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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1988-1989

QUESTION OF NAMIBIA

Programme budget implications of the recommendations of
the United Nations Council for Namibia in its report to
the General Assembly (A/42/24 (Part III) and Corr.1)

Addendum

Observations submitted by the Committee on Conferences pursuant
to paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 35/10 A of
3 November 1980

1. In accordance with paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 35/10 A of 3 November 1980, by which the Assembly decided that all proposals relating to the schedule of conferences and meetings made at sessions of the Assembly should be reviewed by the Committee on Conferences when administrative implications were being considered under the requirements of rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly, the Committee on Conferences met on 4 November 1987 to discuss certain aspects of the proposed programme of work of the United Nations Council for Namibia.

2. In particular, the Committee discussed the proposal contained in paragraph 16 (1) of draft resolution C contained in part five of the report of the Council to the General Assembly, document A/42/24 (Part III) and Corr.1. By that resolution, the Council would:

"Organize international and regional activities, as required, in order to obtain relevant information on all aspects of the situation in and relating to Namibia, in particular the exploitation of the people and resources of Namibia

by South African and other foreign economic interests, and to expose such activities, with a view to intensifying active support for the Namibian cause."

3. In accordance with that provision, and as explained further in paragraphs 18 and 19 of document A/42/24 (Part III), during 1988 the Council would organize four international and regional activities in Western Europe, North America and Japan.

4. That proposal was brought to the attention of the Committee on Conferences in view of the fact that no invitation was expected to be received from a Government to hold the activities on its territory, and the holding of these activities away from New York, the established headquarters of the Council, would therefore entail a departure from paragraphs 4 and 5 of General Assembly resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985.

5. Furthermore, the provision of verbatim transcripts, as requested by the Council in paragraph 19 of document A/42/24 (Part III), would constitute a departure from paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 41/177 D of 5 December 1986, which states that the Council for Namibia is entitled to receive summary records, and paragraph 9 of Assembly resolution 37/14 C of 16 November 1982, by which the Assembly decided:

"that those subsidiary organs that are entitled to receive written meeting records for all or some of their meetings shall receive them when meeting away from recognized United Nations conference centres only if there is a specific decision by the General Assembly for each case".

6. A number of delegations expressed concern over the short notice with which the meeting had been called, and pointed out that it was difficult for the Committee to make a recommendation when members had had so little time to study the relevant documentation.

7. Questions were raised concerning the request of the United Nations Council for Namibia for verbatim transcripts for the proposed activity, and the differences between such transcripts, verbatim records and summary records.

8. The Secretariat explained that verbatim transcripts were unofficial records produced at United Nations Headquarters and issued in one language only, with a very limited distribution. In order to produce the transcripts, it was necessary to send only one verbatim monitor to the site of the activity. If the production of official verbatim or summary records in all official languages were required on site, the number of staff accompanying the mission would have to be much larger, it was further explained.

9. Another delegation raised a question concerning the Council's efforts to secure invitations from Governments so that its meetings held away from New York would come under the provisions of section I, paragraph 5, of General Assembly resolution 40/243, by which the Assembly decided that United Nations bodies could hold sessions away from their established headquarters when a Government issuing an invitation for a session to be held within its territory had agreed to defray the actual additional costs involved.

10. In reply, the Secretariat stated that a formal request for an invitation could be made only after the proposed programme of work of the Council had been approved by the General Assembly. Even then, it had not proved easy to secure such invitations, although some Governments on whose territory activities had been held in the past had met some of the costs of those activities.

11. Another delegation stated that, in view of the political importance of the Council's work, the absence of invitations from Governments under paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 40/243 ought not to be a barrier to the Council's holding meetings away from its established headquarters.

12. In reply to a question on the choice of venues, the Secretariat informed the Committee that these were decided in principle by the Council in informal consultations with the Governments concerned. For costing purposes, before a formal decision was taken on a specific site, the most distant possible location in the region concerned was chosen.

13. A number of delegations expressed regret that, given the importance of the work of the Council, it should be necessary for the Committee on Conferences to have to call the Council before it each year to explain why it had to meet away from its established headquarters. To that end, it was suggested that consideration should be given to the possibility of providing a permanent waiver to enable the Council to do so, until Namibia became independent.

14. It was also noted that the request of the Council for the provision of verbatim transcripts seemed to be based on purely financial considerations. However, the provision of such transcripts in one language only seemed, in the opinion of the Committee, to have little utility. While the Committee had no objection to recommending to the General Assembly that it should explicitly authorize the Council to have verbatim transcripts of the proceedings of its proposed activities in 1988, the Committee would at the same time recommend to the General Assembly that the Council should be invited to evaluate its requirements for written meeting records for future such activities, bearing in mind, inter alia, the limited utility of verbatim transcripts and the need to reach a wider audience.

15. Finally, concerning invitations from Governments, the Committee noted the information provided by the Council to the effect that every effort was made to secure invitations from Governments, but that the Council had no control over the timeliness with which Governments responded to its requests, or whether they responded at all.

16. The Committee on Conferences therefore agreed to recommend to the General Assembly that the United Nations Council for Namibia should consider the possibility of setting a deadline for the receipt of invitations, so that if no invitations were forthcoming by the time the Council had submitted its programme of work to the Assembly for adoption it should be deemed that none would be issued and that all efforts aimed at securing an invitation had failed. That would then make it unnecessary for the Assembly to inquire of the Council whether it had made efforts to obtain invitations or not.

17. The Committee noted further than, as indicated in the relevant statement of programme budget implications (A/C.5/42/26, para. 28) that, subject to the assumption that the number and distribution of meetings and conferences in the next biennium is consistent with the pattern experienced over the past five years, no additional cost would be incurred under section 29 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1988-1989 as a result of the adoption of the draft resolution recommended by the Council.
