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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/1711) submitted pursuant to the decision taken by the Fifth Committee at its 1736th meeting, on 11 November 1975. The report is entitled "Statement of administrative and financial implications of the recommendations contained in paragraph 113 of the report of the Committee on Conferences". 1/
2. Paragraph 113, which constitutes chapter VI of the report of the Committee on Conferences, is a summary of the Committee's recommendations to the General Assembly, followed by the provisional calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1976 and 1977 in annexes I and II, respectively.
3. The Advisory Committee studied document A/C.5/1711 in the light of the report of the Committee on Conferences. The report is the first by the Committee on Conferences, which was established on an experimental basis by the General Assembly in resolution 3351 (XXIX) of 18 December 1974 for a three-year period.
4. The Advisory Committee notes that neither the report of the Committee on Conferences nor the Secretary-General's report under reference state the financial considerations which were involved in the decisions taken by the Committee concerning the calendar and the pattern of conferences. The lack of those data has made it impossible for the Advisory Committee to determine the full administrative and financial impact of the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences.
5. In document A/C.5/1711 the Secretary-General considers the question of the financial implications of the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences

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1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirtieth Session,  
Supplement No. 32 (A/10032, and Corr.1).

solely from the viewpoint of whether those recommendations affect budgetary requirements in 1976-1977. In paragraph 36 he states that he foresees no financial implications in the adoption of those recommendations for the next biennium, except for a possible net saving of \$6,000. The impact of the Committee's recommendations on the optimum allocation of manpower and other resources is overlooked. The Advisory Committee was unable to satisfy itself of the soundness of this exercise and conclusion, either from the content of the Secretary-General's report or from the information provided by his representatives.

6. Information received from the representatives of the Secretary-General indicates that direct conference servicing costs to the United Nations for 1974 and 1975 total \$83.2 million or 16.2 per cent of the total gross expenditure. <sup>2/</sup> The following table summarizes the costs of conference servicing in the regular budget for the five-year period from 1971 to 1975 (in thousands of US dollars):

	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>
Conference servicing costs	28,692	30,959	33,578	39,366	43,872
Total expenditure (gross)	183,975	206,196	225,210	253,730	259,710
Percentage of conference servicing costs of total expenditure (gross)	15.6	15.0	14.9	15.5	16.9

The magnitude of the amounts involved - both absolutely and as a percentage of total expenses - calls for particular attention to how the conference schedule can be carried out most economically.

7. An example of the short-comings observed by the Advisory Committee can be found in the way the question of exceptions under the pattern of conferences has been dealt with. This question was a major topic of discussion by the Committee on Conferences <sup>3/</sup> and led to most of the Committee's recommendations. It involves a number of United Nations bodies, the meetings of which require deploying identifiable conference servicing resources by the Secretariat. The financial implications of planning these meetings would be definable whether they fall under the existing pattern of conferences or those recommended by the Committee on Conferences. The Advisory Committee notes that no attempt has been made in document A/C.5/1711 to quantify the financial elements involved.

<sup>2/</sup> Although this information was provided in November 1975, it is two years out of date, for it relates to figures contained in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1974-1975. Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/9006 and Corr.1). The 1971 figures were obtained or estimated from data in the budget estimates for the financial year 1971 (ibid., Twenty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/8006 and Corr.2 and 3)).

<sup>3/</sup> Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirtieth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/10032 and Corr.1), paras. 41-85.

8. The Committee on Conferences reviewed the exceptions to the general principle that United Nations bodies should plan to meet at their respective established headquarters, in accordance with paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) of 16 December 1969. The Committee's recommendations 3 to 11 relate to the exceptions. They fall into five categories: (a) cycle of venue/season of sessions to be switched (Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme, recommendation 3); (b) exception no longer to be made (United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, recommendation 5; Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee and Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, recommendation 6; Commission on Narcotic Drugs, recommendation 8; Commission on Human Rights, recommendation 9); (c) existing pattern under the exception to be maintained (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, recommendation 4); (d) qualified exemption from the basic principle (other Economic and Social Council functional commissions, recommendation 7); and (e) addition of United Nations bodies to the list of exceptions (Economic Commission for Western Asia, recommendation 10; and International Civil Service Commission, recommendation 11).

9. As can be seen from paragraph 8 above, the list of exceptions covers bodies which require large conference servicing resources. In this connexion, the Advisory Committee would have expected the Secretary-General in his document to have provided data along the following lines:

(a) A breakdown of the financial resources to be deployed in servicing the meetings of these bodies under the existing pattern of conferences;

(b) The financial implications which would be involved as a result of implementing the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences to change the venue or timing of sessions;

(c) The financial and resource effects of the recommendations by the Committee on Conferences that certain United Nations bodies no longer be featured among the exceptions;

(d) Explanation of underlying reasons to justify maintaining the existing pattern of exceptions in the case of certain United Nations bodies;

(e) The feasibility of an alternative pattern of conferences in respect of bodies whose exemption from the general principle has been upheld in the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences;

(f) The financial implications arising from the addition of new bodies to the list of exceptions under the pattern of conferences;

(g) The apportioned costs of conference servicing among United Nations bodies.

10. The Advisory Committee trusts that the next report of the Committee on Conferences on the calendar and pattern of conferences and the statement by the Secretary-General of administrative and financial implications thereof will contain data of the kind listed in the preceding paragraph. The Advisory Committee urges the Secretary-General to pursue the development of a more refined system for the determination of conference servicing requirements. This would assist the Committee on Conferences in the discharge of its responsibility as called for under its terms of reference, which include, inter alia, the examination of current and future requirements of the United Nations for conference services and facilities, and the consideration of means to ensure optimum apportionment of conference resources, facilities and services in order to maximize their efficient and effective use.

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