



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 43rd 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 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 123: UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION (continued) (A/42/7/Add.7, A/42/30 and Corr.1; A/C.5/42/19, 20, 23 and 38)

AGENDA ITEM 124: UNITED NATIONS PENSION SYSTEM: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS JOINT STAFF PENSION BOARD (continued) (A/42/7/Add.7, A/42/9 and Corr.1, A/42/682; A/C.5/42/13, 21 and 23)

1. Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh) said that the crucial task of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) could be achieved only if it was allowed sufficient independence in its deliberations. His delegation was in full agreement with the Commission's belief that there was no need to modify its mandate, given that its monitoring responsibility was already clearly set out in articles 1, 9, 13, 14 and 17 of its statute. It also agreed that there should be no change in entitlements with respect to annual leave or use of the education grant for post-secondary studies. With regard to the consolidation of post adjustment into base salary, it urged Member States to adopt the alternative method set out in paragraphs 110 to 118 of the Commission's report, with a view to avoiding any deficit in the Tax Equalization Fund or additional expenditures.
2. His delegation shared the Secretary-General's concern over the supplementary payments made to nationals of certain States, believing that such payments led to discrimination and negated the principle of equal pay. The Commission should give careful consideration to that concern and endeavour ensure that United Nations salaries remained competitive. The effects of inflation and currency fluctuations on the post adjustment system had already given rise to concern among United Nations staff members in certain parts of the world and would probably cause a decline in staff efficiency if they remained unchecked. His delegation was pleased to note the provision of a temporary solution through use of a remuneration correction factor and believed that the factor should be applied in all cases where salaries had decreased or depreciated. It also looked forward to the early issue of the Commission's study on a long-term solution of the problem.
3. Conditions of service in the field, as a critical element of programme delivery, deserved priority treatment. His delegation, concerned by the financial difficulties facing some field staff, generally accepted the Commission's recommendation on the matter. It also generally accepted the Commission's recommendations with respect to job classification, performance appraisal and the recognition of merit, mobility of staff, implementation of the recommendations and decisions of the Commission and review of its rules of procedure.
4. His delegation was pleased to note that the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund had performed well despite recent events in the financial markets and hoped that all steps would be taken to minimize the adverse effects of market fluctuations.
5. While aware of their financial implications, his delegation believed that the

(Mr. Kabir, Bangladesh)

Commission's recommendations were vital in order to retain and attract competent staff and thus to serve the long-term interests of the United Nations common system.

6. Mr. FULCHERI (Chairman of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board) said that the many changes which had taken place in the pension system since the end of 1982 would have to be closely monitored in the years ahead, in order to ensure that the Fund was financially secure and provided reasonable and equitable benefits, taking due account of the decisions taken by member organizations in respect of their budgets, staffing and personnel policies. With regard to the Board's determination to improve the Fund's financial situation and to remedy the inequitable loss of benefits faced by prospective retirees at certain locations, he was appreciative of the broad support for proposals to increase the contribution rate as of 1 January 1988 and to establish, as an interim measure, a "floor" for the relationship between the initial pension in local currency and the United States dollar pension entitlement. He hoped that such broad support would ultimately be reflected in the resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee to the General Assembly. It should be noted that the margin between United Nations pensions and those of the comparator civil service was now approximately 19.7 per cent on average.

7. The Board had closely followed the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, as well as views expressed in the Fifth Committee, in its formulation of recommendations to reduce the actuarial imbalance. Despite the reference in General Assembly resolutions 38/233 and 39/246 to a need for "a co-operative effort by member organizations, participants and beneficiaries", the largest share of the burden in effecting reductions had thus far been borne by the participants. Meanwhile, budgetary savings amounting to some \$16.6 million each year had been achieved for the member organizations.

8. The extensive support for the Board's proposed interim measures to arrest the continuing decline in the initial local-currency-track pensions at certain locations was gratifying. Note had been taken of delegations' requests that other features of the pension system should be addressed during the next comprehensive review in 1990, including the two-track pension adjustment system. Every effort would also be made to develop a simpler and more comprehensible pension system, despite the difficulties arising from inflation and currency fluctuations.

