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### PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983

#### Programme for training English and French translators/précis-writers at the Economic Commission for Africa

#### Report of the Secretary-General

1. In respect of the programme for training English and French translators/précis-writers at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the General Assembly, at its thirty-fifth session, adopted resolution 35/217, section IV of which reads as follows:

"1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the programme for training English and French translators/précis-writers at the Economic Commission for Africa and the related oral report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions;

"2. Authorizes the Secretary-General to incur the necessary expenses for the third training programme;

"3. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session an evaluation of the training programmes of the two previous biennia to be considered by the Assembly before it approves funds for the fourth training programme."

2. The present report has been prepared, accordingly, as a review and evaluation of the training programmes conducted during the previous biennia.

#### Background

3. The programme for training English and French translators at ECA was authorized in 1977 by the General Assembly, which approved a proposal of the Secretary-General contained in document A/C.5/32/35. The purpose of the programme was to alleviate difficulties in finding qualified English and French translators

to fill vacancies at Headquarters and in offices away from Headquarters, particularly ECA. The programme provided for the training of up to 10 qualified candidates in the techniques of translation for a period of nine months, in order to prepare them for the regular United Nations competitive examination for the recruitment of translators. The trainees were to receive a stipend from the United Nations during their training period and to commit themselves to serve at ECA for a period of five years if successful in the competitive examination. The Secretary-General, in his proposal, noted that the programme would be reviewed at the end of each year and that a report would be submitted to the General Assembly in due course.

4. The General Assembly approved an appropriation of \$152,100 for the first two courses. The first course opened in September 1978 and was completed in May 1979. Eight trainees selected on the basis of a competitive entrance test received intensive instruction. In May 1979 they sat for the standard United Nations competitive examination for the recruitment of translators, and two of them qualified: one as an English translator and the other as a French translator.

5. The second course began in October 1979. At its thirty-fourth session in December 1979 the General Assembly approved an appropriation of \$362,300 under section 28 J of the 1980-1981 programme budget for the implementation of the third and fourth courses. At the same time, in December 1979, the General Assembly, by section V of resolution 34/233, requested the Secretary-General to review the results of the training course and to submit a progress report to it at its thirty-fifth session, so as to enable the General Assembly to review the matter before funds were committed in full for the 1980-1981 biennium. The second course was completed in June 1980. The nine trainees, who had again been selected on the basis of a competitive entrance test following a wide publicity campaign in African countries, sat the official United Nations competitive examinations for French and English translators, and four of them qualified for recruitment: three as French translators and one as an English translator. As noted in the report to the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the immediate need for English translators was met in 1980, and enrolment in the third course was limited to French trainees. 1/

6. The third course began in November 1980. Eight French translator trainees were selected after the usual publicity campaign. They followed the course and sat the United Nations competitive examination for French translators. Five of them qualified for recruitment. In accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 35/217 (IV), quoted above, recruitment operations for a fourth course were suspended, and a full evaluation of the training programme since its inception was conducted.

#### Technical evaluation and findings

7. The training programme has been carefully reviewed on several occasions by the Office of Personnel Services, the Department of Conference Services and the joint

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1/ A/C.5/35/29, para. 8.

board, comprising representatives of both departments, which supervises the programme in New York. As a result, improvements were brought about in the selection of trainees, the curriculum and pedagogy.

8. The initial selection of trainees was considerably improved for the second and third courses by a wider publicity campaign organized in co-operation with African Governments and various training institutions. As a result, a large number of candidates sat the competitive entrance test. Thus, 130 and 175 candidates sat the entrance test for the second and third courses, respectively, as compared with 53 for the first course. That broader recruitment basis resulted in a high level of qualification of the trainees selected for the course. A summary of statistical data on the programme appears as an annex to the present report.

9. The curriculum of the programme was continuously adjusted and refined in the light of experience. During the second and third courses, greater emphasis had been placed on more important subjects, such as development economics, and less on orientation-type lectures. The pedagogical methods were also enhanced by more frequent recourse to individual tutoring and a more structured reading programme.

