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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 40th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. AMNEUS (Sweden)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The CHAIRMAN said that when delegations asked the Secretariat to provide written replies, they should submit their own questions in writing or read them out sufficiently slowly to be taken down.
2. Mr. MAKTARI (Yemen), pointing out that the General Assembly had recently adopted a resolution on regard for the equal status of the official languages of the United Nations, inquired as to the language in which the Secretariat's replies would be drafted.
3. The CHAIRMAN said that the Secretariat's replies would be drafted and read out in one of the Organization's working languages, and interpretation would be provided into all official languages.

AGENDA ITEMS 115 AND 116: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1988-1989 AND PROGRAMME PLANNING (continued) (A/42/3, A/42/6 and Corr.1, A/42/7 and Add.2, A/42/16 (Part I) and Add.1 and A/42/16 (Part II), A/42/512, 532 and 640; A/C.5/42/2/Rev.1)

First reading (continued)

Section 13 - Economic Commission for Africa (continued)

4. Mr. GOMEZ (Controller) said that the problems cited at the previous meeting by the Cameroonian representative and others raised the fundamental question of how priorities were established during the various stages of the programming process and reflected in the complete set of budget proposals, at the individual output level and in the overall introduction to the budget document. Document A/42/674 clearly did not satisfy the request made by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) in paragraph 138 of its report (A/42/16 (Part I)), for it gave no indication of how far the priority assigned by the Secretary-General to African economic recovery and development was actually reflected in the proposed programme budget. The problem had been raised in the context of section 13, but evidently affected all sections. Outlining the conditions in which the proposed programme budget for 1988-1989 had been drawn up, he admitted that, for lack of time and owing to the constraints imposed by General Assembly resolution 41/213, the Secretariat had been quite unable to follow up satisfactorily on the CPC request. When a priority area had been defined for the entire proposed programme budget - in the present case, African economic recovery and development - it was important to ensure that it was reflected in the programme-by-programme allocation of resources, especially in the case of programmes and activities which were the joint responsibility of a number of organizations, such as the World Food Programme which was jointly controlled by FAO and the United Nations. In such a case the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) obviously needed to ensure interorganizational co-ordination. The Secretariat had originally thought it could

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provide the information requested by CPC when the outline of the next proposed programme budget was introduced, in 1988, but it was still not sure what method it should use to do so. In any event, there was little likelihood that the report could be submitted before the second reading of the budget, or even by the end of the year. The Secretariat therefore sought the Fifth Committee's leave to submit the report the following year, on the understanding that it would first be considered by CPC and ACABQ.

5. Mr. IADJOUI (Algeria) said that if the Committee had been given the clarifications now provided by the Controller at the beginning of its consideration of the budget, its task would have been made a great deal easier. The Secretariat promised to supply the information requested by CPC on the priority accorded to African economic recovery and development towards the middle of 1988, but Member States had no guarantee that that information would be taken into account in the budget for the biennium 1988-1989. In the case of section 13, the priority set in the introduction to the budget proposals should be reflected at the programme level and in the budget estimates proper. His delegation could find nothing new among the programmes and outputs to suggest that the priority had been properly taken into account. On the budgetary front, it was paradoxical that, while priority was being given to Africa's economic recovery, the appropriation requested for ECA was over \$2 million lower than that established for 1986-1987. His delegation would like to know the reasons for the decline, and in which areas cuts had been made.

6. Mr. MONTHE (Cameroon) thanked the Controller for his frankness in acknowledging that document A/42/674 did not really satisfy the request made by CPC in paragraph 138 of its report, and that the Secretariat was still uncertain how to proceed in order to ensure that the priorities set by the Secretary-General had been taken into account. A number of basic points should be recalled. At the special session of the General Assembly devoted to Africa, the African States had identified a number of crucial problems and defined priorities, enabling the Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development to be drawn up. Figures had even been provided on the resources needed to put the Programme into effect and the proportion which should come from the international community. On that basis, the Secretary-General could determine within ACC what support the United Nations would provide for the Programme of Action; similarly, on the basis of the priorities established in the final document adopted at the special session, CPC should have been able to decide what activities - which subprogrammes - came within the purview of the United Nations. The Secretary-General should thus have been able to define a number of outputs and submit his proposals to the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board. If that procedure had been followed, it would have been easy to see that the priority attached to the Programme of Action had been given concrete expression in the Organization's budget proposals in the form of 3 subprogrammes, 50 programme elements and 20 outputs. Instead, one could not escape the conclusion that the Secretariat had been very slow to identify the programmes and activities undertaken pursuant to the resolution adopted at the special session. Since the Programme of Action was to end in 1990, it was unthinkable to wait until 1988, as the Controller requested, for a satisfactory

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account of the action taken in the context of the budget proposals for 1988-1989. In the circumstances, and given the patent inadequacies of document A/42/674, his delegation was loath to take a decision on section 13.

7. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya) commented that, although the Secretary-General had taken steps to ensure that the proposed programme budget reflected the priority he attached to the status of women, he had been content to state his intentions regarding the priority attaching to the Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, and specific action would be put forward only in 1988. In the circumstances, and bearing in mind the points raised by the representative of Cameroon, Member States might stipulate what contribution the Organization should make. Before taking a decision on section 13, the Committee should ask the Secretariat, in consultation with Committee members, to draw up a set of specific proposals indicating how the \$2 million which the Advisory Committee recommended deleting could be restored to the budget and used to reflect the priority which the Secretary-General and Member States agreed to accord to Africa.

8. Mr. DEVREUX (Belgium) said that the questions raised by the African delegations had highlighted one of the Organization's basic problems, that of giving effect to established priorities. Priorities had to be reflected in administrative organization, in the contents of activities and in the allocation of resources. Yet it seemed that the definition and application of priorities was all too often an essentially administrative or even academic process and the budgetary procedure was only marginal. When budget growth was low or negative, the Organization was doomed to stagnation. In 1985 his delegation had pointed out that 80 per cent of additional resources, of the order of 1 per cent of the ECA's budget, had been allocated to executive direction and management, making it impossible to meet the urgent needs of the moment. It was to be hoped that in the current exercise the priorities would be accurately reflected in the revised estimates to be submitted in the spring of 1989.

9. Mr. MURRAY (Trinidad and Tobago), referring to paragraph 138 of the CPC report, said that the report requested from the Secretary-General on the measures he intended to take to ensure that due consideration was given to the priority assigned to the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development was of vital importance from the point of view not only of section 13 but also of all priorities within the framework of the proposed programme budget. There were two aspects to the assignment of priorities. On the one hand, the political will needed in order to resolve specific problems had to be mobilized; on the other hand, that will had to be translated into the allocation of human and financial resources. To that end, as the General Assembly had pointed out in resolution 41/213, it was necessary to hold extensive consultations on the subject of priorities. Those appearing in the proposed budget programme emanated from the Secretary-General. The recommended report should indicate not only the measures to be taken to ensure that resources were allocated in conformity with the priorities, but also the manner in which priorities would be assigned in the future.

10. Mr. MONTHE (Cameroon) proposed that the Committee should suspend its consideration of section 13 until the Ambassador of the African countries were in a position to issue instructions to the delegations upon the completion of consultations to be held in the next few days.
11. The CHAIRMAN remarked that the matter under consideration, being of concern to almost one third of the Member States, was extremely important. The Committee should therefore devote to it as much time as was necessary.
12. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya) requested that the decision eventually taken on section 13 should be based on the estimate submitted by the Secretary-General rather than that recommended by the Advisory Committee. However, it would be a mistake to wait until 1988 before deciding on the allocation of supplementary resources.
13. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) endorsed the suggestion by the representative of Cameroon. In any case, the resources which would have been cut under the Advisory Committee's recommendation could be employed elsewhere within the section, and would not necessarily go to the items covered by the initial estimates.
14. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya) explained that his proposal was not incompatible with that made by the representative of Cameroon and that it could be considered later.
15. Mr. FONTAINE-ORTIZ (Cuba) said that, in his delegation's view, the Committee's decisions concerning the other regional Commissions were provisional; the final decisions would be taken at a later stage.
16. Mr. LADJOUI (Algeria) said that he too thought it preferable to suspend consideration of section 13 so as to enable consultations to take place, not only with the Ambassadors of African countries, but also with the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and with the Secretariat. His delegation did not consider the reduction recommended by the Advisory Committee acceptable and also felt that the Secretary-General's initial estimate of \$44 million completely failed to reflect the priority assigned to Africa.
17. Mr. SINGH (Fiji) proposed that the Committee should suspend consideration of section 13, as already suggested.
18. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to proceed to the consideration of section 14.

