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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Application by the United Nations system of the Mar del Plata
Action Plan on water development and administration

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the application by the United Nations system of the Mar del Plata Action Plan on water development and administration (A/36/411).

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This note contains comments of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/36/411) concerning the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan a/ adopted at the United Nations Water Conference in 1977. The JIU report is entitled "Application by the United Nations System of the Mar del Plata Action Plan on water development and administration".

2. Although these comments are presented in the name of the Secretary-General, they also represent the common views of the organizations who participate in the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) Intersecretariat Group for Water. b/ The observations generally corroborate the main findings of the Inspector and supplement the information given in the report in the light of resolutions adopted after the completion of the report by the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1981 and of recent actions by the organizations, which are pertinent to the findings of the report.

3. These comments refer to questions concerning the support by the United Nations system in the areas of policy and planning, of education and training, as well as those concerning the strengthening of the capacity of the system at the regional and national level. With regard to the report as a whole, the Secretary-General welcomes the report of the JIU, which provides a comprehensive review of the present involvement of organizations of the United Nations system concerned with water resources development and contains constructive recommendations for future action. In particular, the emphasis given to the primary role of Governments in the implementation of the Action Plan is welcome.

a/ Report of the United Nations Water Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.II.A.12), chap. I.

b/ The members of the ACC Intersecretariat Group for Water are the United Nations (Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, Department of Technical Co-operation for Development, regional commissions, Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator), United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, International Labour Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health Organization, World Bank, World Meteorological Organization and International Atomic Energy Agency.

II. SUPPORT FROM THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN THE AREAS OF
POLICY AND PLANNING, AND EDUCATION AND TRAINING

4. The organizations concur with the Inspector's observation in paragraphs 28 and 29 concerning the need for an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to planning and development of water resources. In this connexion, in addition to the activities of individual organizations in these fields as outlined in paragraphs 45 to 47 of the report, it may be noted that since the completion of the report the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1981, on the recommendation of the Committee on Natural Resources at its seventh session, adopted resolution 1981/80 of 24 July 1981. In section I of that resolution, the Council endorsed the proposal for the organization of interdisciplinary missions, staffed by experts of the various organizations, to render technical assistance to Governments, inter alia, on the formulation of comprehensive water policies, the setting up of appropriate administrative arrangements and the formulation of national master plans, in response to requests from Governments and in line with the specific requirements of those Governments. The missions would be organized along the lines suggested in paragraphs 98 to 101 of the Secretary-General's report entitled "Progress and prospects relative to water resources policy, planning, legislation and institutional arrangements: proposals for interdisciplinary missions" (E/C.7/118), through a few pilot advisory missions and with the involvement of the relevant organizations of the United Nations system, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the regional commissions, and would be funded from extrabudgetary sources, if possible, within the indicative planning figures of UNDP for the country concerned.

5. It is felt that these missions would constitute an effective means of fostering concerted action in carrying out projects designed to support Governments of developing countries in formulating and implementing water development plans of interdisciplinary conception, as recommended by the Inspector.

6. With regard to education and training, the organizations concur with the Inspector's emphasis on the need for system-wide inputs, as indicated in paragraphs 83 to 87, and share his concern as to the adequacy of existing programmes and approaches in his field.

7. This concern is substantiated by the views of Governments as contained in the survey carried out in connexion with the review of the progress in the implementation by Governments of the Mar del Plata Action Plan, presented to the Committee on Natural Resources at its seventh session (E/C.7/117 and E/C.7/118). The survey indicated that the manpower situation in developing countries has remained essentially the same since the Conference in 1977, both in terms of availability and adequacy at almost all levels and categories.

8. The organizations, at the first session of the ACC Intersecretariat Group for Water, in 1980, expressed their concern that their activities in this area might not always have a sufficiently long-lasting effect and recognized the need for

evolving more systematic and comprehensive approaches to education and training. These concerns were made known to the Committee on Natural Resources at its seventh session in document E/C.7/120, when it was stated that the development of a concerted approach to assisting Governments would require a greater emphasis to be placed on the strengthening and development of permanent education and training programmes and facilities.

9. Following the recommendations of the Committee, the Economic and Social Council, in section III of resolution 1981/80, requested the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, to develop integrated and comprehensive approaches and programmes with regard to education and training in the field of water resources in developing countries, and to report thereon to the Committee on Natural Resources at its ninth session.

10. In the same resolution, the Council requested the regional commissions and the organizations concerned to consider the establishment and upgrading of regional and subregional water training programmes and networks, taking into account the existing arrangements, and requested the Secretary-General to report on progress made in that regard to the Committee on Natural Resources at its ninth session.

11. In a related manner, the Council, in resolution 1981/81 of 24 July 1981, also urged the regional commissions to consider at the request of the Governments concerned, and whenever appropriate, the promotion of training activities for the preparation of qualified cadres of managers, administrators and technicians needed for the development, use and protection of international water resources.

