

UNITED NATIONS  
**General Assembly**  
FORTY-SIXTH SESSION  
*Official Records*

FIFTH COMMITTEE  
48th meeting  
held on  
Tuesday, 10 December 1991  
at 3 p.m.  
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 48th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and  
Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 106: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1990-1991

Standards of accommodation for air travel

AGENDA ITEM 107: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993  
(continued)

Self-evaluation capacity of the Economic Commission for Africa

AGENDA ITEM 18: APPOINTMENTS TO FILL VACANCIES IN SUBSIDIARY ORGANS

- (a) APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY QUESTIONS
- (d) CONFIRMATION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE INVESTMENTS COMMITTEE

AGENDA ITEM 107: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993  
(continued)

Status of technological innovations in the United Nations (continued)

Status of telecommunications activities in the United Nations (continued)

Integrated management information system project (continued)

Optical disk storage and retrieval system (continued)

This record is subject to correction.  
Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned  
within two weeks of the date of publication to the Chief of the Office of Record Management, Room 6101,  
United Nations Plaza, and a copy should be sent to the Secretary-General.

Distr. GENERAL  
A/C.5/46/SR.48  
16 December 1991

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 106: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1990-1991

Standards of accommodation for air travel (A/46/748; A/C.5/46/3 and Add.1 and Add.2)

1. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Secretary-General had proposed certain modifications to the procedures governing travel arrangements. The Advisory Committee recommended that any decision should be deferred and that the Secretary-General should be requested to submit a report to the General Assembly which would evaluate the current system with a view to determining whether any adjustments were needed to eliminate inconsistencies. A new system that met the objectives of the General Assembly and would be applied fairly throughout the United Nations could then be introduced. In his evaluation the Secretary-General should take account of the procedures followed in the specialized agencies.
2. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) asked why the exceptions to the provisions governing travel shown in annex III of the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/46/3) included business-class travel for participants in a study conducted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and whether all participants had been authorized to travel in business class. With regard to annex IV, which listed exceptions authorized for arduous journeys, his delegation questioned the authorization of business-class travel for journeys between Paris and Washington and London and Washington. His delegation was also concerned by some elements in the report concerning upgraded travel arrangements for Secretariat staff, particularly the indication that the Secretariat had difficulties in taking advantage of bonuses granted by airlines. If bonuses were retained by staff members individually, it would be of interest to know whether the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) took what was a substantial benefit into account in calculating the margin.
3. The report had referred to the diminishing level of service in economy class and had proposed the use of business class for flights of more than five hours. Most United States officials, however, travelled with the masses, and he suggested that United Nations staff might do likewise. Regarding the statement by medical directors of the common system regarding the health implications of travel on long flights in economy class, any staff member with medical problems should be granted an exception. The United States did not agree, however, to any redefinition of the nine-hour rule. His delegation was also concerned that the authorization of exceptions in the case of voluntary programmes would divert funds away from the actual programmes. Finally, he wished to know whether the cash refunds of \$800,000 mentioned in the report had been reported to the General Assembly; such funds ought to be returned to Member States rather than be used to upgrade staff travel arrangements.

(Mr. Michalski, United States)

4. The Advisory Committee had not accepted the Secretary-General's proposals but had recommended that further study should be undertaken. Care should be taken to ensure that any action taken at the forty-seventh session resulted in additional savings for the Organization rather than an increase in travel costs. The views contained in paragraph 9 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/46/748) should be reflected in the Fifth Committee's decision.

5. Mr. RAE (India) said that the Secretary-General's reports provided information on travel expenditures but not on subsistence allowances. There was little consistency in the way subsistence allowances were allocated to delegates attending meetings of subsidiary organs, as exemplified by the fact that delegates to the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) received the standard allowance plus 15 per cent, whereas delegates attending meetings of other organs received an additional 40 per cent. The Secretary-General should address that inconsistency.

6. Mr. MERIFIELD (Canada) endorsed the criticism made by the representative of the United States of America of proposals relating to upgraded travel arrangements. The comments by the medical directors of the common system concerning the health implications of travel on long flights in economy class were shameful and untrue: many people flew on long economy-class flights without any health risk whatsoever. The statement that lengthy check-in procedures were the norm was also false. Lastly, the Organization should make more use of APEX flights in the interest of good management.

