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COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND
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Agenda item 6

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE
SECOND PART OF ITS THIRTY-THIRD SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Wolfgang STÖCKL (Germany)

IV. PROGRAMME QUESTIONS

Prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan

1. At its 12th and 13th meetings, on 6 October, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on a possible new approach to programme planning (A/48/277).
2. Some delegations found that the report provided a good account of the seminar on programme planning in the United Nations that was held from 22 to 28 April 1993 to assist the Secretariat in drafting a prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan as recommended by the Committee at its thirty-second session and subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/214 of 23 December 1992. However, several delegations expressed disappointment that the report did not meet the Committee's request that a prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan be presented to it at its current session and to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth regular session.
3. Most delegations agreed that the plan as currently conceived was not well suited for the important functions it was meant to fulfil. The present procedures of the plan and its revisions were considered too complicated and cumbersome both for the Secretariat, in particular the substantive units, and for the Member States.

4. A number of delegations expressed doubts as to the usefulness of the medium-term plan and proposed that the plan be abolished entirely. Other delegations did not share that view and considered that planning played an important role in consolidating and reconciling the various intergovernmental mandates and was a useful tool for both Member States and the Secretariat.

5. The proposal to separate the two basic functions of the plan, i.e., to provide a policy-level perspective and to provide a medium-term programme of work in two separate documents was not supported. Many favoured a longer-term perspective, but recognized the fact that it was almost impossible to predict with any degree of certainty the course of world events for any period longer than five years.

6. Many delegations also expressed the view that a concise, forward-looking policy document with a perspective of no more than five years, developed in consultation with Member States, might be the best possible solution.

7. A number of delegations considered the proposed four-year programme of work to be duplicative of the programme budget and were not convinced that that aspect of the new approach would represent an improvement in the planning process. Other delegations considered that the programme of work would facilitate the process of review of the programme budget. As concerned the proposal for a one-year budget consisting mainly of financial data, most delegations were in agreement that the present two-year programme budget cycle adequately served its purpose.

8. A number of delegations noted that two important aspects of the planning process, monitoring and evaluation, were not addressed in the report and expressed the view that more emphasis should be given to the role of monitoring and evaluation. Some delegations expressed the view that strengthening of the evaluation process could provide a basis for a revitalized role of CPC.

Conclusions and recommendations

9. The Committee regretted that the Secretariat had not provided a prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/214.

10. The Committee noted that the effectiveness of the medium-term plan in its present form was increasingly being called into question. The Committee also noted that the plan was little used and its impact on the work of the Organization was limited. The Committee further noted that the current medium-term plan did not provide adequate overall policy direction.

11. The Committee reaffirmed the need for a programmatic planning tool beyond the biennial programme budget. In that connection, the Committee recommended that consideration be given to replacing the current medium-term plan by a composite document, to be approved by the General Assembly, containing the following elements:

(a) A perspective, which would be a concise forward-looking policy document. It would contain an analysis of persistent problems and challenges

and emerging trends that would need to be addressed by the international community within the next four to six years and the role of the Organization in that undertaking. The perspective would indicate broad priority areas for the work of the Organization; it would be amended only if pressing needs of an unforeseeable nature arose during the period covered;

(b) A programme framework, which would list only major programmes, programmes and subprogrammes and provide the guidelines against which the preparation and implementation of the programme budget would be assessed. The narrative of each programme should consist of a brief one-page chapter detailing its objectives and mandates. The programme framework should be reviewed regularly every two years in the off-budget year in an effective manner to reflect new mandates.

12. The Committee also recommended that the present two-year programme budget cycle be continued.

13. In the programme budget, the narrative of the substantive subprogrammes should consist of clearly formulated objectives that were designed to bring about, to the extent possible, observable change. The objectives for support services would indicate targets for improved efficiency and effectiveness of the services to be rendered to the substantive departments and Member States.

14. The programme and budget performance reports should detail the achievements relative to the objectives of the programme framework and the resources of the programme budget.

15. The Committee also recommended that the findings of the programme performance monitoring reports and evaluation processes should be taken into account in the formulation of the programmes as a key element to improve effectiveness.

16. The Committee recommended that the prototype of the composite document be presented by the Secretary-General for consideration through CPC and the ACABQ to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session in order to facilitate a final decision on the format.