10. As part of the programme evaluation requested by the General Assembly, a test was given to the trainees in the third course on 16 March 1981 under normal examination conditions. The test consisted of the translation of a paper from a previous official United Nations recruitment examination. The results of that test, as well as detailed discussions with the Training Officer, his predecessor and the eight trainees enrolled in the third programme, led the team from the Office of Personnel Services and Department of Conference Services responsible for the evaluation to make the following recommendations, which were implemented during the remainder of the third course:

(a) The majority of texts to be translated by the trainees during the practical exercises should be of a general nature. These texts should be as similar as possible to the texts given at the regular entrance examination. Some United Nations texts should continue to be used, but the main thrust of the practical exercises should be directly related to preparations for the regular competitive examination, which includes no United Nations texts.

(b) More time should be spent on translation exercises and practical work and less time on theoretical presentations about general knowledge subjects and on orientation-type lectures concerning United Nations matters. The latter subjects are covered after recruitment by courses and briefings organized by the United Nations for new recruits, as well as by the briefing programme that new translators follow during their probationary period within the Translation Service concerned.

(c) After an initial period of three or four months devoted to the improvement of accuracy and basic translation techniques, the trainees should be asked to work with deadlines and do their translation exercises within time-limits similar to those imposed in the standard competitive examination. This would improve the speed of their translation work, which is an important element for success in the examination and in a subsequent translator career. The majority of the trainees found that the time given to them in the test was short and stressed

that they were not used to working so fast. At least seven examination-type tests should be scheduled during the whole training period.

(d) Similarly, in order to further improve the speed of work of the trainees they should be regularly requested to do quick oral translations. This would also better prepare them for the interview part of the examination which includes an oral on-sight translation; it would help trainees overcome stage-fright, which proved to be a problem for some trainees in previous examination.

(e) More reading material and better dictionaries should be made available to the trainees, particularly in respect of Arabic and Spanish.

The following recommendations specifically concern future courses:

(f) The considerable increase in marking work which results from the implementation of the above recommendations added to the already heavy workload of the training officer would make it necessary to set at eight the maximum number of trainees to be accepted in each course. This would allow each of them to continue to receive the amount of personal attention and tutoring required.

(g) The more intensive type of training outlined above makes it possible to reduce the duration of the training period from nine to seven months. This should include a one-week break in mid-September.

#### ECA needs for translators

11. With the recruitment of the four trainees who were successful in the second course, all vacancies then existing in the Translation Service of ECA were filled. Two posts of translators (French) have since become vacant and are currently open. These will be filled by two of the five successful candidates from the third course, thus leaving a reserve of three qualified African translators. If these translators cannot be absorbed by ECA, they will be temporarily assigned to Headquarters or the United Nations Office at Geneva pending the availability of suitable posts in ECA. No additional translator posts have been requested by ECA in its proposed budget for the 1982-1983 biennium. ECA, however, has indicated that it considers financing from extrabudgetary sources over the coming years two translator posts for each of its five multinational programming and operational centres (MULPOC), as well as four additional posts at ECA headquarters. According to current budgetary policy, resources for training and recruiting candidates for extrabudgetary posts should normally also be provided from extrabudgetary sources. The appropriation of \$416,300 tentatively included under section 28.J of the 1982-1983 proposed programme budget should accordingly be deleted.

12. Since the training programme for English and French translators at ECA has proved over the years to be an effective means for providing the Commission with well-qualified African translators, the Secretary-General is of the opinion that, subject to the necessary approval, the programme should be continued when appropriate resources have been found to finance the new posts and the programme, including overhead costs.

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Recommendation

13. The Secretary-General, accordingly, recommends that the General Assembly approve the resumption of the training programme as soon as extrabudgetary resources have been identified for this purpose and that the 1982-1983 proposed programme budget be amended as proposed under paragraph 11 above.

ANNEX

Programme for Training English and French Translators at ECA

	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Appropriation</u>	<u>Total Appropriation for biennium</u>	<u>No. of candidates convoked</u>	<u>Trainees</u>	<u>Successful trainees</u>
1st Course	Sept. 78/May 79	\$ 76 050	1978-79 \$152 100	53	8 (5E/3F)	2 (1E/1F)
2nd Course	Oct. 79/June 80	76 050		130	9 (7F/2E)	4 (1E/3F)
3rd Course	Nov. 80/July 81	181 150	1980-81 \$362 300	175	8 (F)	5 (F)
4th Course	Suspended	181 150				