

Wednesday, 27 November 1957,  
at 3.25 p.m.



**NEW YORK**

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**Chairman: Mr. W. H. J. VAN ASCH VAN WIJCK**  
(Netherlands).

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. El-Messiri (Egypt), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

**AGENDA ITEM 51**

**Personnel questions (continued):**

- (b) Question of the geographical distribution of the staff of the United Nations: report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/718/Rev.1);
- (c) Question of the proportion of fixed-term staff: report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/724)

1. Mr. ROMULO (Philippines) thanked the Secretary-General and the Director of Personnel for their efforts to improve the geographical distribution of the Secretariat staff, but pointed out that much still remained to be done. The importance of ensuring that the Secretariat reflected the universality of the United Nations could not be over-emphasized. The need to provide for a balanced geographical distribution was referred to in the Charter and was therefore a legal obligation binding upon the Secretary-General, the General Assembly and Member States.

2. That principle, however, should find expression not only in a numerical balance, but in an equitable distribution of posts at all levels of the Secretariat and particularly at the higher levels. His delegation would point out once again that, viewed from that angle, the situation was far from satisfactory: the Secretary-General's report on the staff of the United Nations Secretariat of 31 August 1957 (A/C.5/L.456) showed that the 101 top-level posts in the Secretariat (Principal Officers, Directors and Under-Secretaries) were distributed among only twenty-eight Member States. Asia, with two-thirds of the world's population, had only twelve posts. Europe, on the other hand, held forty-four posts and North America thirty-one. The Republic of the Philippines, although it had been a Founder Member, having joined the Organization even before it had attained complete independence, had never

been represented at the higher levels of the Secretariat. It therefore shared the views of the new Members on geographical distribution and would never be completely satisfied, as long as its nationals in the Secretariat occupied no posts above the Second-Officer level.

3. His delegation considered that the principle laid down in the Charter should apply to career staff, if a small number of countries were not to exert a predominant influence in the Secretariat. The recruitment of fixed-term staff suggested by his delegation at the tenth session (503rd meeting) was merely a short-term remedy.

4. His delegation did not minimize the difficulties of the problem and did not expect miracles, but it was convinced that no solution could be achieved without a systematic plan of action. It had hoped that the Secretary-General would submit such a plan at the last session, and it now reiterated that hope. Some delegations had suggested in the past that an inter-governmental committee should be set up to study the question, but his delegation would prefer the Secretary-General to undertake such a study. The Secretary-General might take up proposals made in the Fifth Committee during the eleventh session,<sup>1/</sup> including, for example, the proposal put forward by several delegations and supported by his own—that priority should be given in promotions to staff members from countries inadequately represented at the higher levels of the Secretariat, and the Philippine proposals concerning an increased turnover of staff, voluntary retirement below the statutory age-limit and the payment of termination indemnities to staff members who resigned.

5. His delegation had noted that some countries were inclined to regard the principle of geographical distribution as of secondary importance; for them, the main criterion was the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. To accept that proposition would be to admit that staff with such qualifications could be recruited only in certain parts of the world, an idea which had long been disproved by the facts. On no account must the Secretariat lay itself open to the charge of being one of the last strongholds of colonialism. Moreover, Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter provided no legal support for that idea. The paragraph must be interpreted in its entirety and in the context of the Charter as a whole. It was inconceivable that a political organization, ultimately intended to embrace all the States of the world, should attach no more than secondary importance to the principle of geographical distribution, as applied to the composition of one of its principal organs.

<sup>1/</sup>See Official Records of the General Assembly, Eleventh Session, Fifth Committee, 563rd-565th meetings.

6. By deciding in its resolution 1097 (XI) to include the question of the geographical distribution of the staff of the Secretariat as a separate item in the agenda of the twelfth session, the General Assembly had given that question its true importance. His delegation proposed that the practice should continue. Annual examination of the question would focus attention on the progress achieved. For that purpose, it would be useful for the Secretary-General to prepare for each session a report similar to the one contained in document A/C.5/718/Rev.1. If delegations were to be able to form an exact picture of the situation, the report should also reproduce the annex to the Annual Staff Listing (A/C.5/L.456). The statistics by nationality given in that annex should also show the number of staff members of each nationality occupying posts in the language services, which were not included in the quota allocated to each country. Lastly, in the case of every appointment, promotion or other change of status, the category and level of the staff member concerned should be stated.

7. In conclusion, he would assure the Secretary-General that the observations he had just made were prompted by a desire to be constructive and in no way implied a lack of confidence in the Secretariat, whose competence and devotion he had personally learned to value.

