the recruitment methods: institution of competitive examinations for junior administrative generalists and economists (recommendation No. 3); establishment of a prerecruitment training scheme (recommendation No. 6); introduction of rules for recruitment to the highest posts (recommendation No. 5);

(d) Introduction of a career development system: adoption of a new procedure of performance evaluation (recommendation No. 8); establishment of a personnel inspectorate (recommendation No. 7); institution of a comprehensive training programme (recommendation No. 10); revision of the functions of the Appointment and Promotion Board and Committee (recommendation No. 12);

(e) Modification of the structure and the emoluments of the staff: introduction of "alternating secondments" (recommendation No. 13); reorganization of the General Service category (recommendation No. 14); institution of non-renewable fixed-term appointments subject to special conditions of service (recommendation No. 15); establishment of a clear relationship between level of qualifications and grade, and increase in the number of grades (recommendation No. 16); revision of the system of allowances (recommendation No. 17).

9. The final recommendation (No. 20) deals with the manner in which the work already done for the preparation of the report might be carried forward by the establishment of a task force.

10. These recommendations provide a good basis for a fresh look at the wide range of issues which have in recent years been aired in and around the United Nations concerning the human resources required for the performance of its activities. The report itself identifies some of the deficiencies which have affected personnel programmes and policies for years. It highlights such problems as interchange of national and international officials and its effect on recruitment and efficiency, the use of competitive examinations for improving the quality of

recruits, and the institution of prerecruitment training as a means of securing competent staff from all parts of the world. These problems are reflected in recent reports on the composition of the Secretariat and the need for remedial action is therefore well established. Before such action can be taken, however, it will be necessary to follow up on some of the proposals contained in Mr. Bertrand's report in order to determine the extent to which they are susceptible of application. The supplementary studies will have to be carried out in the months ahead so that a fuller submission on the subject may be made to the General Assembly at its next session.

11. In preparing such a submission, every effort will be made to draw upon available staff resources. It is clear, however, that the Secretariat does not possess the expertise required to work out a global plan of competitive examinations. The principle of recruitment by competitive examinations has already been endorsed by the General Assembly, in its resolution 2736 A (XXV) on the composition of the Secretariat, paragraph 2 (d) of which links it with the need to bring into the service of the United Nations young men and women through the use of more objective selection methods. To press ahead with the development of this idea, a number of technical problems will, however, have to be solved, including the establishment of programmes and methods of examination responsive to the various systems of education, the choice of the language of examination in the particular regions of the world and the definition of region for the purpose of conducting the examinations.

12. The Secretary-General believes that this kind of follow-up action on Mr. Bertrand's report is a worth-while undertaking. Concern about productivity in the Secretariat has been voiced by many delegations in recent debates on staff costs. Productivity is clearly inseparable from recruitment. If productivity is to be raised, better methods of recruitment will have to be devised and the introduction of a well conceived system of competitive examinations holds enough promise to merit further exploration. In the event, therefore, that the General Assembly should wish to pursue the matter at its next session, the Secretary-General would suggest that provision be made in the budget estimates, Section 3, chapter III (Other temporary assistance), for an additional

credit of \$50,000 to meet the expenses involved. This estimate would cover the costs of (a) one Professional (P-4) and one General Service staff member for six months to assist in the preparation of the studies (\$20,000), and (b) two educational experts to be engaged for the purpose of working out a global programme of competitive examinations by region or country (\$30,000).

13. So far as the other follow-up studies are concerned, including those relating to the establishment of a long-term recruitment plan and the institution of a computerized system of personnel management, it is the hope of the Secretary-General that it will be possible to carry them out within existing resources.

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