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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981

PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Workload standards for technical and complementary conference
servicing staff

Report of the Secretary-General

1.   By its decision 34/405 the General Assembly adopted the recommendations contained in chapter VI of the report of the Committee on Conferences. 1/ One of the recommendations reads as follows:

"The Committee on Conferences recommends that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to study the feasibility of establishing further workload standards, in particular for technical and complementary conference servicing staff, and to submit a report thereon, through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session."

The present statement is submitted in response to this recommendation by the Committee on Conferences.

2.   In this respect, six distinct categories of staff have been identified as technical and complementary conference staff servicing in and around conference areas. These categories and their functions are briefly provided as follows:

(1) Sound technicians   Microphone control, recording on discs, cassettes or tapes, and maintenance/repair of communications equipment;

1/ A/34/32 and Corr.1.

(2) Conference officers	Over-all administration and proper set-up of conference rooms (seating arrangements, list of speakers, liaison with delegations and Secretariat officials, distribution of speeches, clerical duties in conference rooms, etc.);
(3) Messengers	Documents and mail delivery services between conference rooms and other areas (secretariat offices, delegates lounges, forward echelon, etc.);
(4) Security guards	Control of access to and maintenance of order in and around conference areas;
(5) Meeting room attendants (Unique to conference servicing at Geneva)	Combination of some of the functions performed by conference officers and security guards; control of access to conference rooms, seating and other meeting room arrangements as well as other functions as a forward point of contact for conference and other services;
(6) Information officers and supporting staff	Coverage of meeting proceedings and subsequent preparation of press releases, radio broadcasts and television news packages.

3.   In addition to the above list, certain other functions such as cleaning of conference facilities, replenishing supplies for participants' consumption, information clerks in the conference building or telephone operators in delegates lounges may be included, on a broader basis, as part of complementary conference servicing functions. For the purpose of the present report, these are considered to be more or less indirect functions, although heavy scheduling of conferences at times may give rise to requirements in additional temporary assistance for these functions.

4.   In formulating its recommendation, the Committee on Conferences was apparently mindful that establishing workload standards for technical and complementary conference servicing staff would assist its examination of statements by the Secretary-General showing staffing requirements in respect of intersessional departures from the approved calendar (see para. 71 of A/34/32).

5.   The Secretary-General appreciates this view by the Committee on Conferences and believes that the establishment of workload standards, whenever possible, will provide a useful management tool to gauge the efficiency of the Secretariat operations. However, with respect to the first five categories of functions described in paragraph 2 above, it is not considered possible to establish standards which are universally applicable to conferences, since requirements in these functions tend to vary widely from one meeting to another depending on the characteristics of a given meeting.

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6. For example, a meeting may be held in a certain small conference room without requiring deployment of any security staff other than those routinely provided in the vicinity. On the other hand, as many as 23 security staff may have to be deployed for a meeting held in the General Assembly plenary hall. Similarly, the level of messenger services is geared to various conditions under which a given meeting is held and particularly to the level of documents and mail deliveries to and from the conference area. The number of sound technicians also changes according to specific requirements of a given meeting. If the meeting requires sound control alone, one technician may suffice, but if it requires recording, two or more technicians have to be brought in. Similar considerations are made in determining the number of conference officers or meeting room attendants.

7. For its part, the Office of General Services has developed a cost estimating guide which contains sets of requirements which are geared essentially to the various types of conference room facilities available at Headquarters. While this guide is helpful in cases where the conference room assignments are known in advance with some precision, the Secretary-General is of the view that these estimates should not be considered as workload standards which would be generally applicable to complementary conference servicing functions in all cases. In his view, the servicing requirements for a given conference can only be determined once all of the details relating to the conference are known.

8. In the case of information coverage of meetings, workload standards and staffing patterns are being developed by DPI with a view to identifying differences in coverage requirements of meetings for different phases such as pre-conference, conference or post-conference stages or for various scales of meetings such as major, medium or small conferences.

9. Finally, it may be worth while to mention other kinds of staff involved in servicing of meetings, namely, staff providing substantive and secretariat services. For the most part their involvement is closely related to the subject-matter of a given meeting and accordingly will vary from one meeting to another. Consequently, requirements for staff performing these functions are not susceptible to standardization.