8. Mr. KHALAF (Iraq) thanked the Secretary-General for his efforts to improve the geographical distribution of the Secretariat and for his report, which gave a clear picture of the situation.

9. He agreed with the Philippine representative that Article 101 of the Charter should be applied as a whole and that the principle of geographical distribution was valid not only at the lower levels but also and particularly at the higher levels of the Secretariat. In that connexion, it was surprising to find that out of 101 top-level posts in the Secretariat more than fifty had been allocated to the nationals of five or six countries. Moreover, the situation seemed to be no better than in previous years. The problem could be solved only with the co-operation of the Secretariat, of the countries inadequately represented and particularly of those countries which were over-represented in the Secretariat.

10. Referring to document A/C.5/L.456, he asked what criterion was used in determining the desirable range of posts for each country. His delegation was opposed to the principle of countries being represented in proportion to its contribution.

11. His delegation supported the Philippine proposal that the question should continue to be a separate item in the General Assembly's agenda.

12. He regretted that the figures for the proportion of fixed-term staff were not very encouraging: the report had been more satisfactory in 1956 than in 1957. New efforts in that field were, therefore, required.

13. Mr. LIVERAN (Israel) was of the opinion that statistics were not the only means of learning the truth. What was most important was to go back to the source, which in the present instance was Article 101 of the Charter. The two conditions set out in paragraph 3 of that Article were inseparable. However, the "paramount consideration" in the employment of the staff must be "the necessity of securing the highest

standards of efficiency, competence and integrity". Only after that condition had been fulfilled, could due regard be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible. An important point to note was that the requirement of geographical distribution applied exclusively to staff recruitment, not to grading or promotion. As to the method to be followed, various solutions had been proposed by the delegation of Israel in the past. Competitive examinations could, for example, be held on a world-wide basis so that the recruitment of staff might have an international character and that candidates possessing the standards of efficiency, competence and integrity prescribed by the Charter might be selected without regard to their nationality. The difficulty was due entirely to the failure of the Charter to explain what was meant by the second sentence of paragraph 3. The Member States had compelled the Administration to interpret it as referring to nationality, but had then required it to make exceptions; it had been contended some time ago that nationality alone was not enough and that employees permanently resident in the United States should be placed in a separate category. His delegation had objected to such questionable criteria, but its protests had been in vain. Now that the Secretary-General had submitted the statistics requested of him, delegations still found the situation unsatisfactory and were calling for additional criteria. There had been talk of relating not only the proportion of staff members from each country to the scale of assessments or a Member's ability to pay, but also their rank in the Secretariat. In strict logic there was no reason why all countries should not be equally represented at all levels. In such case, the Secretariat would no longer be administered by the Secretary-General but by the General Assembly.

14. One obviously could not eat one's cake and have it too. All nationalities could be equally represented at all levels, if the Member States were prepared to pay the price. Otherwise, the only solution was to lay down rules by which the Secretary-General would be able to apply the provisions of the Charter. Care should be taken in that regard not to encroach upon his administrative powers nor to give him instructions contrary to the spirit of the Charter. To require him, for example, to make promotions subject to considerations of geographical distribution would be an infringement of those provisions of the Charter which condemned discrimination based on nationality. Such a procedure would be unfortunate for the persons concerned and would also have a regrettable effect on morale in general. The problem was admittedly very complicated and had many aspects. It should be considered from the point of view not only of the individual Members of the United Nations but also of the principles involved, for otherwise there was a risk of adopting purely formal solutions that would leave the basic problem untouched.

15. Mr. KOURANY (Panama) thanked the Secretary-General for the valuable information which he had submitted to the Fifth Committee. The existing geographical distribution of the staff did not appear to be satisfactory. The slight importance attached to Central America, particularly Panama, which were represented by only one or two staff members each, was particularly evident. No nationals of El Salvador or Honduras held posts in the Secretariat. At the tenth session (513th meeting), however, the Secretary-

General had recognized the need for ensuring a reasonable representation of all nationalities at the various levels in the Secretariat. Mr. Kourany was surprised to note that not a single staff member from Central America held a post in the Principal Officer, Director or Under-Secretary categories. According to document A/C.5/L.456, only six of the staff members from that region held posts in the Professional category. In addition, only 109 of the 1,214 posts in the Professional category and only seven of the 101 posts in the Principal Officer and higher categories were held by persons from Latin American countries. It would be advisable for the Secretary-General, when vacancies occurred in the future, to favour the countries inadequately represented as well as the new Members in such a way as to ensure the equitable distribution indispensable in an international organization such as the United Nations.

