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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Control and limitation of documentation in the  
United Nations system

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Control and limitation of documentation in the United Nations system" (A/36/167).

ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the control and limitation of documentation in the United Nations system is a further contribution by the Unit to the study and formulation of policies and procedures regarding an indispensable activity of the secretariats of the organizations within the system - the servicing of meetings and provision of documentation - which has, as the years have progressed, the work of the organization expanded and the language requirements increased, become more and more difficult to manage and more and more expensive to support.
2. Thus, generally, the executive heads of the organization welcome the present report, as they have previous reports on related matters, and subscribe to the concerns expressed by the Inspectors in the introduction to their report. The severity of the problems, however, varies substantially from organization to organization, as does the applicability of the specific recommendations; these differences are recognized by the Inspectors, as they have been in previous reports on related matters.
3. Thus, in accordance with the approved procedures for dealing with JIU reports, and in addition to the general comments contained in the present report, the executive heads will provide their respective governing bodies with their more specific observations on the recommendations of JIU as they may apply in the case of the organization concerned. a/ The general comments in this report are made on this assumption.
4. The executive heads appreciate the recognition by JIU that the demand for documentation (as distinct from publications) depends basically on the level of meeting activity of each organization as well as on the number of requests made for reports on this or that subject, and is thus the primary responsibility of the delegations of the Member States themselves. Certainly, internal discipline within the secretariats can have a substantial effect on the volume of the documents that are prepared by the secretariats, but the need for the document, in the first place, and its potential utility to the body considering it are matters on which the secretariat can advise, but not dictate. The objective of control and limitation of documentation can only be effectively sought as a joint effort of the Member States, as represented in the various bodies, and the secretariats. Thus, those of the JIU recommendations which are addressed to legislative organs and which are designed to ensure continuing attention by delegates to the problem are generally welcome, although in some cases the mechanisms proposed by JIU may be more elaborate than warranted in the particular circumstances.

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a/ The comments of the Secretary-General on the recommendations of the Inspectors as they may apply in the United Nations are contained in document A/36/167/Add.2.

5. As regards the recommendations that are addressed directly to the executive heads:

(a) The question of a "quota" system for documentation (recommendation 11) has been the subject of recommendation in previous reports of the JIU; the ACC comments in the latest of these cases (A/35/294/Add.1, paras. 7 and 8) remain valid. Certain agencies have such a system; others are not convinced that their circumstances warrant, or would respond to, the system in the form envisaged by the Inspectors.

(b) There is no difficulty in accepting the need for effective documents control (recommendation 12) and editorial control services (recommendation 13), particularly for those organizations with sizeable documentation workloads. Some organizations feel that they already possess services with the required authority and strength; other are studying the possibilities of introducing such services or strengthening existing ones. In this respect, to the extent that strengthening would require additional staff resources, current budgetary policies have a restrictive effect. The need for strengthening the authority of such units, as distinct from their "capacity", is for assessment by each organization in the light of its own situation.

(c) The utility of drafting and editing courses (recommendation 14) is not questioned. Some organizations do provide such courses, but admittedly not, at least at this time, at an intensive level; others are not convinced that their problems with documentation are sufficiently serious to warrant the added expense of such courses.

(d) Several organizations already have rules or practices which interdict the revision of texts already in process (recommendation 15). It is noted, however, that some judgement must be exercised, on occasion, in the application of the rule to a specific case.

(e) The executive heads believe that the most-cost-effective methods of providing translation and typing services, according to circumstances and without sacrificing basic quality (recommendation 16), are given continuing consideration through the respective budgetary processes of the organizations. On the specific question of the use of the contractual translation, reference is made to the comments of ACC on the JIU report issued last year on the question of the translation process in the United Nations system (A/35/294, paras. 13 and 14).

(f) The impact of modern documentation technology (recommendation 17) and its possibilities for effective introduction in the documentation processes of the organizations of the system are matters of continuing interest and, when cost-effectiveness studies so indicate, action by individual organizations. The organizations have exchanged information on their experiences in this field and will continue to do so.

(g) The purpose of the Interagency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications is, basically, to facilitate the exchange of information and experience of the interested officials on matters of common concern. Various aspects of the control and limitation of documentation have been considered at such meetings, and no difficulty is foreseen in dealing with the subject in more detail (recommendation 18).