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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME OF WORK AND ESTABLISHMENT OF
PRIORITIES

Memorandum by the Secretary-General

1. The Economic and Social Council, at its eighteenth session, having considered a report by the Secretary-General on his "review of the organization and work of the Secretariat in the economic and social field" (E/2598), excerpts from which are annexed to the present memorandum, adopted on 5 August 1954 two resolutions 557 A and B (XVIII), relating to the review of the Commission's programme of work and establishment of priorities. The relevant provisions of these resolutions are reproduced in the Annex.
2. The other resolutions, adopted by the Economic and Social Council, which govern the procedure for review of the programme of work and establishment of priorities by its functional commissions are resolutions 324 (XI), 402 B (XIII), 451 A (XIV) and 497 C (XVI), all of which were brought to the attention of the Commission on the Status of Women in documents E/CN.6/188, E/CN.6/218 and E/CN.6/248, circulated respectively to the sixth, seventh and eighth sessions of the Commission.
3. The Commission will recall that resolution 402 B (XIII), referred to above, inter alia requests the Secretary-General to report to each session of the Commission on the action which he has taken to carry out the Commission's programmes according to the priorities previously established and to submit suggestions as to priorities.
4. The report on the action taken on the decisions reached by the Commission at its eighth session is contained in document E/CN.6/261.
5. The Secretary-General proposes to submit his suggestions concerning priorities for future work in the course of the Commission's ninth session.

ANNEX

Organization and Work of the Secretariat in the
Economic and Social Field

The Secretary-General presented to the eighteenth session of the Economic and Social Council a report on his "review of the organization and work of the Secretariat in the economic and social field" (E/2598). In paragraphs 2-6 the Secretary-General stated:

"2. ... It has been my aim to strengthen in every way I find possible the contribution the Secretariat can make towards the achievement of the fundamental aims of Article 55 of the Charter. I have been guided by the same broad priorities and have used the same criteria for the assessment of particular phases of the Secretariat's work. I too have had in mind the question whether the original importance of particular activities may have diminished and whether efforts in new directions were now called for; and how far it is possible further to integrate the economic and social work of the United Nations, especially in respect of the technical assistance programme.

"3. But my task and that of the Council have been in certain respects essentially different. In particular, I have had to consider whether particular activities entrusted to the Secretariat are within its proper sphere of competence; whether they are such that an international Secretariat can perform them effectively and efficiently; whether they are suitably assigned by the Council between the Secretariat and the specialized agencies; whether certain research projects might, if appropriate arrangements can be made for planning and direction by the Secretariat, be undertaken by private institutions in different countries. I have had to consider, further, how the administrative resources of the Secretariat should be distributed, what balance should be maintained between research and other activities, what system of arrangement of publications should be followed in order best to mobilize the limited resources of the Secretariat to the accomplishment of its tasks. My primary aim is to ensure that the Secretariat can best fulfil the responsibilities placed upon it. My reason for bringing forward the above considerations, in addition to

those of immediate concern to the Council, is that, irrespective of the total funds available, there is a limit to what can be handled effectively by the organization, given the responsibilities that must be assumed by the senior staff.

"4. The Council has laid down as an 'overriding objective' of the total economic and social programme of the United Nations, the promotion of the economic and social development of under-developed countries. I propose to make this aim the guiding principle in the elaboration of the programmes and projects within the Secretariat, directly concerned with or necessary for the achievement of that objective. This can and should be accompanied by continued pursuit of the extension and promotion of the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

"5. In the pursuit of these objectives, there must be some reduction in work of lesser importance; and it is with this aspect of the problem that the following sections of this paper are mainly concerned. I make no recommendation for the elimination of any major programme or project which has been decided upon by the General Assembly or the Council. On the other hand, in line with the reorientation of the Secretariat's work referred to above, I look towards a shift of emphasis from certain of the existing information services and clearing-house activities, a more limited framework for the prosecution of certain work requested of the Secretariat in order to bring it within the proper sphere of the Secretariat's competence, the reconsideration of certain low-priority projects by the organs concerned, the recognition of the full responsibility of specialized agencies for particular tasks clearly within their mandate, the taking over, under the Secretariat's general guidance, of certain research, training and other tasks by universities and other private institutions, and a reduction in the number and length of documents, including the discontinuation, or reduction in the frequency, of certain periodical publications.