Section 14 - Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

19. The CHAIRMAN said that the estimate submitted by the Secretary-General under section 14 amounted to \$33,015,900 and that recommended by the Advisory Committee to \$31,944,500. The recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination relating to the section appeared in paragraphs 142 to 144 of the CI report.

20. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the general recommendations of ACABQ were reflected with regard to section 14 in a total reduction of \$1,071,400, as indicated in the Advisory Committee's first report. The section was not affected by the proposals made by the Secretary-General in his progress report and update.

21. Mr. YONIS (Iraq) recalled that matters relating to the proposed budget programmes had been discussed at the April session of CPC, which had concluded that the exceptionally high vacancy rate at ESCWA had adversely affected the implementation of the Commission's activities and that the Secretary-General should take all necessary steps in order to enable the Commission to meet its personnel requirements in accordance with General Assembly resolution 39/243. That resolution, as well as the conclusions of CPC, had been reaffirmed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1987/68. His delegation felt that the problem had become extremely urgent; the Secretariat should collaborate with the Executive Secretary of ESCWA with a view to recruiting competent personnel to fill the vacancies, thus avoiding the perpetuation of the Commission's situation in the preceding bienniums.

22. Ever since the establishment of ESCWA there had been large uncommitted balances at the end of each biennium because programmes affecting the region and approved by the General Assembly had not been implemented. The proposed ESCWA budget was in fact largely composed of those balances rather than of new resources allocated to the region. In his delegation's view, the Commission's next budget should include at least such resources as would make it possible to compensate for activities which the Commission had not been able to implement.

23. Since the reduction recommended by ACABQ resulted principally from the high vacancy rate, his delegation considered that the amount of the reduction could be used by the Executive Secretary of the Commission to recruit the necessary personnel. The confirmation of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on that point would be welcome.

24. Mr. OTIMAN (Jordan) noted that the reductions proposed by ACABQ were based principally on two factors, namely, the personnel turnover rate and the uncommitted balances, and that those reductions had been applied across the board to all sections of the proposed budget. In its general statement his delegation had inquired into the Secretariat's view of the method employed by ACABQ in that connection, but the question had so far remained unanswered.

25. Even if the steady increase in the vacancy rate at ESCWA was partly due to the Commission's particular circumstances since its establishment, it was also due to the recruitment freeze. His delegation had already pointed out that there were countries in the region which could propose qualified candidates. It hoped the vacant posts would be filled in spite of the recruitment freeze, which would be consistent with CPC's recommendation in paragraph 142 of its report. His delegation hoped that the recommendation would be carefully studied and translated into action. The Commission's extrabudgetary resources were also declining, whereas the Professional category expenditures they covered were increasing, a

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trend that could hardly be called positive. The rate of real growth in the appropriation requested by the Secretary-General for ESCWA was minus 1.1 per cent, the lowest rate of all the regional commissions.

26. Programme activities provided for in section 14 should focus more on four priority sectors: food and agriculture, natural resources (particularly water resources), the least developed countries of the region and economic integration. Given the persistence of a number of adverse factors affecting the Commission, factors against which the Secretariat could not always take action, his delegation expressed the hope that the Secretary-General or his representatives would show special concern in dealing with the problems of ESCWA.

27. Mrs. EMERSON (Portugal), referring to the high vacancy rate at all the regional commissions, noted that the Secretariat usually had difficulty in filling posts at field offices and that incentive measures had been alluded to under another agenda item. Her delegation wondered to what extent the problem was in fact due to the implementation of recommendation 15 of the Group of 18 and to the recruitment freeze. For example, it was not because of the recruitment freeze that ECA had been unable to fill a P-5 post provided for in General Assembly resolution 39/238. The reductions recommended by ACABQ were merely a reflection of vacancy rates, and financial resources as such could not resolve a problem whose cause lay elsewhere. Perhaps the Secretariat could confirm that the solution was more likely to be found in the incentive measures considered by ICSC.

28. Mr. SINGH (Fiji) said that as the Fifth Committee continued its reading of the various sections of the proposed budget, it became evident that the largest item of expenditure was conference servicing, which was a most unproductive activity that did nothing to further the Organization's foremost aim of improving the well-being of mankind. Fiji was not minimizing conference services as such, but rather was pointing out that United Nations bodies were turning out more and more words and requiring more and more conference services. At ESCWA, for example, an amount of \$3,643,200 was allocated for conference services. Next, as a rule, came the section entitled "Executive direction and management", i.e., bureaucracy. His delegation hoped that the Secretariat would give the matter its attention and endeavour to contain the growth.

