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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983

Review and evaluation of the United Nations Language
Training Programme

Third report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report by the Secretary-General on the review and evaluation of the United Nations Language Training Programme (A/C.5/36/2). The report has been prepared in response to recommendations by the Advisory Committee. 1/
2. The objectives of the language training programme are listed by the Secretary-General in paragraph 7 of his report, as follows:
 - (a) To offer language training to staff in the official languages of the United Nations: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish;
 - (b) To use modern language methods as widely as possible;
 - (c) To provide such courses to staff at all levels;
 - (d) To ensure that successful participants in language courses acquire full understanding of the written and spoken language;
 - (e) To confirm language proficiency by means of examinations administered by boards composed of language teachers.

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/36/7), para. 28.111; *ibid.*, Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/34/7), para. 28.97; *ibid.*, Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 8 (A/32/8 and Corr.1), para. 22.72.

3. Information on the size of the language training programme is given in the statistical annexes. Although much of that information is not up-to-date - most of the data relate to 1978 and 1979, rather than to 1980 - it shows that the United Nations now provides language training to some 4,300 persons world-wide (about 1,800 at Headquarters, New York, 1,200 at Geneva, 400 at Vienna and the balance in the regional commissions and UNEP).

4. The statistical annexes also show that a substantial number of students tend to repeat courses and that sometimes fewer than half the candidates who sit for language proficiency examinations are successful. In paragraph 20 of his report, the Secretary-General refers to attendance problems.

5. The Advisory Committee understands that the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report are designed to help the serious students, while at the same time avoiding unnecessary expenditure on those who are not fully committed to improving their knowledge of the official and working languages of the United Nations. To achieve the former objective the Secretary-General proposes in paragraph 19 to reduce the size of classes at Headquarters from the current level of 21-22 to 12-18 (which is the average size at other duty stations). It is also proposed (para. 24) to increase the number of hours of teaching from the beginner level to the highest level (currently approximately 300 hours). In this connexion, the representatives of the Secretary-General informed the Advisory Committee that it was not intended to increase the number of hours to the total taught by outside language teaching institutions (500-1,000). Other improvements proposed by the Secretary-General cover teaching material and teachers' manuals (para. 27), the revision of the language proficiency examination (para. 36), the development of courses to enable staff who learned additional languages to use them more fully (para. 38) and increased assistance to offices away from Headquarters in terms of pedagogical material and guidance (para. 45).

6. The resources required for the implementation of the Secretary-General's proposals will be obtained by streamlining the programme in the manner indicated in paragraph 46 of his report, namely:

- (a) To charge the standard fee of staff members who repeat any level;
- (b) To reduce the number of language proficiency examinations from three to two a year;
- (c) To limit language studies to one language at a time;
- (d) To set a maximum of two official languages which may be learned free of charge.

7. As regards recommendation (d) above, the Advisory Committee notes that a review would be carried out before the biennium 1984-1985 to ensure that the recommendation does not have an adverse effect on the enrollment for language courses which attract fewer students.

8. With regard to recommendation (a), the Advisory Committee is of the opinion that it should not be applied to staff members who repeat a course because of absence from duty attributable to ill-health or to mission assignment of which they were unaware at the time they enrolled in the course.

9. In the opinion of the Advisory Committee, the Secretary-General's recommendations are consistent with the objectives sought by the General Assembly in its resolutions on the use of languages in the Secretariat, particularly resolutions 2241 B (XXI) of 20 December 1966, 2359 (XXII) of 19 December 1967 and 2480 B (XXIII) of 21 December 1968, while also recognizing that the United Nations cannot be equated with an academic institution for the study of languages. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the Secretary-General's recommendations in document A/C.5/36/2 should be approved.

10. The Advisory Committee also recommends that the Secretary-General should submit to it early in 1983 a report on the progress made, together with more up-to-date and refined statistical data, for consideration by the Committee in the context of its examination of the proposed programme budget for 1984-1985.
