

GENERAL
ASSEMBLY

SIXTH SESSION

Official Records



MEETING

Monday, 26 November 1951, at 10.45 a.m.

Palais de Chaillot, Paris

CONTENTS

	Page
Budget estimates for the financial year 1952: (a) Budget estimates prepared by the Secretary-General (A/1812 and Add. 1, A/C.5/448, A/C.5/L.114); (b) Reports of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/1853)	
First reading (<i>continued</i>).....	69

Chairman: Mr. T. A. STONE (Canada).

Budget estimates for the financial year 1952: (a) Budget estimates prepared by the Secretary-General (A/1812 and Add. 1, A/C.5/448, A/C.5/L.114); (b) Reports of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/1853)

[Item 41]*

First reading (continued)

PART III, SECTION 13; PART IV, SECTION 20 (CHAPTER II); PART V, SECTION 21; PART VIII, SECTION 26 (CHAPTER I, ITEM (vii))

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to consider sections 13, 20 (chapter II), 21 and 26 (chapter I, item vii) of the budget estimates prepared by the Secretary-General (A/1812), relating to information services as a whole. The Committee's task would be made easier by the lengthy study which the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had made of those services in pursuance of the recommendation made to it at the previous session.¹ As regards those sections, the Advisory Committee recommended in paragraphs 193 to 195 of its second report of 1951 (A/1853) reductions amounting to \$90,000 for the Department of Public Information (section 13), \$6,700 for the Geneva Information Centre (section 20 (II)), \$41,700 for the other information centres (section 21), and \$80,000 for the publications of the Department of Public Information (section 26 (vii)), making \$218,400 in all. The Committee proposed that the reduction in section 13 should be distributed at the discretion of the Secretary-General, while anticipating some reduction in the staffing of the Press and Publications Bureau and some savings on the Films and Visual Information Division.

2. In addition, the Advisory Committee had prepared

* Indicates the item number on the General Assembly agenda.

¹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifth Session; Annexes*, agenda item 39, document A/1734.

a review of public information activities of the United Nations (Annex B, page 35 of its report).

3. The Secretary-General considered (A/C.5/448, paragraph 19) that certain of the reductions recommended would have the effect of reducing public information activities substantially below the level hitherto required; he hoped that the discussions in the Fifth Committee would result in a clear indication of the scope and extent of the service which governments of Member States desired to have performed.

4. Mr. COHEN (Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the Department of Public Information) assured the Committee that he had given the closest possible consideration to the resolution concerning economies to be effected in the cost of information activities, contained in the report of the Fifth Committee adopted by the General Assembly at its fifth session.¹ The Department's budget, however, had suffered from the general rise in prices affecting supplies, contractual services, printing costs, and the like. The automatic salary increases provided for by the General Assembly had also to be taken into account. His estimates under section 13 were \$1,220 less than the figures proposed for 1951, which actually meant that the Department had absorbed substantial supplementary expenditure amounting to \$184,000. The Advisory Committee had taken that partially into account and acknowledged in its report that the Department had reduced staffing costs by \$53,000. The Committee, however, should keep clearly in mind the total figure of \$184,000 which was additional to the net saving of \$1,220 mentioned in the printed text of the budget.

5. As regards section 21 (information centres) the effective reduction was also \$30,000.

6. Bearing in mind the additional \$40,000 required by the Warsaw Information Centre owing to the revaluation of the zloty, the Department of Public Information would require a further \$250,000 to maintain in 1952 the activities authorized in 1951. Of that sum, \$215,000 had already been completely absorbed. The Secretary-General was prepared to save the whole cost of the Warsaw Centre — approximately

\$ 70,000 — by closing it down if, in return, the Committee agreed to waive other reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee which would affect the Department's work even more adversely.

7. At the previous session the aim had apparently been to effect a saving of \$ 200-\$ 250,000. The estimates and explanatory statements showed that that aim had been achieved.

8. To that figure had to be added the reduction of \$ 218,400 recommended by the Advisory Committee, so that the total reduction proposed for information services in 1952 would amount to nearly \$ 500,000.

9. He recalled in that connexion that in 1951 the Committee had voted a gross reduction of \$ 297,226. Starting with the estimates submitted for 1951 and ending with the Advisory Committee's recommendations for 1952, the total saving effected in the cost of information services by absorption or reduction was in excess of \$ 750,000. Reductions on that scale would affect information activities very substantially.