29. The Secretariat should explain why there were no appropriations for the environment in the regular ESCWA budget, in contrast to the budgets of the other regional commissions.

30. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee's recommendations on the turnover deduction rate did not imply a reduction in posts at ESCWA. Once the Secretary-General had decided how recommendation 15 of the Group of 18 should apply to that regional commission, the Advisory Committee's recommendations would in no way hinder action by the Secretariat to fill the remaining vacant posts during the biennium 1988-1989. He had already pointed out several times that the reductions

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recommended were purely indicative, pending the submission by the Secretary-General of revised estimates which, for a number of budget sections, would be completely different from the current figures.

31. As the representative of Portugal had commented and as he himself had already said, the recruitment freeze might have some effect on the vacancy rate but the problem in certain regional commissions dated from long before. Despite the criticism it had had to face, the Advisory Committee maintained that financial resources could not of themselves fill posts. It was more relevant to find out why staff did not stay at the duty stations concerned. At one time, for example, ECA had had more translators than posts and the translator training programme had had to be suspended; but once the translators had completed their stipulated terms of service, they had left ECA and no other translators could be found to take their places, although ECA once again had vacant posts. As for the recommendations of ICSC on the subject, he felt that their implications for the regional commissions should be considered, but thought it unlikely that they would solve all the problems faced by the regional commissions.

32. Mr. OTHMAN (Jordan) said that his delegation fully agreed with the analysis by the Chairman of ACABQ. One of the reasons the Secretariat had given for ESCWA's high vacancy rate was that some countries in the region were unable to propose candidates, chiefly because they needed human resources more than the Commission did. That had prompted his delegation to observe that the region also comprised other countries which were prepared to propose qualified candidates and the Secretariat could have recruited nationals of those countries, if only provisionally, for fixed terms. Perhaps the Secretariat could clarify the matter for the Fifth Committee. Condition of service constituted another aspect of the problem. In addition to the conflict in the region, which had lasted for some time, the general conditions of service offered by the United Nations were perhaps not sufficiently competitive to attract qualified personnel to difficult duty stations. In a number of cases, the argument that the salaries and benefits of United Nations civil servants were too high was unfounded.

33. Mr. BAUDOT (Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division), replying to a question from the Jordanian delegation, said that in the specific case of ESCWA, exceptionally, permission had been granted to recruit candidates from overrepresented countries. It seemed, however, that few candidates had applied, perhaps for the very reasons the Jordanian representative had given. In any case, the Secretary-General was fully aware of the Commission's specific problems and was making every effort to help resolve them. At a future meeting, the Secretariat would give explanations regarding the incentive measures and the vacancy management system, subjects which had been raised by the representatives of India, Portugal and Iraq and which concerned not only the regional commissions but most departments as well.

34. Replying to the representative of Fiji, he said that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was usually responsible for activities related to the environment and that ESCWA had not requested a regular budget appropriation under

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that heading. If, as the Jordanian delegation had indicated, programmes were dispersed in the proposed budget under consideration, that was because it was a transitional budget which reflected mandates in their current form. The Secretariat had, of course, considered the possibility of transfers from other regional commissions to ESCWA, but it was mainly on the basis of the revisions in the medium-term plan, which CPC and ACABQ would be considering in the spring of 1988, that priorities would be changed and activities consolidated.

35. In response to a point raised earlier by Canada concerning the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 39/127 and 40/105, he wished to explain, with regard to the former resolution, that senior women's programme officers posts at the regional commissions had been regularized in the 1986-1987 programme budget, either through the establishment of posts or through transfers, and that the posts in question were one P-5 post at ESCAP, one P-3 post and one local level post at ECLAC, one P-5 post at ESCWA and two P-4 posts at ECA. Where the latter resolution was concerned, the Secretary-General had already given instructions to programme directors a year earlier to take due account of the provisions of the resolution in drawing up their budget proposals, which was in keeping with the recommendations made by the Commission on the Status of Women. It could be seen from the various sections of the proposed budget already considered by the Committee that the regional commissions' work programmes contained activities relating to women and that, in comparison with the programme budget for the biennium 1986-1987, there had been a marked increase in the number of subprogrammes containing such activities. In document A/42/273/Add.1 the Secretary-General had made a compilation of mandates and programmes related to the integration of women in economic development.

