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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981

Arabic language services

Report of the Secretary-General

1. During 1980 to date services in Arabic have been provided as required by the related decisions of the General Assembly and the applicable rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA) and special conferences. Generally speaking, such services have been delivered on a par with those in other official and working languages. Specific difficulties that may have been encountered on occasion were of the type that affect all languages. In the case of documentation for the current session of the General Assembly it had proved possible, up to the time when this report was prepared, to make available in Arabic, with only one or two exceptions, all documents issued in other official and working languages. That required an exceptional effort on the part of the translation and typing services involved. The ability of those services, particularly of the Arabic Translation Service, to maintain this situation during the rest of the session, as the volume of documentation and meetings records reaches a peak, will depend on the speed with which the candidates who passed the translators' examination described below can actually be brought on board.

2. There follows a more specific report on the progress made in respect of the improvement of the Arabic language services in response to the actions taken by the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session.

3. At that session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 34/226 of 20 December 1979, requested the Secretary-General to bring the Arabic language services up to a level equal with the services of the other official and working languages of the General Assembly and its Main Committees by adopting a number of measures, including: (a) the immediate reinforcement of the Arabic Translation Service at United Nations Headquarters by a sufficient number of permanent posts so as to ensure the translation of all pre-session, in-session and post-session

documentation of the General Assembly and its Main Committees within the specified time limits and simultaneously with their issuance in the other languages and (b) the establishment at Headquarters of an Arabic interpretation service with a sufficient number of permanent posts to provide interpretation services to the General Assembly and its Main Committees.

4. At the same session, the General Assembly approved additional resources for the Arab language services in Geneva to ensure that Arabic would have full capacity as an official and working language of UNCTAD with respect to both interpretation and translation facilities and thus be on a par with the other official languages of UNCTAD, with effect from 1 January 1980, as had been recommended by UNCTAD in its resolution 115 (V) of 3 June 1979.

5. In order to assist the responsible services at Headquarters and in Geneva in achieving those objectives, the General Assembly agreed to the establishment of 79 additional posts distributed as follows:

		<u>Headquarters</u>	<u>Geneva</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Interpretation services</u>				
	P-5	1	-	1
	P-4	3	-	3
	P-3	3	-	3
		<u>7</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Translation services</u>				
Revisers	P-5	2	-	2
	P-4	8	2	10
Translators	P-3	22	4	26
	P-2/1	4	-	4
		<u>36</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>42</u>
<u>Typing services</u>				
	G-5	1	-	1
	G-4/1	25	4	29
		<u>26</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>30</u>
Total		<u>69</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>79</u>

6. Among the posts authorized by the General Assembly when it decided at its twenty-eighth session to include Arabic among its official languages were several intended for editorial, reference and terminological work. For reasons of administrative convenience, those posts were assigned to the Arabic Translation Service at the time. Following the action taken by the Assembly at its thirty-fourth session to increase the size of the Arabic language services, it was decided

to reassign these posts in the same manner as in the other language areas. To that end, one P-4, three P-3, one G-5 and one G-4/1 posts were transferred from the Arabic Translation Service to provide for the establishment of an Arabic language group in the Official Records Editing Section of the Editorial and Official Records Division, and one P-3, one G-5 and one G-4/1 posts to accommodate a terminologist, a reference assistant and a reference clerk in the Documentation and Terminology Section of the Translation Division.

7. As a result of these various developments the total Arabic language establishment in the Department of Conference Services at Headquarters currently comprises a total of 153 posts, of which 89 are in the Professional category and 54 in the General Service category and are distributed among the various services as follows.

	Professional category and above						General Service category		
	D-1	P-5	P-4	P-3	P-2	Total	G-5	G-4/1	Total
<u>Interpretation and Meetings Division</u>									
Arabic Interpretation Section	-	1	3	3	-	7	-	-	-
<u>Translation Division</u>									
(a) Arabic Translation Service	1	4	20	44	5	74	2	6	9
(b) Documentation and Terminology Service	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	1	1
<u>Editorial and Official Records Division</u>									
(a) Official Records Editing Section	-	-	1	3	-	4	1	1	2
(b) Arabic Typing Unit	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	47	51
<u>Publishing Division</u>									
Copy Preparation and Proof-reading Unit	-	-	-	1	2	3	-	1	1
						89 a/			64 a/

a/ This total establishment of 153 posts compares with those of the other language services as indicated below:

	Professional category and above	General Service category	Total
English	70	53	123
French	107	62	169
Spanish	96	62	158
Russian	90	61	151
Chinese	118	61	179
			/...

8. In order not to distort the comparison, the statistics provided above exclude the English, French, Russian and Spanish verbatim reporting teams (nine posts in each team), the records in Arabic being provided, when required, by specially recruited free-lance personnel.