"6. How these general recommendations may be applied to the work of the present Departments of Economic and Social Affairs raises complex questions and has been the subject of prolonged and careful consideration. At this stage, as stated earlier, the indications I can give are neither exhaustive nor final. Nor can I attempt to deal with each area of work in a strictly

uniform way. In some cases, concrete proposals are made, in others I set out the lines along which action should be developed without making specific proposals, in others again I confine myself to raising questions for the consideration of the Council. I attach the greatest importance to the discretion accorded to the Secretary-General under existing Council decisions in regard to the scheduling of work and the use of the Secretariat's staff and resources; and I conceive my forthcoming consultations with the Council as a stage in a continuing process of co-operation which should gradually increase the usefulness of the work of the Secretariat in the service of the Member States."

With respect to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women the following paragraphs of the Secretary-General's report are relevant:

"23. In the course of my review, I have examined each of the projects requested of the Secretariat in the field of human rights in the light of the long-range purposes of the Council and the General Assembly and such considerations as the proper limitations upon the scope of Secretariat action and the proper distribution of functions between the Secretariat and the specialized agencies. At the Council's 17th session, I called attention to certain of these considerations in connexion with proposals concerning freedom of information. My review, however, has convinced me that in other areas of work also it would be desirable for the Council and the General Assembly carefully to review the mandates given to the Secretariat. By way of example, I might mention two resolutions of the Council involving a great volume of work which has produced little tangible result. I refer to resolutions 75 (V) and 76 (V), as amended, whereby the Secretariat is asked to prepare for the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities confidential lists containing summaries of the many thousands of communications received each year which allege violations of human rights.

"24. My review has further made it clear that, rather than placing responsibility for particular phases of work jointly upon the Secretariat and one or more specialized agencies, it is desirable that, wherever possible, responsibility should be placed squarely upon the specialized

agencies concerned, in so far as the work falls directly within their statutory competence."

Having considered the Secretary-General's report on his review of the organization and work of the Secretariat in the economic and social fields (E/2598) the Economic and Social Council in resolution 557 A (XVIII):

1. Welcomes the attention which the Secretary-General is giving to the above matters;
2. Endorses the approach adopted by the Secretary-General in the above documents to the problem of the concentration of the efforts and resources of the United Nations and the specialized agencies;
3. Expresses its general approval of the suggestions relating to the priorities and programme set forth in sections II, III, IV and V of the Secretary-General's report;
4. Invites the Secretary-General, taking into account the discussions in the Council:
 - (a) To take such action as is appropriate to put his suggestions into effect;
 - (b) To submit to the commissions, for their consideration, his plans regarding publications and studies and, in this connexion, to call their attention to General Assembly resolution 789 (VIII) concerning the control and limitation of documents;
 - (c) Pending consideration by the commissions and any further action by the Council, to proceed with his plans in accordance with sub-paragraph (a) above;
 - (d) To pursue his review of the substantive work programme of the Secretariat in the economic and social fields and to furnish further reports to the Council;
5. Transmits the Secretary-General's report together with the records of the discussions thereon in the Council to the specialized agencies for appropriate attention.

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Annex

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Furthermore in resolution 557 B (XVIII) the Council instructed the Commissions:

- (a) To concentrate their efforts on issues of major importance and to avoid recommending activities not likely to make a substantial contribution to the promotion of the objectives of the United Nations;
- (b) To submit to the Council for prior approval all requests for new studies or other projects which would require additional budgetary provisions or substantial changes in the work programmes.