12. The organizations concerned, at the second session of the ACC Intersecretariat Group for Water, initiated discussions concerning the concerted implementation of the above mandates. In addition, with regard to drinking water supply and sanitation, it may be noted that the Steering Committee for Co-operative Action has established a task force on human resources development, with the purpose of developing new approaches and programmes within the context of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

13. The JIU report emphasized the importance of integrating environmental considerations in water resources development and management activities, in keeping with recommendations 51 through 55 of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, c/ which were taken into account in the Mar del Plata Action Plan. The organizations of the United Nations system are fully cognizant of the importance of environmental considerations and are taking specific measures to ensure that these considerations are fully integrated in the development and management of water resources.

c/ Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
(United Nations publication, Sales No. E.73.II.A.14), chap. II, sect. B.

14. In this connexion, it may be noted that in addition to the activities indicated by the Inspector, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in co-operation with the organizations of the United Nations system, is involved in the assessment of industrial pollutants, in ensuring that consideration of environmental aspects are properly taken into account in the development of major river basins, and in conducting training courses on the subject of integrated water management. The UNEP Regional Seas Programme also contains important components for the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan.

III. STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF THE SYSTEM

15. With regard to issues concerning basic co-ordination arrangements as discussed in paragraphs 105 to 118 of the JIU report, it may be pointed out that since the completion of the report, the Economic and Social Council in section VI of resolution 1981/80, took note of the arrangements made by ACC for co-operation and co-ordination at the international level through the Intersecretariat Group for Water, with the terms of reference as shown in document E/C.7/120. This arrangement provides an appropriate basis for functional co-ordination and for integrated planning and implementation, and for increased efforts for joint planning of the activities of the system.

16. It may be noted that a close working relationship exists between the Group and the Steering Committee for Co-operative Action for the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. Issues concerning the Decade are discussed at the sessions of the Group, and information is provided by the WHO Unit for Global Promotion and Co-operation for Water Supply and Sanitation as the secretariat of the Steering Committee, on the activities and decisions of the Steering Committee.

17. With regard to strengthening the capabilities of the regional commissions, as referred to in paragraphs 119 to 128, 144 and 145, the Secretary-General notes that, in General Assembly resolution 32/197, on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, the Assembly recommended that measures should be taken to enable the Commissions to function expeditiously as executing agencies for interregional, regional, subregional, and intersectoral projects and in areas which did not fall within the purview of the sectoral responsibilities of the specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies. It considered that this question, as well as the possibility of assigning to the commissions executing agency functions for country projects would warrant further examination, taking into account the sectoral responsibilities of other organizations. In line with the views given in paragraph 120 of the Inspector's report, consideration would also have to be given to the formulation of measures to enable the system as a whole to use to best advantage the machinery already in existence.

18. With regard to the analysis of the regional activities, attention is also drawn to the regional activities of the specialized agencies and their

complementarity with those of the regional commissions. As the Inspector points out, however, these complementarities are adequately dealt with by the regional commissions through intersecretariat arrangements.

19. With regard to issues related to integration of activities at the country level, the organizations concur with the views expressed in paragraphs 129 to 133 of the report. Several initiatives are being taken that aim at enhancing the capability of the system to act in a concerted manner.

20. In conformity with the recommendations of the United Nations Water Conference, means are being sought for strengthening the role of the resident co-ordinators/resident representatives to act as a focal point in the co-ordination of projects and programmes. In the case of drinking water supply and sanitation, they are being assisted by technical support teams composed of field experts affiliated with individual organizations. In addition, it is felt that the organization of interdisciplinary missions mentioned in paragraph 4 above would also contribute to this purpose.

21. As pointed out in paragraph 133 of the JIU report, the ACC Intersecretariat Group for Water assists in the co-ordination of water-related activities at the country level. This includes new and ongoing projects with a view to increasing co-operation in their implementation. The organizations have agreed on general guidelines for co-operation in cases where joint action by two or more organizations might be called for, as follows:

(a) In cases where a short-term consultancy concerning a project is required and it falls within the purview of another organization, the executing organization would, as appropriate, endeavour to consult that organization on the choice of expert and, if possible, on the outcome of the expert's work;

(b) In cases where a significant part of a project can be clearly identified as having well-defined functions within the competence of another organization, that organization would be consulted for the purpose of assigning to it the responsibility for that part of the project;

(c) In cases involving tasks that cannot readily be suballocated, whether because of timing constraints or because the tasks do not lend themselves to a clear distinction in relation to the technical competence of other organizations, it would be more efficient for the executing organization to provide the full services. This organization would, however, seek the advice of and technical support from other organizations as might be required.

22. Furthermore, as stated by the Inspector, the organizations are in the process of completing a note on their respective roles and their methods of collaboration and co-operation for the use of resident co-ordinators/resident representatives, as well as country representatives and project managers affiliated with individual organizations. The note prepared by the Inspector, entitled "Guide to agencies and offices of the United Nations system active in the water field" (JIU/Note/81/1),

was found to be informative. It is envisaged that the information in the note, suitably updated, would be used as part of the briefing note.

23. With regard to financing arrangements, the organizations share the views, expressed by the Inspector in paragraph 101, that there is need for an increase in over-all flow of development financing and for the creation of a steady flow of properly formulated water development projects. In addition, they feel that there is an equal need for an evaluation of the effectiveness of past investments in the field to aid formulation of future policies. In fact, this kind of evaluation has already been initiated in the case of drinking water supply and sanitation.