9. He had been pleased by the support expressed for maintaining the tripartite composition of the Board and increasing its membership from 21 to 33. Since the Board's primary function was to administer the Fund, its composition must adequately reflect the interests and concerns of the three constituent groups of each member organization. While the Board had made every effort to arrive at compromises which were technically sound, financially reasonable and politically realistic, it was always aware that the fate of all its proposals rested ultimately with the General Assembly. It was determined to remain responsive to the concerns of Member States, believing that it was in the interest of all that recommendations should be based on the full and effective participation of all parties concerned.

(Mr. Fulcheri)

10. The opposition expressed to the creation of a category of "representatives" might have arisen from a misunderstanding of the Board's role and objectives. As a result of the need to limit membership, those constituent groups which did not provide a member at a particular session of the Board could only take part in its work if they attended as observers, the numbers of whom were not subject to any limits. The Board proposed to limit such participation to one "representative" for each group without, however, according voting rights to such "representatives". The Board would distinguish the status of the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants from that of observers by extending the status of "representative" to two persons designated by that Federation.

11. In thanking delegations for their support for the Board's recommendations, including the recommendation to continue the Emergency Fund, he also assured the Committee, on behalf of the Controller, that careful note had been taken of the various views expressed and that every effort would continue to be made to derive the maximum return from the Fund's investments.

AGENDA ITEMS 115 and 116: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1988-1989 AND PROGRAMME PLANNING (continued) (A/41/591 and Add.1, A/41/806 and Corr.1, A/42/3, A/42/6 and Corr.1, A/42/7 and Add.2, A/42/16 (Part I) and Add.1 and (Part II), A/42/295, 512, 532, 640, 673 and 724 and Corr.1; A/C.5/42/2/Rev.1)

First reading (continued)

Section 27. Public information (continued)

12. Mr. DEVREUX (Belgium) said that the Advisory Committee had recalled, in paragraph 27.12 of its report, that the General Assembly had decided at its fortieth session that the Yearbook of the United Nations should be issued in an abbreviated edition until the backlog had been eliminated. Apparently, the Department of Public Information (DPI) was still examining the possibility of a reduction in the number of pages and consulting other departments and specialized agencies on its possible impact on the Yearbook as a source of information. He asked why the Department was again studying a matter on which a decision had already been taken, and why was it considering only the possibility of abridging the publication and not the effect that delays had had in diminishing its interest. Why, too, was DPI consulting only other departments and specialized agencies? If they were the only readers, the Yearbook was not really a publication but rather an internal document. He believed that the Yearbook had other readers. He would like to know the total cost of publishing the Yearbook, including staff and rental costs, and in regard to the latest edition, apparently that for 1983, he would like to know how many copies had been sold and how many distributed and what share of the overall cost had been covered by sales.

13. Mr. HARAN (Israel) said that although there had been complaints about the press releases, he felt that some inaccuracies were inevitable when speed was the major consideration and noted that the necessary corrections were also made very quickly. In his delegation's view, the press releases were valuable primarily, not to the press, whose interest in the work of Committees was very limited, but to

(Mr. Haran, Israel)

delegations, particularly small delegations which could not cover all meetings. The Department should therefore be encouraged to continue the press releases and to improve their speed and accuracy.

14. Another important DPI publication was the press release it issued after each General Assembly session containing the text of all resolutions and decisions adopted. The "Roundup", as it was known informally, was a mine of information, in particular because it showed how delegations had voted on the various resolutions.