7. Ms. MILLS (Deputy Controller) said that the participants in the ESCAP study had been authorized to travel in business class on the grounds of their eminence. The two instances of business-class travel between Europe and the United States of America had been authorized for segments of longer journeys. Regarding the \$800,000 received in cash refunds from airlines, such amounts were credited to miscellaneous income (A/C.5/46/3/Add.2, para. 10) and thus served to reduce the assessed contributions of Member States. Lastly, the difficulty in taking advantage of bonus miles lay not in the Organization's management but, rather, in the limitations imposed by airlines on the use of such bonuses.

8. The CHAIRMAN said he would take it that the Fifth Committee, on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, wished to recommend to the General Assembly that it should take note of the report of the Secretary-General contained in documents A/C.5/46/3 and Add.1 and Add.2; that it should endorse the comments and observations of the Advisory Committee as contained in document A/46/748; and that it should request the Secretary-General to submit a review/evaluation of the current system together with specific proposals to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session.

9. It was so decided.

10. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said he trusted that adoption of the decision would lead to savings for the Organization and not to an increase in costs.

11. Mr. RAE (India) noted that his delegation's concerns were not reflected in the decision. His delegation would, however, endorse the decision on the understanding that the matter would be taken up again at the Committee's resumed session.

AGENDA ITEM 107: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993  
(continued)

Self-evaluation capacity of the Economic Commission for Africa (A/C.5/46/37)

12. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that General Assembly resolution 44/201 B had requested the Secretary-General to review the question of resources for the evaluation function in the regional commissions prior to the preparation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993, and had decided that the post of Chief, Office Automation, at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) should be an established post at the P-5 level for the biennium 1990-1991 and that the post of evaluation officer, also at the P-5 level, should be restored on a non-recurrent basis, subject to renewal, in the context of the biennium 1992-1993. Pursuant to that resolution, the Secretary-General had submitted a note on the self-evaluation capacity of ECA (A/C.5/46/37). That document contained confusing statements regarding the P-5 evaluation officer post. According to paragraph 9, the post was currently vacant, although that was not the Advisory Committee's understanding. Nor was there any indication that the post had been included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993. Retention of the post would thus require a specific decision by the General Assembly.

13. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) agreed that the Secretary-General's note (A/C.5/46/37) was confusing. Moreover, it did not meet the requests made by the General Assembly in resolution 44/201 B. The Secretary-General had merely described existing arrangements. What was clear, however, was that the P-5 evaluation officer post at ECA had been created by the General Assembly; consequently, the Secretary-General was not in a position to eliminate it.

14. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Fifth Committee should recommend that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to submit a report on the matter, through CPC, to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session in order to enable the Assembly to take a decision on it at that session.

15. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) said it was his understanding that the Chairman of ACABQ had said that the P-5 evaluation officer post must be retained, as it had been created by the General Assembly in resolution 44/201 B. He sought confirmation of that point, as he did not want the Committee's decision to result in the abolition of that post.

16. Mr. ETUKET (Uganda) said that the Fifth Committee should not allow itself to be used to terminate a position created by the General Assembly. Taking the mandate of resolution 44/201 B fully into account, the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that the evaluation officer post should be retained during the 1992-1993 biennium and that any subsequent studies of the self-evaluation capacity of ECA should be conducted without prejudice to that post.

17. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) endorsed the suggestion made by the representative of Uganda.

18. Mr. BAUDOT (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that any decision by the Fifth Committee to reinstate the P-5 post would be in line with the recommendations of the Chairman of ACABQ but would require an additional appropriation from the contingency fund under the proposed programme budget.

19. Mr. KINCHEN (United Kingdom) said that the matter of an additional appropriation should be considered in the informal consultations on section 23 of the proposed programme budget.

20. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, in its recommendation to the General Assembly, the Fifth Committee might simply state that it endorsed the Advisory Committee's observations and recommendations

21. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) said that before sending the matter to informal consultations, it should be clarified as much as possible. While the General Assembly had established the evaluation officer post, albeit on a temporary basis, the Programme Planning and Budget Division maintained that it no longer existed. He wondered how such a thing could happen. Moreover, while the General Assembly had asked the Secretary-General to increase the evaluation capacity of ECA, the Secretary-General, in suppressing that post, had done just the opposite. Informal consultations were not needed; the Secretary-General should simply respect the wishes of the General Assembly and reinstate the post.

