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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981

PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

Administrative structure of the Secretariat

Letter dated 8 November 1980 from the Secretary-General
addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee

I wish to refer to our recent discussions and the relevant item inscribed on the agenda of the Working Group on Personnel Questions of the Fifth Committee.

As you are aware, the present structure of the administrative services of the Secretariat has been in effect since 1968, after the General Assembly, by a resolution adopted on 19 December 1967, took note of a report presented by my predecessor, U Thant, on the reorganization of the top echelon of the Secretariat.

In that report, U Thant stated:

"I believe that it would be an advantage if there were one official at the higher level within the top echelon in charge of the joint offices, assisted by two officials at the lower level of the top echelon, in charge of the present offices of the Controller and the Director of Personnel. I have in mind for this official the designation of Under-Secretary-General in charge of Finance and Management."

Subsequently, U Thant established a Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat. This independent body commented in its report that the new post of Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management could be of considerable assistance to the Secretary-General in dealing with many of the intransigent administrative problems of the United Nations.

During the course of the last 12 years, there has been steady growth in the financial and personnel resources of the Organization. At the same time, the

implementation of the administrative tasks has become more complex, particularly the relationship between programme planning and resource management following the introduction of programme budgeting.

Concern has been raised regarding the adequacy of the present structure of the Secretariat to implement effectively decisions of the General Assembly with regard to administrative, personnel and financial questions. Some have expressed the view that there is a diffusion of authority on personnel matters while others feel that financial and personnel issues cannot, at least in so far as policy aspects are concerned, be separated. Moreover, some believe that there is a need for more centralized financial and personnel control while others point out that substantive departments and programmes should have sufficient flexibility within over-all policy control, to enable them to fulfil the tasks entrusted to them by the competent legislative bodies. In the latter context, reference is made to the decisions taken by the General Assembly on the decentralization of certain administrative functions to the regional commissions and on giving greater budgetary, financial and administrative flexibility to major programmes like UNCTAD and UNIDO.

The time may well be opportune, therefore to undertake a review of the current administrative machinery which would entail a careful analysis of its short-comings, its strengths and possible improvements. I am aware that this complex task will require a balanced evaluation of the interrelationships involved, not only among the various administrative units at Headquarters, but also between these units and those at other major offices away from Headquarters and, equally as important, between administrative units in general and the substantive activities they are mandated to serve.

If the General Assembly were to consider that a review would be timely and desirable, I would be prepared, as was done in 1968 by U Thant, to establish an independent committee of experts to evaluate the present administrative structure of the Secretariat and to recommend any modifications that might be necessary and appropriate to assist me in the discharge of my responsibilities as chief administrative officer of the Organization under Article 97 of the Charter.

It would be my intention to consult with Member States on the composition of that Committee, whose report would be submitted for the consideration of the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session.

(Signed) Kurt WALDHEIM
Secretary-General