15. A new approach to information activities seemed to be emerging which was concerned with the United Nations "image". In his view, DPI should not be engaged in a public relations exercise. It was not the purpose of DPI or of the Organization to present the public with a manufactured "image" but rather with information from which the public could deduce the true image. It was universally acknowledged that the United Nations main purpose was the promotion of international peace and security. Reference to the programme narrative for programme element 2.1 of subprogramme 2, would show that of the 10 outputs referred to, 6 were devoted to Palestine, Israel and similar subjects. That seemed to suggest that the main work of the United Nations related to Palestine and Israel. The impression was that the many other pressing issues in the world did not exist for DPI. As long as information was presented in such a biased and unrealistic fashion, totally divorced from the real world, all efforts to create an improved image would be in vain.

16. Mr. MURRAY (United Kingdom) said that, to a certain extent, all the fascicles of the programme budget had an element of fiction, because they represented the broad spectrum of activities as they were in the biennium 1986-1987 rather than as they would be in 1988-1989. That was particularly true of the Department of Public Information, of which an in-depth review had been taking place for the last few months. His delegation believed that the substantial funds allocated for information activities under the regular budget should lead to an accurate, objective well-targeted and effective information output. The impression was, however, of scattered efforts ranging over all the media, rather than a selective and thus more effective approach.

17. The Advisory Committee noted in paragraph 27.8 of its report that the amount requested under section 27 by no means represented the total resources devoted to public information. The table on page 135 showed that an additional \$11.3 million was devoted to public information activities outside DPI. It was not the first time that the Advisory Committee had made such an observation, nor the first time it had asked to have that information included in the programme budget proposals. DPI should be in a position to provide full information if any department was, and he hoped that in future the information requested would be provided under section 27.

18. In paragraph 27.14 of its report, the Advisory Committee noted, on the subject of Development Forum, that contributions from participating organizations had declined over time while production costs had increased. His delegation had long had reservations about regular budget funding for Development Forum. He would like

(Mr. Murray, United Kingdom)

further information on the way in which the contributions of the participating organizations were arrived at. No clear pattern seemed to emerge from the table following paragraph 27.13 in the Advisory Committee's report. He wondered whether the question was in fact decided by the availability of funds. He would like to know whether, in practice, contributions from the participating organizations and income from the sale of the business edition covered the full cost of publishing the Development Forum, or whether a balancing item was regularly required under section 29 to cover the amount not met. He had read with surprise, in paragraph 27.12 of the Advisory Committee's report, that two years after the General Assembly decision to issue the United Nations Yearbook in abbreviated form, that had not yet taken place. He would like an explanation of the excessive delay in acting on that decision.

19. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that a recent document referring to the News Digest, the United Nations Chronicle and the Yearbook (A/AC.198/118), contained a statement to the effect that the Committee on Information might wish to indicate its opinion regarding the desirability of continuing the United Nations Chronicle, the News Digest and the Yearbook in their present forms, considering their target audiences, format and periodicity. He wondered how the Secretariat could again ask the Committee's opinion regarding the form of the United Nations Yearbook when the General Assembly had already decided that it should be issued in an abbreviated format until the backlog had been eliminated.

20. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya) said that the Chairman of the Advisory Committee, in introducing the Committee's report on section 27, had raised a number of points that should be clarified. It was not clear, for example, what impact the far-reaching reorganization of the Department of Public Information had had on its staffing table. He wondered whether the issuing of a bulletin by the Secretary-General approving the reorganization meant that the General Assembly, or the Fifth Committee in particular, had no role or function in the matter. The newly appointed Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had replied at length to questions about her mandate and the need she had felt to resort to external expertise in her task of revitalizing, modernizing and streamlining the Department. She had already used up 60 per cent of the Department's budget for outside consultants in that exercise and almost three-quarters of that sum had gone to consultants from her own country. He felt that those appointments demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to the requirement of equitable geographical distribution. No one region, or country, had a monopoly of knowledge. Moreover, he did not think that the United Nations was in a position to bear the kind of expense involved in teaching senior officials how to present themselves in public.

21. His delegation had been informed that among the changes contemplated, or perhaps already carried out, was the central planning of radio programmes. He would like to be assured that programming, particularly in regard to the topics of apartheid, Namibia and Palestine, would remain unchanged as long as the problems with which those programmes were concerned were unresolved, not merely in terms of programme output but in terms of the staffing table and resource allocation.