36. Mr. HARAN (Israel) said that from the outset Israel had been excluded from ESCWA, even though geographically it formed part of Western Asia and despite the fact that the PLO had been admitted. In view of that discriminatory treatment, which disregarded the principles of universality and the sovereign equality of States upon which the United Nations was based, his delegation wished to request that the decision on section 14 should be put to a vote. Israel would vote against the decision.

37. Mr. OTHMAN (Jordan) said that the issue of ESCWA membership did not fall within the Committee's competence. It was being dealt with by the Economic and Social Council, which had been considering it for two years.

38. Mr. SHARFI (Sudan) said that he endorsed the remarks made by the representative of Jordan and wished to draw attention to the fact that the Chairman himself had already rightly said that the Committee should not consider the political aspects of the matters under consideration.

39. Mr. MAKTARI (Yemen) said that he wished to suggest that the issue in question should not be put to a vote, as requested by the Zionist entity, until the Secretariat had responded to the points raised by Iraq and Jordan, as scheduled for Tuesday, 24 November.

40. Mr. HARAN (Israel), speaking on a point of order, said that Israel should be referred to only by its official name, as was the custom among civilized peoples and as required by the rules of the United Nations.

41. Mr. OTHMAN (Jordan) said that, while the suggestion put forward by Yemen was relevant, his delegation was ready to adopt a decision on section 14 immediately, if the Committee so wished.

42. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee decided to endorse the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination on section 14 (A/42/16 (Part I), paras. 142-144).

43. It was so decided.

44. Ms. SHERWOOD (United States of America), speaking in explanation of vote, said that she would vote against the ACABQ recommendation in question because ESCWA, being a regional commission, should admit all Member States.

45. The recommendation of the Advisory Committee for an appropriation of \$31,944,500 under section 14 for the biennium 1988-1989 was approved in first reading by 81 votes to 2, with one abstention.

46. Mr. OTHMAN (Jordan), speaking in explanation of vote after the vote, said that he had voted in favour of the decision just adopted. He wished to draw attention to the fact that Israel had requested admission not only to ESCWA but also to the Economic Commission for Europe and that there had been no objection in the latter case.

47. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland), referring to section 15, said that he wished to request the Secretariat to provide a breakdown of expenditure on consultants charged against that section in the biennium 1986-1987, showing the geographical distribution of the experts employed.

Section 18 - United Nations Environment Programme

48. The CHAIRMAN said that the appropriation of \$10,611,200 requested by the Secretary-General had been reduced to \$10,286,500 by ACABQ and the relevant CPC comments were set forth in paragraphs 161 and 162 of document A/42/16 (Part I).

49. Mr. LADJOUZI (Algeria) said that he wished to know whether the overall reductions recommended by ACABQ also applied to section 18.

50. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), responding to the point raised by the representative of Algeria, said that that was the case. The overall recommendations made by ACABQ applied to all sections, with the exception of sections 24, 30, 32 and 33, as shown in table 1 in the first ACABQ report.

51. Mr. LADJOUZI (Algeria) said that, since some UNEP activities - such as those relating to desertification - chiefly concerned Africa, he wished to make a formal request to the Secretariat for an explanation, as provided in the case of sections 6 and 13, of how the priority accorded to Africa was actually reflected in programmes under section 18.

52. Mr. BOUR (France) said that he welcomed the fact that the UNEP Governing Council had decided to reduce the duration of its sessions and of its preparatory Committee's meetings and to adopt a biennial cycle. He noted that the financial implications of those changes were set forth in paragraphs 18.8 to 18.16 of the proposed programme budget. Moreover, in decision 14/4, which had been adopted by the Second Committee, the UNEP Governing Council had taken the formal step of establishing a committee of permanent representatives. He wished to ask the Secretariat whether provision had already been made under section 18 for the resources required for the functioning of the committee in question, including the conference services provided for in rules 63 and 64 of the rules of procedure of the UNEP Governing Council. If not, he wondered whether the Secretariat intended to submit revised estimates. If the Secretariat's intention was to provide the necessary conference services by redeploying resources, he wished to know which of the possible solutions available to it it planned to opt for (such as recruiting local staff or holding meetings on dates coinciding with those of other conferences being held at Nairobi that required such services as interpretation). His delegation would have difficulty in expressing an opinion on section 18 before having been given such details.

53. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should continue consideration of section 18 at the following meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.