10. He regretted that his Department had been unable to propose more cuts itself. In its operations, the Department of Public Information had applied the general directives given it in 1946 by the General Assembly (resolution 13 (I), Annex I), which was alone competent to take fresh decisions in the matter, as the Secretary-General had pointed out (A/C.5/448, paragraph 19). He would see to it that the economies decided upon by the General Assembly impaired the information services as little as possible.

11. He then indicated how the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee might be effected (A/C.5/L.114).

12. Mr. AGHNIDES (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee were such as could in its opinion be effected without impairment of the existing structure and services. It had proposed reductions totalling \$ 218,400 in the over-all costs of information activities. It had also shown that greater economies could be made in the event that the General Assembly should direct a change in structure and services. The Advisory Committee, for its part, made no such recommendation; changes of that kind could and should be made only on the basis of a decision of principle which rested with the General Assembly.

13. The Advisory Committee had referred, in its report, to the necessity for determining an order of priority in importance among the several information activities of the United Nations. Under its terms of reference it had no authority to carry out that task, which would require re-examination of the recommendations on the policies, functions and organization of the Department of Public Information approved by the General Assembly at its first session. The Advisory Committee considered that the General Assembly alone could undertake that task. It held the same view with regard to the information centres.

14. In conclusion, he recalled the care and attention with which the Advisory Committee had studied the work of the Department of Public Information. He pointed out that the basis to be taken in assessing the economies effected should not be the 1951 estimates, but the appropriations actually voted by the General Assembly.

15. Mr. ASHA (Syria) observed that the Assistant Secretary-General had stated that the Department of Public Information had carefully studied the decision adopted by the General Assembly at its fifth session. The Advisory Committee's report, however, showed that the Department's suggestions failed adequately to reflect the spirit and purpose of the resolution.

16. Each year the various delegations expressed their misgivings at the increase in the expenditure of the Department of Public Information and, each year, the latter requested larger appropriations. He himself was quite certain that the savings to be effected should stem from a resolution of the General Assembly. It was time to reorganize the Department and he reminded the Committee of the recommendations of the Technical Advisory Committee on Information concerning the policies, functions and organization of the Department of Public Information, which the General Assembly had adopted at the first part of its first session. Those recommendations specified, *inter alia*, that the Department should not engage in propaganda and that its work should supplement the services of existing information agencies, to the extent that those were insufficient to realize the purpose set forth in the resolution. He did not mean that the Department was engaging in propaganda; he wondered, however, whether it had not reached a stage where it was difficult to distinguish between information and propaganda. It was doubtful whether the General Assembly had anticipated that the Department would extend its activities in that way and that such large sums would have to be appropriated for its work.

17. Moreover, the Assistant Secretary-General had not mentioned the order of priority to be given to the Department's activities. Whether or not the Assistant Secretary-General accepted the Advisory Committee's recommendations, it was high time that he defined the principles underlying the Department's operations. In his own view, the only solution would be to set up a small sub-committee with the task of defining the principles laid down by the General Assembly and of drawing up a programme of priorities.

18. Mr. BOURGET (Canada) pointed out that the figure of \$ 750,000 in savings, over four sections of the budget, quoted by the Assistant Secretary-General was unreal; the items which had to be compared were the 1951 budget and the estimates of expenditure recommended by the Advisory Committee for 1952; that comparison showed that the reduction in expenditure under those sections of the budget amounted to less than \$ 100,000.

19. The Canadian delegation could not help feeling profoundly disappointed at the budget estimates for United Nations information activities in 1952. He recalled that at the fifth session (245th meeting) the Australian delegation had submitted a draft resolution which, in its original form, stated that the General Assembly requested the Advisory Committee to consult with the Secretary-General with a view to reducing by from \$ 200,000 to \$ 300,000 the budgetary estimates of the Department of Public Information for the financial year 1952.

20. The Fifth Committee had subsequently adopted a resolution in which that figure was not mentioned, so as not to prejudice the decision taken by the General Assembly in 1951. The members of the Fifth

Committee nevertheless hoped that that figure would be taken into account as an indication of its own views.

21. He acknowledged that that resolution had been implemented by means of the detailed study which the Advisory Committee and the Department of Public Information had made of the question; nevertheless, in its substantive proposals, the Advisory Committee's report did not reflect the views clearly expressed by the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly at the fifth session.

22. His delegation did not hold the Advisory Committee responsible for that situation; nevertheless, the Fifth Committee's immediate task was to consider how its wishes could be met as quickly as possible.