22. Mr. MURRAY (Trinidad and Tobago) said that his delegation found it extremely difficult to understand section 27 and noted that it would be impossible to have any clear idea of the Department's actual product until the end of 1988. It was difficult to reconcile the principal objective referred to by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CFC) in paragraph 212 of document A/42/16 (Part I) with the concept of central programming. His delegation would also appreciate any information on steps being taken to carry out the work called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 38/82 B. With regard to the conclusions and recommendations contained in paragraph 30 of document A/42/16 (Part II), it wished to know whether the views referred to in paragraph 28 of that document had been taken into account.
23. His delegation would have been grateful for some more direct indication of the Department's review plans than news items on that subject in the press. It continued to believe that the provision of some sort of organizational chart would be useful.
24. Ms. MUSTONEN (Finland) said that her delegation fully shared the concern expressed by the Advisory Committee over a decline in contributions towards the financing of Development Forum, which was the only regular United Nations publication in the economic and social field to co-ordinate development information from the various organs of the system. A long-term solution should be sought through financing based, first and foremost, on predictable voluntary contributions from certain organizations in accordance with established criteria, as well as on financial support from the business edition and a grant from the regular budget, which should be considered as an integral part of the publication's financing. While taking note of the remarks contained in paragraph 27.14 of the Advisory Committee's first report, her delegation would be grateful for further information on future financing prospects and on the declining trend in contributions from participating organizations.
25. Mr. RODRIGUEZ-MEDINA (Colombia) said that DPI was in urgent need of modernization and professionalization. It had shown such disregard for technological progress that its methods had become extremely outdated. A draft resolution on the subject which was shortly to be approved by the Special Political Committee urged that due account should be taken in the modernization process of professional standards among the staff, equitable geographical distribution and the political and information-related priorities laid down by the General Assembly. In view of the difficulties involved in restructuring the Department, the Secretariat should be given time to carry out the process in a comprehensive manner and to remedy any mistakes that might be made along the way. The assurances provided by the Secretariat gave cause for optimism, but at the same time delegations must make their views known and ensure that due account was taken of their needs, particularly those of the developing countries. Attention should be paid to the costs involved in restructuring, but it should also be recognized that modernization necessarily entailed financial sacrifices.
26. Mr. MONTHE (Cameroon) said that the Committee was greatly handicapped in its consideration of the impact which the latest administrative reorganization measures taken in DPI would have on DPI programmes and on the geographical distribution of its staff, because it had not received the update his delegation had requested.

(Mr. Monthe, Cameroon)

27. In so far as the structure was concerned, the reorganization had downgraded the political importance of certain programmes. Those relating to Namibia, apartheid, the Middle East and Palestine had been grouped into one unit. Although it made sense to do so, downgrading them by putting them in a section rather than a division was unacceptable to his delegation. At the very least there should be a section for each programme, albeit within the same service.

28. In so far as human resources were concerned, he said that it was his understanding that, now that the structure of DPI had been worked out, job descriptions were being prepared in conjunction with the Office of Human Resources Management. While that might appear to be a purely administrative operation, it was one that could be politicized, since a job description could be prepared in such a way as to exclude all but a particular individual. He therefore urged the Secretary-General to ensure that job descriptions were prepared only with the requirements of the service in mind. He expressed the hope that, when the Committee received the requested update on the reorganization measures it would find that the Assembly's directives with respect to geographical distribution, linguistic balance and representation of women had been respected.

29. The outline of the revised programme structure of DPI which had been considered by CPC contained one major deficiency - there was no technical support plan. Such a plan was essential to the modernization of DPI since the new world information and communication order called for modern communication and information equipment.

30. Not only had the cost of the administrative reorganization been high in terms of consultants, the principle of equitable geographical distribution had not been observed when hiring the consultants. That was unfortunate because it meant that the reorganized DPI reflected only one school of thought instead of the rich variety of thinking that existed in the world.