16. Mr. FREIRE (Brazil) considered that the information supplied by the Secretary-General was extremely useful and asked that similar information should in future be annexed to the Annual Staff Listing. The Secretary-General should be warmly congratulated, because, despite the difficulties that were apparent from his report, he had succeeded in recruiting staff from countries which had not been represented and in improving the representation of those countries which had been inadequately represented. Further improvements were undoubtedly possible, particularly with regard to posts at the highest levels, but the Brazilian delegation was confident that the Secretary-General would do what was necessary. The Secretary-General was not entirely responsible for the existing situation and would not be able to reconcile the demands of geographical distribution with the standards of competence required of the staff, unless the Member States co-operated by facilitating the recruitment of qualified staff and enabling the Organization to offer such staff favourable working conditions.

17. He pointed out in that connexion that the co-operation of Member States was also indispensable in the case of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, because there too it was necessary to eliminate bureaucratic obstacles to the seconding of national civil servants and to provide conditions which would attract the necessary qualified staff.

18. Mr. AMERASINGHE (Ceylon) said that his delegation attached the greatest importance to the question under discussion because, in its opinion, the international character of the United Nations should be reflected not only in the apportionment of financial obligations but also in the distribution of posts in the Secretariat among the different nationalities. In staff recruitment, the authority of the various parties must be specified as clearly as possible. The definition of policy, with due regard for the legitimate interests and wishes of the Member States, was a function of the General Assembly, but the Assembly, in carrying out that function, should not encroach upon the discretionary powers of the Secretary-General with regard to the selection of staff. Although the Ceylonese delegation was aware that the composition and character of the Secretariat had been determined at a time when the governing principles had not yet been clearly defined and that the problem had been considerably complicated by the admission of new Members, it nevertheless was bound to point out that the objectives

which had been laid down, particularly in General Assembly resolution 1097 (XI), had not been achieved. Article 101 of the Charter prescribed the limits which could not be exceeded and had set out conditions that were not incompatible. At the preceding session, the General Assembly had drawn attention to the imbalance in the geographical distribution of posts, but, in order not to prejudice the careers of the staff already employed or to disrupt the proper functioning of the Organization, it had had to be content with indicating the need for remedying the situation in future appointments to the staff. There obviously could be no question of blocking promotions, and in that regard he did not agree with the Philippine representative, but felt, as did the representative of Israel, that merit should be a decisive factor in promotion.

19. The General Assembly had recommended that preference should be given to nationalities which, at all levels, formed a disproportionately small part of the Secretariat. The United Nations staff could hardly be said to be strictly international in character. Of the posts in the Principal Officer, Director and Under-Secretary categories, 50 per cent were held by the nationals of three countries—the United States, the United Kingdom and France. In other words, at that level, which was the most important, because it was the policy-making level, seventy-nine countries had been placed on an equal footing with three. The Philippine representative had made some very apt remarks on that subject. A review of the changes which had occurred in geographical distribution during the year ending 31 August 1957 (A/C.5/718/Rev.1) made it clear that an unduly large proportion of the new staff, at all levels, was made up of the nationals of several countries which were already over-represented. The Secretary-General's report showed that three of the recently filled posts in the Principal Officer, Director and Under-Secretary categories had gone to three countries whose nationals already held 50 per cent of all the posts in those categories. Out of 101 internationally recruited posts, seventeen had been filled by nationals of countries that had already exceeded their quota.

20. The recommendations made by the General Assembly had thus been to no purpose. The Assembly should, therefore, indicate to the Secretary-General the manner in which a desirable range of posts for each Member State should be determined. One solution which came to mind and also seemed to be the fairest would be to apply the principles governing the scale of contributions to the United Nations budget, with a ceiling and a floor adapted to the requirements of geographical distribution.

21. His delegation proposed a system in which posts would be divided into four categories, the first corresponding to Under-Secretaries and Directors, the second to the P-5 and P-4 levels in the Professional category, the third to the P-3, P-2 and P-1 levels in the Professional category, and the fourth to the principal level in the General Service category. As the different categories would not be equally important from the point of view of representation, each post would be assigned a number of points according to its category, namely, six points for the first, four for the second, two for the third and one for the fourth. In other words, one post in the first category would be equivalent to three posts in the third category.