23. In paragraph 169 of the Advisory Committee's report the whole question was referred back to the General Assembly and the Fifth Committee. The Committee therefore had the choice of two solutions: it could itself proceed to make a detailed study of the question, with a view to establishing an order of priority among information activities—a method which he considered undesirable in view of the Committee's heavy agenda—or it could invite the Department of Public Information itself to propose economies, the extent and general governing principles of which would be clear from the general debate on the matter in the Fifth Committee.

24. The Committee should to that end propose, if not a list of priorities, at least a system of priorities based upon the criterion of the relative effectiveness of the various media of information. It might be difficult in practice to assess how much the general public knew about the role and activities of the United Nations; that, however, was a difficulty which there was no way of avoiding and which the staff of the Department of Public Information were best able to overcome. Those staff members themselves should be called upon to apply the principles formulated by the Committee to the technical knowledge they already had.

25. If mistakes were made, the General Assembly would always be able to correct them in the light of the protests which the suppression of a useful activity would inevitably cause.

26. As regards the objections relating to the impartiality and objectivity required of the Secretariat, the Department of Public Information should be called upon, not to demonstrate its preference for a particular information medium, but solely to apply certain objective criteria to the various information media. With regard to the Department's statement concerning the *United Nations Bulletin*, contained in paragraph 178 of the Advisory Committee's report, he was sure that the Department would always perform its task successfully, whatever the size of its appropriation. It was understandable that the Department should be disappointed not to be able to carry out all the tasks it deemed essential, but the United Nations was in the same position as regards all aspects of its work.

27. Two other less important criteria should be considered besides that of the effectiveness of the several information media. The first was that of the relative cost of the various media, with regard to which paragraph 170 of the Advisory Committee's report contained some interesting information. That criterion

should not be carried to inordinate lengths. Thus an important feature which gave excellent results, such as the Spanish edition of the *United Nations Bulletin*, should not be suppressed merely because of its high cost.

28. As regards the Russian edition of the *Bulletin*, his delegation hoped that the most objective and complete information possible about the United Nations would be supplied to all peoples, including peoples whose language was Russian. Expenditure in that field, however, was justifiable only if it could be proved that the information in question reached the persons concerned, or would do so eventually. For similar reasons, his delegation considered that the appropriations for certain information centres would be justified only if it were clearly demonstrated that those centres were able to function with at least a minimum of efficiency.

29. The second subsidiary criterion proposed by his delegation was that of the relative value of the various information media in the various parts of the world. Where, for example, a certain information medium was the only one which reached a given area, it had to be adopted regardless of the cost.

30. The Canadian delegation sincerely hoped that the Department of Public Information would, spontaneously and without the Committee's having to give formal instructions or put a ceiling on expenditure, undertake to submit proposals embodying very substantial savings along the lines indicated by the Committee.

31. Mr. ADARKAR (India) considered that in view of the complexity of the problems presented by the Department of Public Information it might be advantageous for the Committee to decide forthwith on the Syrian proposal for a sub-committee to deal with those matters.

32. Mr. MACHADO (Brazil) thought it inexpedient to set up the sub-committee before the end of the general discussion.

33. Mr. FABREGAT (Uruguay) considered that there should first be a broad exchange of views on the question under discussion. If it were to serve any useful purpose the debate should continue without interruption. The proposed sub-committee would, moreover, be of no avail if it were unable to base its recommendations on the conclusions arising from the general discussion.

34. Mr. ASHA (Syria) said that he had never intended to curtail the general debate and he did not wish his proposal to be considered until it had been concluded.

35. Mr. ADARKAR (India) explained that he too had no wish to restrict the general debate. The sub-committee might have begun a detailed study of the budgetary estimates for the Department of Public Information. He would not however press his proposal.

36. Mr. MELAS (Greece) stated that he did not intend to call into question the professional qualifications of the officials of the Department of Public Information; on the contrary, he would like to congratulate them and the Head of the Department on the dynamic qualities, good taste and imagination they had exhibited. The Greek delegation felt however that the United Nations could ensure the necessary publicity for its activities without any need for so large a volume

of expenditure as the Secretary-General had foreseen. In point of fact, the general public and the Press were in any case displaying sustained interest in the Organization and it was not absolutely essential to cater for that interest at the cost of millions of dollars. Consequently, there were no economies more appropriate and less hazardous than those that might be effected in regard to that part of the budget.