22. Mr. DANKWA (Ghana) said that the Fifth Committee was empowered to take decisions having an impact on budgetary levels without holding informal consultations, and it should do so in the current situation. The evaluation officer post had been created as a temporary post, but no deadline for its elimination had been set. The Secretary-General, for his part, might have recommended the elimination of the P-5 post to the Fifth Committee, but he should not have eliminated it outright, for that would represent a falling away from the commitment to evaluation.

23. He therefore proposed that the Fifth Committee should, on the basis of the Secretary-General's note and the observations of ACABQ, recommend that the General Assembly should decide: to maintain the P-5 post for self-evaluation at ECA in the context of the 1992-1993 programme budget; to request the

(Mr. Dankwa, Ghana)

Secretary-General to appoint a qualified candidate to the post to allow for a resumption of self-evaluation at ECA; and to request the Secretary-General to endeavour to complete his review, in accordance with the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 36/228 on the strengthening of the United Nations evaluation systems, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session through the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

24. Mr. MERIFIELD (Canada) welcomed the proposal by the representative of Ghana but suggested that the Committee should defer a decision on the matter.

25. Mr. ETUKET (Uganda) said that his delegation had serious reservations about holding informal consultations. Resources should be appropriated in accordance with the directives of the General Assembly, one of which had created the P-5 post under discussion. Unless the Secretariat could find a legislative mandate for terminating it, his delegation could not agree to informal consultations. Moreover, deferring the question of strengthening self-evaluation capacity at ECA, which had been raised as long ago as the thirty-eighth session, was not in accordance with existing mandates.

26. Mr. BAUDOT (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the General Assembly was a sovereign body. Nevertheless, if it decided to reinstate the post, there would be financial implications which he was required to draw to the Committee's attention.

27. As for the requisite legislative mandate, the Secretary-General was fully entitled to recommend the creation or abolition of posts. He had also been given a mandate to implement self-evaluation within the Organization, and to that end had been asked to create a renewable temporary post at ECA. For the biennium 1992-1993 the Secretary-General had simply proposed that a decision regarding that post should be deferred for a year, pending further study. However, the General Assembly did not have to accept that proposal.

28. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) welcomed the remarks by the representative of Canada and the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division. He reiterated that the P-5 post should be retained, in accordance with resolution 44/201 B, and suggested that other studies should be carried out to explore the possibility of applying similar self-evaluation arrangements to other regional commissions.

29. Mr. ELDEEB (Egypt) expressed support for the Chairman's suggestion as further elaborated by the representative of Ghana. If the Secretary-General wanted to abolish the post, he could submit a proposal to that end to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session. At that time the Secretary-General might also submit a report on self-evaluation in all the regional commissions, including ECA.

30. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said he thought that the matter should be discussed in informal consultations.
31. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) said he did not think it was necessary to hold consultations on the maintenance of the evaluation officer post, the importance of which had been stressed by previous speakers. He suggested that a reference to the Committee's endorsement of the recommendations of CPC might be included in the Chairman's proposal.
32. Mrs. CLIFF (United Kingdom) shared the view that the question should be considered further in informal consultations and added that her delegation would have difficulty agreeing to the proposal made by the representative of Ghana. She also sought clarification as to whether the Secretary-General was in fact proposing a new post. It was her understanding, which she wished to have confirmed, that the Committee could take a decision immediately only on the basis of savings realized under section 23.
33. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) said that he would agree to informal consultations in the interests of flexibility, but only on the question of strengthening the self-evaluation capacity of ECA and the other regional commissions. If the Committee insisted on discussing the specific P-5 post informally, he wished to have all similar posts referred to informal consultations as well.
34. Mr. ELDEEB (Egypt) supported the Ghanaian proposal, which was objective and balanced and allowed the Committee to maintain the principle that the General Assembly had a legislative mandate to create posts.
35. Mr. BAUDOT (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division), replying to the question raised by the representative of the United Kingdom, said that it had been the decision of the General Assembly to create the post on a non-recurring basis; the post was therefore listed in a footnote to staffing table 23.5. The cost of the post was approximately \$270,000 for the biennium.
36. The CHAIRMAN suggested that further discussion of the item should be postponed to a later meeting.
37. It was so decided.

#### AGENDA ITEM 18: APPOINTMENTS TO FILL VACANCIES IN SUBSIDIARY ORGANS

- (a) APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY QUESTIONS (A/46/101 and A/C.5/46/51)

38. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/46/101, in which the Secretary-General had indicated that, owing to the expiration of the terms of office of five members of ACABQ on 31 December 1991, the General Assembly would have to appoint five persons to fill the resulting vacancies. Document

(The Chairman)

A/C.5/46/51 contained the names and curricula vitae of the candidates nominated by their respective Governments.