31. His delegation attached importance to radio and television programmes broadcast to Africa in a multitude of languages. Those programmes should continue. He also stressed the need for the Secretary-General to ensure that the activities relating to the new world information and communication order were implemented promptly.

32. Finally, he reiterated that it would be very useful for the Committee to have a brief conference room paper giving an update of the reorganization measures taken since the last session of CPC.

33. Mr. NGAIZA (United Republic of Tanzania) asked what impact the reorganization of DPI would have on the budget and on programme delivery during the next biennium. It would also be interesting to know if the reorganization would affect the geographical distribution of staff and the languages used by DPI.

34. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the representatives of Kenya, Trinidad and Tobago, and Cameroon, particularly with regard to the proposal that DPI should have a centrally planned programming system, since it feared that that

(Mr. Ngazwa, United Republic
of Tanzania)

would result in a reduction of the activities which it considered important. Given the importance attached by CPC to the dissemination of information at the grass-roots level (A/42/16 (Part I), para. 212), it was necessary to intensify the use of local languages in radio and television programmes particularly those relevant to the policies of apartheid. He supported the view that the anti-apartheid programme section should be maintained or even expanded.

35. Mr. MILLS-LUTERODT (Ghana) noting that several outputs under subprogramme 2 were "feature articles ... to be placed in magazines and newspapers", asked how the magazines and newspapers would be selected and how global the selection would be. Referring to the list of radio programmes under programme element 2.17 (ix), which indicated the language of each broadcast, he asked what criteria were used in selecting languages other than the official languages of the United Nations.

36. Mr. HOH (United States of America) endorsed the questions put by the representatives of Belgium and the United Kingdom regarding the Yearbook. Noting that when the Committee had examined the statement of the programme budget implications of the special information programme on the question of Palestine (A/C.5/42/45), it had been told that the costs could be absorbed, he asked for details of how those costs would be financed within the proposed programme budget. Finally, he asked whether the new programme structure of DPI, established in response to recommendation 37 of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations (Group of 18), would alter programme outputs. His delegation's understanding was that the purpose of rationalizing DPI's working methods, as stated in recommendation 37, was simply to bring DPI's role and policies up to date in order to improve DPI's capacity to provide information on United Nations activities. During the discussion in the Special Political Committee, delegations had been assured that measures taken to increase the professionalism of DPI would not alter programme outputs. He would welcome further assurances to that effect, since it was crucial to his delegation's understanding of the various documents before the Committee.

37. Mr. TAKASU (Japan) said that it was the Secretary-General's prerogative to determine the internal structure of the Secretariat, based on the guidelines set by Member States. Accordingly, delegations should approach that subject with caution. However, he had two comments. First, recalling that the Group of 18 had considered the existing structure to be top-heavy and too complex and that it needed to be simplified (A/41/49, recommendation 14 (a)), he wondered whether creating a new Bureau in DPI would indeed contribute to streamlining the Department. Second, standard United Nations nomenclature did not include the term "Bureau". Considering that a number of resolutions, including resolution 32/204, stressed the need for uniform nomenclature, he wondered whether that term was appropriate.

38. Mr. LADJOUZI (Algeria) said that his delegation supported the statements by the representatives of Cameroon, the United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya and Ghana on the substantive issue. The Algerian delegation had already asked CPC to specify

(Mr. Ladjouzi, Algeria)

the context in which DPI was being restructured, but had had no reply. He was therefore resubmitting the question to the Fifth Committee. Perhaps one paragraph or the matter could be included in the conference room paper requested by the delegation of Cameroon. Many delegations would find it useful to know whether the restructuring was an internal Secretariat initiative or had been proposed on the basis of a Group of 18 recommendation.

