



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/37/112/Add.1
18 August 1982

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-seventh session
Items 107 and 108 of
the provisional agenda*

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Secretariat organization and procedures for preparation of
United Nations special conferences

Comments of the Secretary-General

In the annex to this document, the Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the members of the General Assembly, through the committee on Conferences, his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Secretariat organization and procedures for preparation of United Nations special conferences" (A/37/112).

* A/37/150

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

1. The Secretary-General welcomes the report by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on Secretariat organization and procedures for the preparation of United Nations special conferences and considers it to be a constructive contribution towards the solution of the increasingly complex and demanding management problems posed by the convening and organization of special conferences, the number of which has risen considerably in the course of the past few years. The observations which follow relate to the various recommendations by the Inspectors in chapter VIII of their report.

2. At the outset it may be appropriate to recall that the Committee on Conferences and the General Assembly have in the past two years paid particular attention to the subject of special conferences. In 1980 and 1981 the Secretary-General submitted to the Committee on Conferences detailed and comprehensive reports on experience gained in this regard (A/AC.172/27 and 48), resulting in the adoption by the General Assembly of two resolutions containing detailed sets of guidelines on the preparation, organization and servicing arrangements of special conferences of the United Nations and their preparatory meetings (resolution 35/10 C) and on control and limitation of documentation (resolution 36/117 D). By these actions of the General Assembly many of the matters raised in the report by the Inspectors have already been codified. Moreover, recent decisions by the Secretary-General in the field of control and limitation of documentation, which will also be applicable to documentation prepared by the Secretariat for special conferences, should in the future substantially mitigate many of the related problems to which the Inspectors have referred. The study by the Inspectors complements, in the view of the Secretary-General, the endeavours of the Assembly to improve the organization and procedures to be followed by the Secretariat in the preparation of special conferences.

3. In his 1980 report, the Secretary-General pointed to the diversity which existed in respect of the subject, pattern and structure of special conferences, which extend to practically all fields of activity of the organization, although no agreed definition of the term "special conference" yet exists. Problems encountered in one area might not arise in another and, thus, the approach taken by the Secretariat might have to differ depending on circumstances and the subject area of a conference. The Inspectors in their report attach particular emphasis to conferences in the economic and social field, to which indeed a significant number of special conferences held during the past decade belonged. However, in the interest of general applicability of guidelines eventually to be approved by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General would have considered it advantageous if the scope of the study could have been broadened to reflect more fully the experience gained in other areas and to take full account of varying requirements.

Recommendation 1 (a)

The Secretary-General should establish a Conference Management Committee immediately after an intergovernmental organ recommends the convening of a special conference, with designated representatives from the substantive secretariat, the Departments of Conference Services and Public Information, OFS, OSSECS and the Office of the Director-General for economic and social conferences, and other Secretariat units as needed. This Committee, and particularly its chairman, should have clear and co-ordinated authority and responsibilities for conference preparation, and should meet regularly throughout the preparatory period.

4. Problems which tended to arise at the Secretariat level in the course of preparation of past special conferences were mainly caused by insufficient co-ordination among some of the departments and offices concerned and by the absence of a clear definition of the authority and, on occasion, responsibility assigned to various offices. For this reason, the Secretary-General welcomes the proposal to establish a Conference Management Committee (CMC) as a central management mechanism. The Secretary-General believes that the CMC should be under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General of the Conference or the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The CMC should guide and co-ordinate all Secretariat activity during the preparatory phase of the conference and should undertake after the conclusion of the conference a comprehensive evaluation of the experience gained. With respect to the composition of CMC, the Secretary-General believes that it should also include representatives of the Office of Legal Affairs and the Office of General Services (in the case of conferences held away from Headquarters).

5. The Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation has been charged by the Secretary-General with the responsibility of providing "guidance, orientation and co-ordination for the preparation of United Nations conferences dealing with economic and social matters with a view to ensuring conformity with the directives of the intergovernmental bodies concerned" (A/33/410/Rev.1, para. 36). This responsibility is an integral part of the Director-General's function of ensuring the coherence, co-ordination and efficient management of economic and social activities within the United Nations and of establishing policy-related guidelines for such activities, as set out in General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202. One of the improvements introduced to this end in the past few years - to which reference is made in paragraph 17 of the JIU report - has been the setting up of intersecretariat steering committees, chaired by the Director-General, with the participation of the heads of United Nations entities more directly concerned, which are responsible for over-all policy guidance and interagency co-ordination. For example, steering committees were established for the preparation of the United Nations Conferences on Science and Technology for Development and the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and a new steering committee has been convened to deal with the forthcoming Population Conference. This practice will be continued in the future. It is the view of the Secretary-General that the work of such committees should be concentrated on major policy issues affecting the substantive direction of conference preparations, in particular to ensure the conformity of the preparatory

work with the over-all strategies and priorities established by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and the substantive co-ordination of such work with related activities undertaken within the United Nations system of organizations (in this connexion see also paragraph 107 of the JIU report).