39. Mr. PANOV (Bulgaria) pointed out that, owing to an error, the name and curriculum vitae of one of the three candidates nominated by the group of Eastern European States for membership on ACABQ had been omitted from document A/C.5/46/51.

40. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, in view of the error just pointed out by the representative of Bulgaria and the fact that there were three candidates for one vacancy for the group of Eastern European States, the Committee should elect one candidate from that group by secret ballot at its next meeting.

41. It was so decided.

42. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, since the number of candidates from the African, Asian and Latin American and Caribbean groups corresponded to the number of vacancies available for those groups, the Committee should elect four members from those regional groups by acclamation. Accordingly, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to recommend the appointment of Mr. Ahmad Fathi Al-Masri (Syrian Arab Republic), Mr. Kwaku Dua Dankwa (Ghana), Mr. E. Besley Maycock (Barbados) and Mr. C. S. M. Mselle (United Republic of Tanzania) to the Advisory Committee for three-year terms of office beginning on 1 January 1992 by acclamation.

43. It was so decided.

(d) CONFIRMATION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE INVESTMENTS COMMITTEE (A/46/104 and Add.1, A/C.5/46/27)

44. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/46/104/Add.1, in which the Secretary-General had informed the General Assembly of the death of Mr. George Johnston of the United States of America and of the need to appoint one person to fill the unexpired portion of Mr. Johnston's term of office, i.e. until 31 December 1993. In document A/46/104, the Secretary-General had drawn the Assembly's attention to article 20 of the regulations of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund and to the need for the General Assembly to confirm the appointment by the Secretary-General of three persons to fill other vacancies on the Investments Committee.

45. In document A/C.5/46/27, the Secretary-General had informed the General Assembly of the nomination by the Government of the United States of America of Ms. Francine Bovich to fill the unexpired portion of Mr. Johnston's term of office, and had presented to the Assembly for confirmation the appointment to the Investments Committee of Mr. Ahmad Abdullatif (Saudi Arabia), Mr. Aloysio de Andrade Faria (Brazil) and Mr. Stanislaw Raczkowski (Poland) for three-year terms of office, beginning on 1 January 1992. If he heard no



(The Chairman)

objection, he would take it that the Fifth Committee wished to recommend confirmation of those appointments.

46. It was so decided.

The meeting was suspended at 5.15 p.m. and was resumed at 5.35 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 107: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993  
(continued)

Status of technical innovations in the United Nations (continued) (A/C.5/46/1 and Corr.1 and A/46/7/Add.12)

Status of telecommunications activities in the United Nations (continued) (A/C.5/46/5 and A/46/7/Add.12)

Integrated management information system project (continued) (A/C.5/46/24 and A/46/7/Add.12)

Optical disk storage and retrieval system (continued) (A/C.5/45/58, A/C.5/46/26 and A/46/7/Add.12, A/46/88 and Corr.1)

47. Mr. BAUDOT (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division), replying to questions raised at an earlier meeting, said it was expected that the financing of the optical disk storage and retrieval system, would require the full amount allocated but no more. The true cost of the system, however, would not be known until the contracts required to complete it had been received. The budget for the project had not included provision for translation into languages other than English; the estimated cost of translation into one other language, which could be done after the system had been fully tested, was \$350,000. It was impossible to make an accurate estimate of the savings that might be realized through the non-implementation of projects superseded by the integrated management information system (IMIS), but it was believed that they would amount to several million dollars. Nor was it possible to estimate how many posts would be eliminated through the implementation of the system until after it was in place. The new system would certainly improve the efficiency of the Organization, but that did not always mean the elimination of posts.

48. With respect to a cost-benefit analysis, he could only repeat that the difficulties involved in undertaking such an analysis were great; however, more information would be provided to the Committee after the completion of the workflow analysis in 1992. With respect to the cost of terminating the project at the present stage, he said that the \$9.4 million spent on the project as of 31 October 1991 would be lost. In addition, approximately \$100,000 would be required to terminate the staff currently engaged in the project and \$800,000 would be needed to terminate the major contracts recently agreed to. The Secretariat remained confident that the project was developing well, and great interest in it had been expressed by other organizations of the United Nations system. The Secretariat also believed that its

/...

(Mr. Baudot)

implementation would enhance the Organization's efficiency and could be carried out on the basis of the present plan.

