



General Assembly

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Programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999

Consolidation of technical secretariat servicing of intergovernmental bodies

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 8 of section III of its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997, entitled “Questions relating to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999”, noted that the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services would not, for the present time, undertake the servicing of the Fifth and Sixth Committees of the Assembly or of the Security Council, even though the rationalization of servicing arrangements should lead to greater unity of purpose, greater coherence of efforts at all levels and greater cost-effectiveness, which would result in economies of scale.
2. In paragraph 9 of section III of the same resolution, the Secretary-General was requested to keep those arrangements under review and to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session a report in that regard, with a view to considering the possible integration of all conference-servicing resources for all Main Committees of the Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary and ad hoc bodies and special conferences into the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.
3. The intention to establish a Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, which would integrate the major technical support services for the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary bodies, provided at that time by the Department of Political Affairs and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, was announced in a letter of the Secretary-General dated 17 March 1997 addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/51/829). In that letter, the Secretary-General stressed that a priority in the reform effort should be to strengthen the coherence, quality and efficiency of the technical support services provided by the Secretariat to intergovernmental bodies. In this regard, he pointed out the need to streamline and strengthen technical support for the intergovernmental process.
4. Since its establishment one year ago, the new Department has provided technical secretariat services to the plenary meetings of the General Assembly (regular and special sessions), its General Committee and its First, Special Political and Decolonization, Second and Third Committees, the Special Committee on Decolonization (Special Committee of 24),

the Disarmament Commission, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, the Economic and Social Council and the majority of its subsidiary organs, and to a number of other intergovernmental meetings and consultations.

5. The Department does not at present provide technical servicing to the Security Council, which remains in the Department of Political Affairs, or to the Fifth and Sixth Committees of the Assembly, which continue to receive technical and substantive servicing by the Department of Management and the Office of Legal Affairs, respectively. However, the conference servicing resources for the servicing of the Security Council and the Fifth and Sixth Committees are integrated in the Department, together with the resources for all other intergovernmental and expert bodies.

6. The presence of the secretaries of most of the different General Assembly and Economic and Social Council bodies in the same Department has allowed better coordination and the avoidance of the time-consuming interdepartmental consultations of previous years. The preparation of regular and special sessions of the Assembly has proved to be easier. Contact between the secretariat of the Committees with conference services is now much closer, as that operation is also in the same Department.

7. One of the gains resulting from the consolidation of the technical secretariat services is the presence in the new Department of the Documentation Programming and Monitoring Unit. Joining the technical secretariat servicing teams for different Committees and intergovernmental bodies into a single department has strengthened the role of the Unit as the "clearing house" for documents of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and has afforded better overall coordination and rationalization of documentation.

8. The substantive support to the work of intergovernmental organs serviced by the new Department is provided by practically all other departments of the Secretariat, including the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department for Disarmament Affairs. In coordinating the work of the secretaries of the Main Committees of the General Assembly, of the Economic and Social Council, and of its subsidiary organs, the Department is in constant contact with the Office of the Secretary-General, the Protocol and Liaison Service, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Security and Safety Service, the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and the Office of Central Support Services. This network of contacts is reflected in the composition of the Secretariat's Coordination Committee for the General Assembly.

9. During sessions of the General Assembly, the secretaries of the Fifth and Sixth Committees as well as the Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions participate in the weekly working-level coordination meeting, which is convened by the General Assembly and ECOSOC Affairs Division of the new Department. The legal advisers to the Assembly from the Office of Legal Affairs also take part in the meeting, which has proved a useful tool for horizontal contacts among working-level staff responsible for all aspects of work of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary organs.

10. Given that the present arrangements for the provision of substantive, technical and conference servicing to all intergovernmental and expert bodies appear to meet the requirements of Member States, no change is proposed at this time. The Assembly will be informed of any plans for further developments in this field.