6. The Inspectors observe in paragraph 47 (a) of their report that the responsibilities of the various offices involved in the preparation of special conferences have been far too diffused. The Secretary-General submits that this does not apply in the case of the Department of Conference Services or the Office for Secretariat Services in Economic and Social Matters (OSSECS), whose respective responsibilities and authority are clearly described in ST/SGB/160 on the planning, preparation and servicing of special conferences, and whose practical co-ordination of work has been particularly close and effective. Moreover, the entire range of responsibilities of OSSECS is specifically outlined in ST/SGB/163.

7. As regards the Department of Conference Services (DCS), the role of a conference services co-ordinator, as discussed in paragraph 17 of the JIU report, extends both to the preparatory and the conference stages. This function requires the planning and co-ordination of input from the various divisions of DCS and other conference servicing units at other main office locations, as well as from the substantive secretariat units involved in a conference. This includes a verification that stated needs for conference services match respective entitlements and are actually put in place.

8. The Office of General Services (OGS) is involved to a considerably greater extent in the organization of special conferences than suggested in paragraph 19 (e), particularly when they are held away from established headquarters. In such cases, OGS experiences a significant impact on the workload of its security, transportation and communication services. While OGS regularly provides sound technicians, messengers and information clerks for conferences at Headquarters, such requirements vary in host country situations, depending on the facilities available locally. Normally, the services of a sound technician are needed and an increasing number of conferences and seminars held in countries with limited technical facilities require technical advice and also the installation of interpretation equipment.

9. Some clarification may be appropriate regarding the role of the Office of Legal Affairs, mentioned in paragraph 19 (f) of the JIU report. In the Secretary-General's report on draft standard rules of procedure for United Nations conferences (A/36/199), which will be considered by the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session, it is proposed that most United Nations conferences, including special conferences (but not "treaty-making conferences"), should not require credentials or establish credentials committees. This change, if approved by the Assembly, would obviate the need for a secretary of a credentials committee.

10. In the case of many conferences prior to 1981, the registration of representatives and other participants was handled by the Office of Legal Affairs. Since this function does not usually involve any legal question, it was subsequently considered more practicable that the office sending invitations to

participants and the protocol and liaison section should be entrusted with the registration task, including the preparation and issuance of the list of participants.

11. While generally it is advisable to assign a legal officer to attend any large conference, the Secretary-General is of the opinion that the need to do so should be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the plan of work of the conference and the likelihood of disputes on questions of procedure, representation or substance (e.g. the establishment of new organs or organizations, or the assignment, on recommendation of a conference, of new responsibilities to existing organs or organizations).

Recommendation 1 (b)

The Committee (CMC) should maintain control of the preparatory process, using PERT techniques as a disciplined basis for planning, scheduling, monitoring and adjusting the complex organizational effort which a special conference requires.

12. The Secretary-General feels that sufficient expertise and experience in organizing and planning special conferences exists within the United Nations system. What is essential is to put that expertise to effective use through better organization and direction. To that end, the PERT technique could provide a useful and effective management tool, but it may not always be the only appropriate method for a conference management committee to maintain a systematic approach to the entire preparatory process. Thus, other management methods for planning, scheduling and monitoring should also be considered, especially in view of the political considerations which normally play an essential role in the preparatory process and the outcome of a conference.

13. For UNISPACE, for example, a comprehensive plan for all conference preparations was developed three years in advance of the Conference. This plan set out the purpose, objectives, agenda, organization, secretariat, bureau and the format of the Conference, as well as a schedule for all preparatory activities, including documentation and regional seminars (see A/34/20, paras. 85-106). This plan was strictly adhered to and no major revision was required. As such, it can provide a successful example of a comprehensive and coherent scheduling system in action.

14. The Secretary-General considers that all offices involved in the preparation of special conferences should be acquainted with the use of efficient management techniques and that this should not be restricted to any one office, as suggested in paragraph 59 of the JIU report, as this office might not be in a position to co-ordinate fully the complex web of the totality of activities. Moreover, the Secretary-General believes that emphasis should be placed on the need for systematic management and control, as required, rather than on the mandatory use of a particular approach.

15. The flow-chart attached to the JIU report appears to cover the main elements of the preparatory process and could undoubtedly provide a useful guide for such

questions as the timing of meetings of the preparatory committee. On the other hand, much will depend on the specific requirements of a conference, its timing in relation to other events, such as a session of the General Assembly during the preparatory process, and the type of secretariat assistance to be given to Governments during this stage. Thus the development of an integrated time-table of the type illustrated by the JIU would depend on the specific characteristics, objectives and design of a particular conference.