37. The public information budget of the League of Nations had been absurdly small in comparison with that of the United Nations. It had never been asserted, however, that that was one of the causes, either primary or secondary, of the League's failure.

38. In view of the terms of the Committee's report to the General Assembly at its fifth session regarding that section of the budget, it was a matter for disappointment that the public information expenditure estimates still amounted to five and a half million dollars, i.e. about 12 per cent of the total budget. Those figures appeared to him quite excessive. He realized that it was not possible to effect the total reduction desired in the expenditure on information by a stroke of the pen, but he thought that in view of the decisions adopted at the fifth session, the Secretary-General might have taken rather more drastic action, and he hoped that the Committee would adopt the Advisory Committee's recommendations and indicate the directives to be followed in the future.

39. It might be possible to abolish certain publications altogether, and to arrange for other publications to appear at less frequent intervals, or to reduce their content. Another point meriting enquiry was the maintenance of nineteen information centres. It was, of course difficult for the delegation of a Member State to suggest that there was no justification for an information centre in a country other than its own. Similarly, it was embarrassing for a State Member which had an information centre in its territory to say that it had no objection to its suppression, since it might then be wrongly accused of indifference to the work of the United Nations. In those circumstances, the Committee might, he suggested, restrict itself to deciding the number of information centres to be abolished, giving the Secretary-General discretion to determine the details on objective grounds.

40. Furthermore, having regard to the interest shown by public opinion and the Press in the activities of the United Nations, it should be possible to arrange for those receiving information to bear a much larger share of the costs of the distribution. He requested the Secretariat to prepare a paper on the subject showing the receipts accruing to the Department and the Information centres over the past three years.

41. Mr. BLANCO (Cuba) stated that his delegation had always taken very keen interest in matters of public information. States Members attached greater importance to the verdict of world public opinion than to most of the resolutions adopted. It was, therefore, plain that the United Nations should keep world public opinion informed of all factors enabling it to form a judgment. The founders of the United Nations had been right in considering that it should collaborate closely with the information services of Member States. To that end, the Department of Public Information had been set up, and he considered that the Department deserved very cordial congratulations upon its work over the past five years. His country was highly

satisfied with the information distributed there by the United Nations; the *United Nations Bulletin*, in particular, had from the outset been found to be a valuable source of information by members of the Government, journalists, broadcasting stations and others interested in the activities of the Organization. He therefore hoped that the *Bulletin* would continue to be published and might even be enlarged.

42. At the present juncture, when peoples of all nations were anxiously asking what the future had in store, it was essential that the United Nations itself should indicate new goals. It would be regrettable if, just to save a few thousand dollars, that source of information were destroyed. He therefore asked that the Secretariat should make available to the Committee precise information as to the consequences that would follow adoption of the Advisory Committee's recommendations, especially as regards the controversial items under discussion. Upon receipt of that information the Committee would have a complete picture of the situation and would be able to express a fully objective opinion on each of the reductions proposed. In that way the General Assembly would be able to express its desires in clear terms.

43. Mr. BRENNAN (Australia) was disappointed to see that the Secretary-General had not, as he had hoped, applied the decision taken by the General Assembly at its fifth session. It was to be noted, that while the budgetary estimates under section 13 were slightly lower than in 1951, the estimates under section 21 showed a considerable increase, so that instead of the substantial economies asked for, the General Assembly was being called upon to approve an increase of \$94,500. Whereas the 1951 estimates for information services showed, according to his calculation, an increase by comparison with 1950 of only \$50,000, that figure was almost doubled as between 1951 and 1952. It was regrettable that, in spite of the General Assembly's decision, the tendency towards increased expenditure, far from being checked, was on the increase. In the circumstances, he thought that the calculations made by the Assistant Secretary-General, in which the allocations recommended by the Advisory Committee were compared with hypothetical figures which had never appeared in a budget, could not be considered valid by the Committee.

44. He felt that the Committee should shoulder its responsibilities. From paragraph 171 of the Advisory Committee's report it appeared that the activities of the Organization in the field of public information cost about \$5,500,000 per annum, i.e., a sum equal to the total budget of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. The Committee therefore had to decide whether the public information programmes were as important as the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization within its own field. He did not mean to imply that the Committee should consider the problem on so simplified a basis, but he did wish to demonstrate by the concrete example he had quoted that it should also not be considered as an abstract and isolated problem. It was not a matter of ascertaining all that could be done in a given field but to survey the whole range of activities that should be undertaken and, allowing for available resources, make a choice and establish some order of priority.

