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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981

Establishment of a child-care centre at Headquarters

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Fifth Committee for consideration a proposal to establish a child-care centre on the Headquarters premises to meet the long-felt need for such a facility for United Nations staff in New York. It is presented to this session because of the timing and cost constraints involved in altering the current construction plans which make it essential for an early decision to be taken on the proposed establishment of such a centre. The report consists of four parts: background information on the subject, an assessment of the need for a child-care centre, the proposal of the Secretary-General and its financial implications.

I. Background information

2. At its 2444th plenary meeting on 17 December 1975, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Fifth Committee,

"Decided to invite the International Civil Service Commission, in the study on salary, allowances and working conditions, to examine the need for the provision of day-care facilities for the children of the staff of the United Nations, taking into account the observations of the Advisory Committee in paragraph 14 of its report (A/10008/Add.28) and to make proposals thereon to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session ...". 1/

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirtieth Session, Supplement No. 34, (A/10034). Other decisions adopted on the reports of the Fifth Committee, agenda item 96.

3. In its report to the thirty-first session of the General Assembly, the International Civil Service Commission responded by expressing the view that:

"the question of the responsibility of the employer to provide or assist in providing day-care centres for the children of staff members was a matter of social policy and so of the conditions of service in general, but could not properly be said to be a part of the salary system It considered however that the question of possible financial support from the budget of the United Nations (whether in the form of a capital grant to assist in the launching of the project or in some other form) was not within its competence; having regard, inter alia, to the precedent created by the granting of financial support to the United Nations International School, it did not believe that if such a proposal was again made by the Secretary-General its approval would prejudice any policy recommendations the Commission might later reach in this respect." 2/

4. In its report on women in the Professional category and above in the United Nations system, submitted to the thirty-third session of the General Assembly, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) recommended the establishment of child-care facilities where they do not exist for children of United Nations staff members. Particular mention was made of the need for such facilities in the New York area and the United Nations was urged to give serious consideration to the establishment of such facilities. 3/ The JIU recommendation was reaffirmed in its note on staff welfare in the United Nations, some specialized agencies and IAEA, submitted during the same year to the Secretary-General and the heads of the larger specialized agencies.

5. In July 1980, the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, called for the implementation of the recommendations of the General Assembly and JIU in its resolution 24 on women in the United Nations Secretariat. 4/

6. Within the Secretariat itself, a major effort of self-help was made in the early 1970s to establish a child-care centre near the United Nations in co-operation with the City of New York. A board of directors was appointed and an architectural plan drawn up for the proposed site. However, the project eventually had to be abandoned for lack of financial support. Several attempts to interest local foundations were also unsuccessful.

2/ Ibid., Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 30 (A/31/30), para. 21.

3/ A/33/105, para. 111 (e).

4/ Report of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Copenhagen, 14 to 30 July 1980 (A/CONF.94/35), p. 86.

II. Need for a child-care centre

7. The establishment of an educationally adequate and financially accessible child-care centre at Headquarters has long been urged by women's and staff groups as a matter of social policy to meet the needs expressed by many individual staff members. The availability of a child-care centre would help to improve the work efficiency of staff members who are working parents and whose performance is affected by the pressures caused by poor child-care arrangements. This need is particularly acute at Headquarters for the following reasons:

(a) There are practically no organized child-care facilities available to United Nations personnel in New York for children below the age of 3;

(b) The means test for admission to the city-subsidized centres in all boroughs of New York City for children between the ages of 3 and 6 is now extremely stringent with the result that virtually no staff members would qualify;

(c) The number and size of private centres for children between the ages of 3 and 6 on a full-time basis is very limited and the costs are often prohibitive;

(d) United Nations working hours, particularly during the General Assembly period, do not correspond to the hours of operation of the public and private child-care centres; and

(e) Arrangements for individual baby-sitters are often unreliable and frequently inadequate for the development of the child.