49. The Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/46/26) had correctly described the status of the project at the time the report had been prepared. The project was proceeding in accordance with the schedule indicated in the report, and the final system would be fully operational at the end of the first quarter or the beginning of the second quarter of 1992. With respect to maintenance costs, the supervisory committee for the project had recommended acceptance of the proposal submitted by the contractor, which would now be incorporated into the final contract.

50. In summary, the initial contract currently being negotiated with the contractor covered installation and acceptance of the hardware for phase I of the system, which would be installed in Geneva and New York by January 1992. Full installation of the system would be completed by the end of February, and it was anticipated that the system would be fully operational by the end of the second quarter of 1992.

51. A questionnaire had been sent to all Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York and 35 per cent of them had responded, all expressing interest in participating in the system. The Secretary-General did not propose to provide missions with terminals; the information in paragraph 22 of his report was intended merely as a guide to the cost of acquiring a computer, or of adapting an existing one, to serve as a retrieval station. Within the Secretariat, the policy was definitely not to place a terminal on the desk of every staff member. What was involved was the upgrading of workstations installed for other uses rather than the acquisition of workstations exclusively for optical disk storage and retrieval. As to whether the maintenance costs of the optical disk system had been understated, the Secretary-General's report if anything overstated the costs of maintaining the system once it was well established. The cost was likely to be less than 10 per cent of the total value of the equipment.

52. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) commended the members of the Technological Innovations Board on their efforts to ensure greater efficiency and rational use of resources in the United Nations. In their endeavours, the Board and its subsidiary organs should, however, bear in mind a number of important considerations. First and foremost, the credibility of the Secretary-General must not be undermined in any way - for example, by claiming that implementation of phase I of the optical disk project had begun when, as pointed out by the representative of France, that was not yet the case.

53. In addition, with several technological projects under way it was essential, as the Advisory Committee had indicated, that all units involved should coordinate their activities and harmonize their use of technologies in order to prevent any future incompatibility problems. Work should proceed on the basis of an information technology strategy suited to the carefully projected needs of the United Nations system. Furthermore, it should not be

(Mr. Tommo Monthe, Cameroon)

forgotten that innovations had been approved by Member States in the firm belief that they would not only be applied at Headquarters but extended to the regional commissions and field offices.

54. Speedy execution of projects was vital, as any delay could cause difficulties. Expenditures must be kept within reasonable limits and cost comparisons should be made to ensure that Member States continued to finance technological innovations in the knowledge that they stood to gain and were not simply allowing some countries to develop their markets. Lastly, the Secretariat should monitor project execution strictly and submit a comprehensive report on all technological projects that was coherent, pertinent and credible.

55. Mrs. CLIFF (United Kingdom) thanked the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division for his detailed answers, especially those concerning the cost of IMIS. Under the circumstances, and in the light of those replies, she wished to propose that the Fifth Committee should take a decision to abandon the IMIS project. However, her delegation was ready to consider the matter in informal consultations if other delegations so desired.

56. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) likewise welcomed the information provided and hoped that it would be made available in written form so that delegations could evaluate the status of the various projects more easily. His delegation supported the concept of the optical disk storage and retrieval system but still had doubts about the way in which the project was being implemented. Also, it appeared from the Advisory Committee's report (A/46/7/Add.12, para. 37) that the maintenance costs of the system had been understated by the Secretariat, an observation that was at variance with the information provided by the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division. Those matters should be discussed further in informal consultations. Lastly, his delegation shared the concerns voiced by the representative of the United Kingdom regarding the IMIS project and supported the proposal that it should be terminated.

57. Mr. MORDACQ (France), referring to his statement at the previous meeting concerning the inaccurate information given in the Secretary-General's report on the optical disk system (A/C.5/46/26), said the replies received from the Secretariat indicated that some progress had been made on the project since the issuance of the report on 29 October 1991. The Advisory Committee had made some judicious recommendations in its report regarding the need to keep the project costs under control (A/46/7/Add.12, paras. 41 and 42), particularly in calling for a detailed performance report on the completion of phase I before phase II was begun. Proposals might also be considered with a view to meeting the requirements partly from the regular budget and partly from peace-keeping operations and extrabudgetary activities. In addition, operating and maintenance costs would have to be closely monitored. His delegation took a flexible position on the matter and hoped that the Committee would be able to accept the proposals of the Secretary-General together with the recommendations of ACABQ.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.