45. Of course the Department of Public Information performed an essential task in ensuring that the Orga-

nization should have the support of world public opinion, and such activities would no doubt always be costly, as several media of information had to be used to allow for differences between the various countries as regards degree of development, history, civilization and language. That reason was not in itself sufficient, however, to justify the adoption of the Secretary-General's budget estimates.

46. The question of priorities was also a highly complicated one. It was not enough to establish some order of preference between the various media of information and using the available resources only for media for which the Committee had indicated a preference. The fact had also to be borne in mind that certain media of public information were more effective in some areas than in others, and that none of them could therefore be neglected. The Committee should therefore give the Secretary-General precise instructions on the point and take responsibility accordingly. The Advisory Committee had, moreover, on several occasions requested that it be given a clear indication of the criteria on which its recommendations should be based. He had hoped that the Secretary-General would himself submit proposals in that matter.

47. After deciding on the priorities to be adopted, the Committee should establish the extent of the economies to be effected and specify which principles should guide the activities of the Department in the future. It had been proposed to set up a sub-committee to that end, while the representative of Canada had proposed that the Secretary-General be entrusted with the task. For his own part he (Mr. Brennan) considered it possible that the two methods might be combined, and that the Secretary-General be asked to present proposals which could be examined by the sub-committee.

48. The Australian delegation would take into account the observations of the Secretary-General concerning the importance of the various media of information in the various countries. The Australian delegation considered, however, that the budget estimates for the Department of Public Information were still disproportionate to the allocations granted for other activities. He could not see why the estimates for the expenditure of the Department in question should be 25 per cent higher than the estimates for the Department of Economic Affairs and over 50 per cent higher than those of the Department of Social Affairs, the activities of which were among the most essential duties of the Organization.

49. Mrs. DE RIEMAECKER (Belgium) recalled that her delegation had always urged a substantial reduction in the expenditure of the United Nations in the field of public information activities. Such a reduction could be achieved only if there were complete reorganization of the Department of Public Information and a re-distribution of its activities. It was for that reason that the General Assembly had asked the Advisory Committee to study the question. That Committee had stated that it was possible to achieve economy if the General Assembly indicated a scale of priorities between the various activities of the Department of

Public Information. The Belgian delegation would therefore support the Syrian proposal that a sub-committee be set up to deal with that task.

50. The time had come to take advantage of experience acquired during the past six years and to make a thorough study of the information programmes of the United Nations. The present structure of the Department seemed to suffer from a lack of balance. The Secretary-General himself implicitly acknowledged that fact in his statement (A/C.5/448) that the General Assembly was competent to decide broad issues of policy and priorities as regards public information activities, especially the number and geographical distribution of the information centres. The Committee should therefore consider the administrative aspect of the question before the budgetary aspect, and re-organize an important service of the Secretariat rather than decide on the appropriate allocation to be made to it. The report of the Advisory Committee gave the impression, moreover, that much more could be done, much better and with less funds. The total expenditure of the Department of Public Information represented in fact some 12 per cent of the total budget of the United Nations, which was an obviously excessive and disproportionate amount.

51. The Belgian delegation considered, in particular, that reductions might be made in the publications of the Department. The *United Nations Bulletin* alone cost \$133,000. She did not share the view of the Secretary-General that it would be an excessively difficult task to combine objectivity and conciseness; for the *Bulletin* contained numerous repetitions which might well be omitted. She could not accept, however, the elimination of the French edition of the *Bulletin*, for French was one of the working languages of all organs of the United Nations and it was the duty of the Secretariat to ensure that a French version of all its publications appeared.

52. The Belgian delegation was also of the opinion that the *United Nations Yearbook* need not appear more than once every five years if supplements were issued at intervals.

53. A sub-committee should be set up to undertake a careful study of the structure and operation of all the information services of the United Nations in order that funds allocated for that purpose might be employed to the best advantage and economies effected. The Belgian delegation would also support the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, in the belief that the proposed reductions could be made without in any way adversely affecting the Organization and its services.

54. Mr. AGHNIDES (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) wished to make it plain that the Committee had endeavoured to carry out the task assigned to it to the best of its ability. It could not, of course, make recommendations on questions which lay solely within the competence of the General Assembly. Consequently, it could not, on that account, be accused of not having performed its duty to the full.

The meeting rose at 1.5 p.m.