8. In 1979, the International Year of the Child, a desk-to-desk survey was conducted by the Staff Council to quantify the needs of working parents at United Nations Headquarters with respect to child-care for children in several age brackets. That survey indicated that there was a total of 378 children in need of child-care services, broken down by age bracket as follows:

77	early-age day-care centre	(age 1 to 3)
121	day-care centre	(age 3 to 6)
180	(after school programme	(age 5 to 11)
	(short vacation programme	(under 14)

The greatest need is for a child-care centre for children between the ages 1 to 6. Among the respondents who indicate a need for child-care services, some 35 per cent were staff in the Professional category and above, and the remaining 65 per cent staff in the General Service and related categories, which corresponds closely to the proportional distribution of Professional and General Service staff at Headquarters.

9. On the basis of that survey, a recommendation was made to the Secretary-General, through the Staff Management consultative machinery, that consideration be given, as a matter of priority, to the establishment of a child-care centre for children under the age of 6 and the submission of a plan to this effect to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

III. Proposal

10. The Secretary-General shares the view that the establishment of a child-care centre at Headquarters should be given favourable consideration. Taking the average size of a city-sponsored centre as a model, he believes that a centre of medium size to accommodate 70 children in two sections for ages 1 to 3 and 3 to 6 would provide for a fully adequate response to the needs as outlined above.

11. Based on careful review of the physical requirements for such a centre, including fire and safety regulations, it would seem best to locate it at the ground level, in a relatively independent area so as not to interfere with the daily flow of work of the Secretariat. Given the advanced state of the current construction work, the only remaining area which would meet these requirements is the southern extension of the Secretariat which affords easy access through the first basement of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, thus making it unnecessary for the children to pass through the lobby of the Secretariat building.

12. On the assumption of an enrolment of 70 children, a preliminary architectural sketch has been prepared, covering a total net area, excluding corridors, of 4,100 square feet (5,110 gross sq ft). The plans provide for four classrooms (two classes would each have 15 1 to 3-year-olds, the other two would each have 20 3 to 6-year olds), a playroom, a director's office and a teachers' room, as well as the necessary storage and toilets.

13. The cost of modifying the existing arrangements for this space if a decision to do so were taken at this time is estimated at \$143,000 for the additional net construction costs plus \$35,000 for architectural costs, or a total of \$178,000.

14. If a decision were to be deferred until next year, the construction would have advanced to such an extent that the required modifications would, according to present estimates, involve a further additional cost of \$122,000.

15. Under the current plans, the area in question is for the Training Service. If it is decided to reassign this space to the child-care centre, some 1,560 square feet will still remain for the use of language classes. Some of this space could be considered for use at a later stage for an after-school programme which would not conflict with the requirements of the Training Service.

16. As regards the administrative arrangements for the centre, the Secretary-General would report more extensively on these at the next session should the Assembly approve the establishment of the child-care centre. Already at this stage, it might be indicated that it is envisaged that the centre would be administered by a board of directors, or advisory board, consisting of persons with expertise in financial management, administration, public relations and early childhood education as well as parents themselves. The Board would be assisted, as necessary, by the relevant services of the United Nations. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) have expressed interest in the centre and they would also be included in the administrative arrangements.

17. The Board of Directors would determine or advise on such matters as (a) the criteria for enrolment, (b) the fee schedule, (c) educational policies, (d) staffing, (e) fund-raising activities, (f) budget of the centre, and (g) the effective and efficient administration of funds.

18. The centre would exist primarily to serve United Nations staff. However, its terms of reference could also provide for service to the larger United Nations community, including delegation personnel, should conditions permit.

19. The staffing of the centre would consist of a director, teachers, assistant teachers and aides. They would not be United Nations staff members and their conditions of service would be determined in accordance with local prevailing conditions of employment for similar staff at other child-care centres.

20. Enrolment of their children at the centre would not be considered as a right or entitlement for eligible staff members, and it is possible that some deserving children would have to be excluded if the centre were full. Based on the needs analysis, however, the Secretary-General considers that a facility of the type proposed would go far to meet the perceived need at Headquarters and would constitute a gesture of leadership by the United Nations in an area of social policy which has been identified and endorsed at the World Conferences of the International Women's Year and Decade.

IV. Financial implications

21. The costs associated with the proposed child-care centre would comprise:

(a) Capital construction costs;

(b) One-time capital equipment costs;

(c) Direct operating costs to be largely offset by income from fees and donations;

(d) Indirect operating costs, such as space occupancy costs, utilities and cleaning;

(e) Provision of working capital.

