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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983

Job classification and career development
of language staff

Report of the Secretary-General

1. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly approved 1/ a plan for job classification and career development of language staff in the United Nations, in which the General Assembly recognized that "the career of staff in all the language occupational groups at the United Nations represents a functional continuum within which the range of grade levels should reflect the increasingly complex and specialized nature of the assignments performed by language groups".
2. The plan envisaged a progressive adjustment of the manning tables in respect of translators, interpreters, verbatim reporters, editors, copy-preparers and proof-readers providing for reclassifications of posts in those Professional categories. The adjustment, including reductions in the number of posts for translation services, was to be spread over three years - 1981, 1982 and 1983. The action by the General Assembly was reflected in the 1981 staffing provisions in the approved numbers, and the proposed programme budget for 1982-1983 reflects the completion of the implementation of the establishment adjustments for Headquarters and Geneva.

* A/36/150.

1/ Resolution 35/225. Document references are: A/35/294 - report of the Joint Inspection Unit; A/35/294/Add.1 - comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination; A/C.5/35/75 - report of the Secretary-General; and A/35/7/Add.27 - report of the Advisory Committee.

3. In resolution 35/225, the General Assembly also directed that, within the totals, the reclassifications should be distributed among the six language groups in proportion to the number of established posts for each group. This has been done.

4. In its report to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions noted that the proposed classification of translators' posts appeared to be at variance with the relevant job classification standards being developed by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and stated that it trusted that the differences could be resolved through consultations with ICSC (A/35/7/Add.27, para. 11). Following that suggestion, the Secretary-General requested the Commission at its thirteenth session to defer its approval of the tier II classification standards for translators and revisers so that further consultations might be carried out to reconcile the differences in those classification standards. The attention of the Commission was also drawn to General Assembly resolution 35/214 A, section II, in which the General Assembly invited the Commission, the Secretary-General and the heads of the other organizations in the common system to co-operate fully in the implementation of the common standards of job classification established by the Commission, ensuring appropriate considerations of the individual situation and requirements of each organization. The Commission acceded to the request and, after further consultations with the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, it adopted the tier II standards for translators and revisers at its fourteenth session in July 1981. The deliberations and decision of the Commission on this question are set out in its report to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session (A/36/30, paras. 184-192).

5. An important element of the plan was the introduction of more institutionalized "self-revision" in the translation process as recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit for all organizations in the system and as further defined more specifically for the United Nations by the Secretary-General. While the General Assembly called for a report to be submitted at its thirty-fifth session on the implementation of its resolution, it is much too early for the Secretary-General to provide the General Assembly with an analytical report on this element of the resolution. What can be said is that the process has begun, that the initial results have been encouraging and that the Secretary-General is proceeding with the implementation of the plan he proposed and the General Assembly approved. In this effort, he fully shares the concerns expressed in the Fifth Committee regarding the necessity to maintain the necessary quality of translation work. It is noted, therefore, that while for staffing table purposes, all translation language groups will be treated equally, as required by the resolution, the actual amount of work which can be "self-revised" during these first three years of the plan in any one language will necessarily depend on the actual staff composition in each translation service - i.e. in relation to the proportion of trained and experienced staff within each unit who can be entrusted with "self-revision".

6. As indicated above, the budgetary proposals for implementation of the plan for career development of language staff as approved by the General Assembly last year dealt with Headquarters and Geneva. The principles, however, and the concept of "self-revision" of translation also apply to the language staff and work at other locations. In most cases, the number of language staff at those locations - in any one language - are too small to permit an over-all approach and, in those cases,

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the Secretary-General proposes to deal with each situation on an individual basis to assure that the staff involved are dealt with in an equitable manner vis-à-vis their colleagues in the language professions. The situation in Vienna, involving as it does a larger number of staff, may call for a more global approach involving a study similar to those undertaken at Headquarters and Geneva, but in the first instance the matter will be reviewed by comparison with the situation at Headquarters and Geneva. The Secretary-General would suggest that should reviews at these other offices indicate the need for some reclassifications to ensure equality of treatment, he might be permitted to proceed in 1982 and 1983 to the extent that the approved manning tables permit or, if necessary, seek the approval of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

7. There can be no doubt that the action taken by the General Assembly in improving the career prospects of the language staff, bringing them into a position closer to that of their colleagues in other professions in the Secretariat, has had a positive effect on morale. On the whole, the Secretary-General is of the opinion that the experience to date indicates that the plan presented and approved last year should result in a significant improvement of the situation in the language services as a whole.