9. The Arabic language services which have been established as part of the Language Division of the United Nations Office in Geneva in order to meet the requirements of UNCTAD, currently comprise a total of 53 established posts, of which 17 (1 P-5, 5 P 4 and 11 P-3) are located in the Arabic Interpretation Unit, 23 (1 P-5, 6 P 4, 14 P-3 and 2 General Service) in the Arabic Translation Section and 13 (General Service) in the Arabic Typing Unit.

10. As the result of the creation of new posts, as well as of vacancies in the existing establishment, the Secretariat was faced at the beginning of 1980 with the prospect of recruiting 12 interpreters (7 new posts at Headquarters and 5 vacant posts in Geneva), 50 translators (36 new posts at Headquarters, 6 new posts in Geneva and 8 vacancies) and 30 typists (26 new posts at Headquarters and 4 new posts in Geneva).

11. With a view to filling the interpreter posts, a large-scale publicity effort was organized to inform potential candidates of the competitive examinations which would be held for the purpose. Advertisements were placed in newspapers and other appropriate media in 23 countries, 18 of them primarily Arabic-speaking (Algeria, Bahrain, Democratic Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen). Advertisements were also placed in key cities in France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Canada and the United States of America. Close to 250 replies were received from 21 countries. All replies were carefully screened and 40 candidates were judged to have the necessary qualifications to sit for the test. Of these, 9 were tested at Headquarters in April and June, 11 in Cairo in July, and 20 in Geneva in April and during June and July, as part of the first world-wide competitive examination for the recruitment of interpreters. All the tests were evaluated in New York and Geneva by a joint Board of Examiners comprised of representatives of the Department of Conference Services, the Office of Personnel Services and the United Nations Office in Geneva, as well as a representative of a user department. The 12 candidates who were selected are currently being interviewed by the Board of Examiners and processed by the Office of Personnel Services. It is likely, therefore, that it will be possible in the very near future to fill the five vacancies at the United Nations Office at Geneva in addition to the seven posts in the new Arabic Interpretation Unit at Headquarters. The best candidates will be offered career appointments at grades consonant with their competence and experience within the approved grading structure. Almost all of the candidates have extensive experience of United Nations work as free-lance interpreters and can be expected to turn in a satisfactory performance from the start. At the same time, their appointment on a career basis will lead to a higher degree of proficiency through more training and closer monitoring.

12. Pending these appointments, the members of the Arabic Interpretation Unit in Geneva, assisted where necessary by free-lance personnel, have been able to meet in

full all requirements for interpretation both at Geneva and New York, including those arising in the case of the special and the emergency special sessions of the General Assembly earlier this year and its current regular session.

13. With a view to filling the vacant translator posts, it was necessary to organize a competitive examination on an international basis along the lines of those conducted in respect of Arabic posts in previous years and meeting the same standards as those held in the case of all the other official and working languages of the United Nations. Special measures had to be taken to ensure that the number of candidates who would sit for the examination would be large enough to generate the requisite number of staff to fill all vacancies, as well as to establish a roster from which to fill future vacancies caused by the normal turnover of staff. To that end, an extensive publicity campaign was undertaken through the press, radio and television, announcements sent to schools, universities and academies, and the assistance of such public institutions as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization requested. As a result, more than 2,200 candidates applied from almost all Arab countries and from countries in Europe, North and South America and other parts of the world. After an intensive screening process, some 1,620 were selected to sit for the examination. The examination itself was conducted on 13 and 14 May 1980, simultaneously in 16 Arab-speaking countries and in Addis Ababa, Dakar, Geneva, Paris, London, Vienna, New York and Montreal. Of those candidates, 162 passed the written part of the examination. All were subsequently interviewed by the Board of Examiners in Paris, Cairo and New York and 76 finally selected, of which 50 will be offered regular appointments at this time and 26 placed on a roster.

14. Pending the recruitment of long-term staff, every effort has been made to fill the vacancies on a temporary basis. As of 1 September, 17 such temporary staff had been appointed at Headquarters, with contracts lasting until the end of the current session of the General Assembly. Special efforts are being made to fill most of the remaining 15 vacancies on the same basis within the next few weeks. In Geneva, on the other hand, the much more limited number of vacancies have all been filled, some also on a short-term basis, pending the results of the examination.

15. In the case of the Arabic Typing Unit at Headquarters, an Arabic conference typists examination was completed in mid September 1980. After screening, 1,130 of the some 1,500 applicants were invited to sit for a typing and grammar test on 19 May in 18 Arabic-speaking countries and in Geneva, London, Paris, Montreal, New York and Vienna. Of those candidates, 45 passed and subsequently were given a verbatim dictation test and an interview in August 1980. Of the 36 successful candidates, 25 will be selected for appointment to the established posts which were vacant as of 1 September; the others will be placed on a roster. In the meantime, 20 Arabic typists were serving on a short-term basis, two were expected to report for duty soon, and it was hoped that the balance might be located in time to ensure that the Unit might operate at full strength during the greater part of the current session of the General Assembly. There are no vacancies in Geneva