The total number of points would be distributed among the Member States on the basis of the percentages approved for each, so that a comparison with actual representation would make it possible to determine which Members were over- or under-represented. Arithmetical formulae were not, of course, the best means of settling problems of that kind, but they might provide a quantitative criterion for evaluating qualitative data. The principles or recommendations adopted by the General Assembly need not be applied to the letter, but recruitment policy should be guided by their spirit. Experience gained in connexion with the administration of an international organization would certainly be very useful to the small countries with a modest civil service.

22. His delegation did not think that the Secretary-General should be asked merely to submit a report each year on the changes that had occurred in geographical distribution. It intended to submit a draft resolution to the Committee under which the Secretary-General would be requested to continue his efforts to conform as far as possible with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 1097 (XI) by: (a) reducing, whenever there was an opportunity to do so, the number of staff from countries already over-represented; (b) providing for a more equitable geographical distribution at the Under-Secretary and Director levels; (c) fixing definite percentages for representation in the Secretariat in conformity with the principles approved for the scale of contributions by Member States instead of fixing desirable ranges of representation.

23. Mr. UGO (Italy) was glad to note that, according to the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/718/Rev.1), the number of Italian staff members in the Secretariat had increased slightly during the year under review. He hoped that it would be still higher in future and that it would not be long before the number of Italian nationals in the Secretariat corresponded to the number considered equitable by the Secretary-General.

24. Referring to table I of the report, he asked whether the Secretary-General had made sufficient effort to recruit staff of nationalities which were proportionally under-represented in the Secretariat. Of the 101 appointments made between 1 September 1956 and 31 August 1957, only thirty-seven were in fact staff from countries recently admitted to the United Nations, while sixty-four were from other countries, some of which were already well represented in the Secretariat. Nevertheless, the Italian delegation was confident that, in future, the Secretary-General would make further efforts to improve the geographical distribution of the staff.

25. Mr. SAHNI (India) said he would make a few general comments, reserving his right to revert subsequently to the views expressed by the various delegations. The Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/718/Rev.1) was a commendable effort to provide the Fifth Committee with an analysis of the changes which had occurred in the geographical distribution of the United Nations Secretariat staff during the year ending 31 August 1957. The Indian delegation regretted, however, that the Secretary-General had drawn up no plan or even given a general idea of the measures he intended to take in order to achieve a more equitable geographical distribution. While the efficiency, competence and integrity of staff members should be

the primary consideration, the Indian delegation considered it important that the United Nations Secretariat should become truly international. As the Secretary-General himself had admitted, the present composition of the Secretariat was far from meeting that requirement; the imbalance which was the result of somewhat hurried initial recruitment, was clearly shown in the figures given by the Secretary-General. The representatives of the Philippines, Iraq and Ceylon had commented fully on the figures given in the Secretary-General's report and he would merely point out that out of nine persons appointed to higher posts, only one was from an Asian country, and out of four staff members who had been promoted, only one came from an Asian country and only one from Latin America. It therefore appeared that the imbalance in the geographical distribution of the Secretariat staff was being perpetuated. The situation was particularly serious at the higher levels and extensive action was called for to put it right.

26. In conclusion, he considered that the real problem was not so much to find a solution based on pre-established principles as to request the Secretary-General to try to achieve an equitable balance between the various Member States and to submit a detailed plan of action to the Fifth Committee with that end in view.

27. Mr. LENNARD (Canada) emphasized that the problem before the Secretary-General had its origin in an earlier situation. The Secretariat had been organized when there were only fifty Members of the United Nations and many of those States had not been in a position to provide staff. That was why recruitment had taken place in a limited number of countries. Moreover, in order to retain the staff recruited, the Secretary-General had considered it necessary to offer more career posts than fixed-term contracts. The United Nations had since admitted thirty-two Member States, thus creating fresh difficulties in regard to geographical distribution. The Secretary-General had taken steps to meet those difficulties and the report he had submitted to the Fifth Committee at the present session indicated that some progress had been made. The Canadian delegation trusted that the Secretary-General would submit a similar report each year. The difficulties of his task should not be overlooked, and the Canadian delegation would support any draft resolution which, while recognizing those difficulties, would ask the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to bring about equitable geographical distribution.

28. It was essential, and in fact mandatory under the Charter, for the Secretary-General to recruit qualified personnel: he could not, therefore, accept the idea that the United Nations Secretariat should serve as a training centre: that was the function of the public administration programmes undertaken by the Technical Assistance Administration.