39. The conference room paper might also contain a paragraph explaining the relationship between the restructuring of DPI and section 27, which dealt with budgetary and programmatic questions. In CPC, Algeria had opposed considering a restructuring in the context of section 27, as it seemed to be an illogical approach. It was unclear whether DPI's structure, or programmes, were to be reformed. With regard to the Department's structure Member States should defer to the Secretary-General, who was competent to make decisions on administrative matters. As far as programmes were concerned, however, Member States were entitled to seek all the information necessary for a decision to be adopted. Reform and section 27 being two distinct questions, the Committee should approve the section, and consider reform under the appropriate agenda item. As the representative of the United States had indicated, the Fifth Committee could benefit from the conclusions of the Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee concerning reform of DPI. When problems arose, it was usually because the conclusions of a Main Committee were perceived differently by the Secretariat and Member States.

40. It would be interesting to hear the views of DPI representatives on the CPC conclusions and recommendations. The Secretariat should indicate whether it intended to implement reform without waiting for Member States' approval or taking into account the views of CPC. The restructuring process must reflect the priorities of Member States - not obscure them. It must also reflect the equitable geographical distribution of staff members - a basic principle of the Organization's Charter.

41. Mr. RODRIGUEZ-MEDINA (Colombia) said that perhaps no department of the United Nations was as closely supervised as DPI. As the representative of Algeria had indicated, discussion of reform in the Fifth Committee might duplicate the work of the Special Political Committee, and particularly the Committee on Information. Representatives to both those Committees had the expert knowledge needed to consider reform in depth; the Fifth Committee should consider the budgetary aspects only. The Secretary-General had recently assured the Special Political Committee that programmes and priorities would not be jeopardized by restructuring. The reform in progress had not originated with the Group of 18, but dated back to concerns expressed by the Committee on Information in 1982. DPI was sorely in need of modernizing, failing which it would be technologically incompetent to bring the message of the United Nations to the world.

42. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya) said that certain delegations seemed to possess more information than others. Those delegations had spoken assertively, confirming the old adage that knowledge was power. It was his understanding that delegations had a right to ask questions and that their questions would not be construed as

(Mr. Mudho, Kenya)

encroaching on the Secretary-General's prerogatives. Membership in some bodies, such as the Committee on Information or the Special Political Committee was not supposed to conflict with delegations' right to raise questions in others.

43. Japan had invoked recommendation 14 of the Group of 18, but that recommendation specified that departments, offices and other units should be merged when such a consolidation would improve efficiency. His delegation wondered whether the planned reform of DPI would truly contribute to efficiency, and whether it would be consistent with the directives of the Secretary-General. Delegations had asked questions about document A/42/674 on the critical economic situation in Africa, but had no idea of when those questions would be answered. If it was unreasonable to ask such questions, delegations should be so informed and told why.

44. Mr. MAKTARI (Yemen) said that the amounts requested in section 27 had been proposed before the Fifth Committee had adopted a draft resolution on the equal treatment of official languages of United Nations bodies. It was not clear whether the budget estimates were to be considered in the light of that draft resolution.

45. Mr. MOUSSAKI (Congo) said that his delegation supported the Cameroonian representative's request for a conference room paper. Perhaps it was premature to inquire, but the Congolese delegation would like to know the nationalities of the persons occupying the 168 Professional and higher-level posts mentioned in paragraph 27.3 of the Advisory Committee's first report (A/42/7).

46. Mr. ABOLY-BI-KOUASSI (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the mixture of Roman and Arabic numerals in the budget format made it unclear whether radio news programme outputs (iii), (ix) and (xvi) (A/42/6 (Sect. 27), para. 27.10) had been deleted. His delegation also agreed with the representative of Cameroon on the need for a conference room paper.

47. Mr. GOMEZ (Controller) said that delegations' questions were a sign of their keen interest in understanding the budget - whose format was, indeed, not simple. Replying to the representative of Kenya, he said that the Secretariat would inform delegations if it felt that their questions encroached on its prerogatives. A clear understanding of delegations' views could only help his office to prepare revised estimates for 1988. The Secretariat would respond to the many questions raised after consulting the units concerned.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.