22. As regards capital construction costs, the amount involved would depend on the location chosen for the centre. As indicated in paragraph 13 above, the cost of modifying the existing arrangements for the southern extension of the Secretariat, if a decision to this effect were to be taken at the current session of the General Assembly, would amount to \$178,000. The relocation of the language classrooms of the Training Service, mentioned in paragraph 15 above, would take place under ad hoc arrangements until such time as a more permanent solution could be found, most likely in the context of the proposals for the use of the second building to be constructed by the United Nations Capital Development Corporation, which will be placed before the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session.

23. Should the General Assembly not be in a position to approve the use of the space in the southern extension, the Secretary-General would seek the guidance of the General Assembly concerning possible alternative solutions that he might consider for review at the thirty-sixth session. It is not possible at this time to indicate the approximate costs of any such solutions.

24. As regards one-time capital equipment costs to start up the centre, it is anticipated that provision will be sought for these costs from the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session, since it is very doubtful that the operating budget of the centre will be able to absorb them. As an order of magnitude, the costs of providing furniture and equipment for the classrooms, director's office and teachers' lounge are estimated a \$40,000, including learning equipment for the classrooms.

25. The operating budget for the proposed centre will include the costs of teachers' salaries, expendable equipment and supplies and housekeeping supplies. There will also be a need to make provisions for eventual replacement of items of capital equipment such as toys and educational equipment. It is currently expected that the enrolment structure of the centre will consist of 30 children in the 1 to 3 age group and 40 children in the 4 to 6 age group, divided into two classes of 15 and 20 respectively. In view of the long hours that the centre would be open each day (approximately from 9 a.m. to 6.30 p.m.) staffing patterns would need to be staggered to some extent, with the optimum pattern developing in the light of experience. At present it is anticipated that the salary costs, including fringe benefits, of a director, four teachers, four assistant teachers and a number of part-time aides would amount to approximately \$200,000 per annum. Other operational costs will amount to some \$10,000, exclusive of a lunch programme which, if offered, would be funded separately. The operating budget would therefore amount to approximately \$210,000, or \$3,000 per child, assuming that all 70 places were filled. Were the operating budget required to cover the indirect costs relating to space occupancy, including utilities and cleaning, the full cost of the centre would be approximately \$350,000, or \$5,000 per child.

26. The amount of tuition fees which parents would be able to contribute towards these expenses would depend in large part on the earnings capacity of the parents. The survey conducted in 1979 provided information on the ability of the respondents to pay which has encouraged the Secretary-General to believe that, with a graduated fee scale (to be administered by the Board of Directors) income from tuition fees could amount to some 90 per cent of the direct operating budget. Obtaining the remaining 10 per cent through fund-raising efforts should not present an insurmountable problem to the Board of Directors, particularly in view of the expressions of support which have come from UNDP and UNICEF.

27. The considerations in the preceding paragraph concerning the financing of the direct operating budget do not apply to the indirect costs of space occupancy, utilities and cleaning. In the view of the Secretary-General, these would need to be absorbed by the United Nations in order for the child-care centre to be a viable undertaking. These costs are currently estimated at \$140,000 per annum. Other indirect expenses which the regular budget would be requested to absorb, without additional cost, would be costs of providing access to the Medical Service, book-keeping and accounting services and costs of general insurance.

28. As regards working capital, it is anticipated that, should the centre be established as a facility provided by the United Nations, the Secretary-General would seek the concurrence of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a self-liquidating advance under the provisions of resolutions relating to the Working Capital Fund.

29. In summary, should the General Assembly accept the proposal of the Secretary-General the financial implications for the regular budget would be:

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(a) Capital construction costs	
Appropriation required under section 32 (if work approved at this session)	178,000
(b) One-time capital equipment costs	
To be requested at the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly (in the order of)	40,000
(c) Direct operating costs	
To be met through tuition and other income	-
(d) Indirect operating costs	
To be absorbed in section 28 (approximate cost per annum)	140,000
(e) Working capital	
To be sought from the Working Capital Fund	-