29. Mr. CHAKER (Egypt), referring to table I, which showed that the 101 staff members appointed to internationally recruited posts between 1 September 1956 and 31 August 1957 were distributed among thirty-nine nationalities, expressed regret that the table did not show the level and category of those staff members. On the other hand, he noted that, according to table IV, the 101 staff members holding internationally recruited posts in the Principal Officer, Director and Under-Secretary categories had been recruited in only

twenty-eight countries. It was therefore obvious that the principle of geographical distribution was far from being respected. The imbalance would have been even more apparent, if the posts of Under-Secretary had not been included in the same list as those of Principal Officer and Director.

30. Finally, referring to the Annual Staff Listing (A/C.5/L.456), he asked the representative of the Secretary-General for information regarding the basis on which the desirable range of posts for each country was calculated.

31. Mr. SZABO (Hungary) said that, despite the improvement in the geographical distribution of the Secretariat staff, some countries were still inadequately represented; it was therefore necessary to continue the efforts to correct the existing imbalance. All the possibilities open to the Administration should be utilized to that end; thus, vacant posts should be filled as rapidly as possible by appointing nationals of under-represented countries instead of giving them to staff members recruited on a temporary basis. He noted, however, that the situation of the countries inadequately represented in the Secretariat had to some extent been taken into account in giving effect to General Assembly resolution 1097 (XI), and expressed his satisfaction at the recent appointment of a Hungarian staff member, as indicated in table I of the Secretary-General's report.

32. Mr. URABE (Japan) said that his delegation was satisfied with the progress which had been made in regard to the geographical distribution of the Secretariat staff during the year ending 31 August 1957, but regretted that no Japanese staff member had been recruited for a top-level post and that, in general, the Asian, Latin American and African countries were inadequately represented: out of 101 posts in the Principal Officer, Director and Under-Secretary categories, only twelve had been given to nationals of the Asian and African countries and only seven to nationals of Latin America.

33. His delegation requested that that imbalance should be remedied gradually by reserving vacant posts for staff members from the countries which were under-represented, provided, of course, that they met the standards of efficiency, competence and integrity required under Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter.

34. Lastly, he agreed with the Egyptian representative that it would be useful for table I of the Secretary-General's report also to show the level of the staff members concerned.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE DRAFT RESOLUTION SUBMITTED BY THE FOURTH COMMITTEE IN DOCUMENT A/3751 ON AGENDA ITEM 37\* (A/C.5/730)**

35. Mr. AGHNIDES (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) presented orally the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the

\*/The future of Togoland under French administration: report of the Trusteeship Council.

financial implications of the draft resolution proposed by the Fourth Committee on the future of Togoland under French administration (A/3751). On the basis of the experience gained from the dispatch in 1956 of the United Nations Plebiscite Commissioner for the Trust Territory of Togoland under British administration, the Secretary-General considered that the draft resolution of the Fourth Committee, if adopted by the General Assembly, would involve an expenditure of \$157,400 (A/C.5/730). The Advisory Committee thought that some savings would be possible, in particular on travel and subsistence of staff, and on local transportation. In that connexion, he recalled that the actual cost of the 1956 mission had been only \$106,000, although it had been estimated at \$135,000.

36. The Advisory Committee proposed that one month after the arrival of the mission an official from the Office of the Controller should make an on-the-spot study of local conditions and make recommendations to the Controller concerning the subsistence allowance which should be paid to the mission staff.

37. Subject to those observations, the Advisory Committee concurred in the Secretary-General's view that the draft resolution proposed by the Fourth Committee, if adopted by the General Assembly, would involve expenditure which would certainly not exceed \$157,400 and might even be well below that figure.

38. Mr. GANEM (France) thought that the estimate was somewhat high and that it would be possible to make savings not only on the items of expenditure mentioned by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee, but on others as well. In 1956, the actual expenses had been 20 to 25 per cent below the estimate and, on the basis of that precedent, his delegation considered that the present estimate might be reduced to \$120,000. It requested that its comments should be embodied in the Committee's report to the General Assembly.

39. Mr. KHALAF (Iraq) asked the Controller for further information on the way in which the subsistence allowance would be fixed one month after the mission's arrival; for example, he wished to know whether the allowance paid to the staff during the first month would be reduced.

40. Mr. TURNER (Controller) said that the allowances provided for were provisional and subject to revision. In any case, if it was decided to decrease the rate of allowance, the reduction would not be applied retroactively.

41. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee should inform the General Assembly that the draft resolution proposed by the Fourth Committee on the future of Togoland under French administration would involve an estimated expenditure not exceeding \$157,400.

It was so decided.

42. Replying to a question from Mr. RAEYMAECKERS (Belgium), the CHAIRMAN said that the comments made by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and by the French representative would be brought to the General Assembly's attention by the Rapporteur.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.