16. To sum up, the Secretary-General agrees that control over the preparatory process for a special conference at the Secretariat level should be exercised by a CMC, but believes that the management and control techniques to be used in that regard should not be restricted to the PERT method.

Recommendation 1 (c)

The function of Conference Secretary should be merged with that of Executive or Administrative Officer. The official combining these functions should be an outposted member of OSSECS assigned to the conference secretariat and charged to the special conference budget, without increasing over-all costs. OSSECS should ensure that these officials are adequately trained in conference management including PERT and should arrange for their assignment to new special conferences when they complete each assignment.

17. The functional titles "executive secretary of a conference" and "secretary of a conference" have existed for some time and in the absence of clear definitions, members of the Secretariat as well as representatives have been confused. It might have contributed to a clearer distinction of the respective responsibilities of such staff if the executive secretary had been designated say, "executive assistant to the Secretary-General of the conference" instead. The basic functions of the secretary of a conference, on the other hand, are specified in general terms in paragraphs 13-15 of ST/SGB/160. In addition, the secretary, together with his or her supportive staff, has the task of providing technical servicing of the conference, including its preparatory activities, and is further responsible for the provision of technical servicing to all formal and informal negotiating meetings, including the preparation of synoptic tables, draft consolidated texts for such negotiations, final drafts submitted for formal adoption by a conference and the final report of a conference. The functions performed by the administrative and/or executive officer of a conference secretariat are distinctly different particularly during a conference, when most of the time a secretary is required to attend official meetings and the executive administrative officer needs to assure the smooth performance of the behind-the-scenes administrative and logistical tasks. To exemplify further the practical difficulties which might arise with the arrangement proposed by the Inspectors, one might consider its effect in a situation where an existing department or office is designated as substantive secretariat and the Executive Officer of this department is also called upon to assume the functions as secretary of the conference. For example, the Executive Officer of the Offices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations would then have to serve as Secretary of the United Nations Conference on the Question of Palestine.

18. In view of the variety of tasks performed by a technical secretariat which exists on a permanent basis, as in the case of the Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters (OSSECS) for the economic and social areas, it is impossible to assign a staff member solely to one special conference, let alone to outpost this staff member to the substantive servicing unit for the duration of the preparatory process, which would defeat the purpose of General Assembly resolution 32/197, which called for the provision by OSSECS, on an integrated basis, of technical secretariat services for all ad hoc conferences in the economic and social fields. The timing and nature of the preparatory processes for special conferences also vary. For each conference a staff member is assigned from the beginning to work with the preparatory body concerned, under the direct supervision of the Secretary of the Economic and Social Council, and these staff members continue to serve as secretaries of other intergovernmental meetings. Moreover, not only the secretary but several other staff members are usually involved in the provision of technical secretariat services to a preparatory body or a special conference. Accordingly, the Secretary-General does not see merit in following the suggestion by the Inspectors.

19. In this connexion, it should also be emphasized that, contrary to the opinion of the Inspectors, as expressed in paragraph 62 of their report, full-time and continuous services have indeed been provided by OSSECS from the beginning of the preparations for the various conferences. This included the servicing of the preparatory body and the planning and organization of its work. OSSECS has actively briefed every Secretary-General of past conferences, delegations, and others on the steps required for the launching of the preparatory process and on the planning and organization of work of the preparatory body and of the special conference itself.

20. The Inspectors seem to imply in their report that all expertise in the technical servicing of special conferences is concentrated in OSSECS, whereas its terms of reference cover only conferences on economic and social matters. It is not clear, therefore, which unit should, in the view of the Inspectors, perform such functions in the case of a conference in another category. The arrangements for the technical servicing of the UNISPACE conference, for example, provide an example of alternative ways of organizing this task at the secretariat level. In that case the substantive secretariat, temporarily strengthened, assumed the responsibilities for technical servicing.

21. With reference to paragraph 68 of the Inspectors' report, in which attention is drawn to the considerable variation in the size and composition of the substantive secretariat of special conferences in the past, it might be interesting to note that the UNISPACE secretariat consisted of a total of 29 staff members (19 in the Professional and 10 in the General Service category). However, this might be a misleading figure as to a desirable level of staffing required for the secretariat of a special conference, since 10 Professional and 6 General Service staff were part of a permanent secretariat unit with a defined work programme to be carried out in addition to the conference preparations. The temporary staff added to the UNISPACE secretariat also included one Assistant Secretary-General, three Professional and four General Service staff, serving, on average, for less than

18 months. Thus, any analysis of the staffing situation, as provided in paragraph 68, should fully distinguish between the number of staff specifically appointed for a conference and those drawn from existing secretariat machinery on a part-time basis. In that respect, the figures presented in paragraph 68 might require re-examination, as it appears that categories of staff reflected in the case of one conference (HABITAT) were not included in the tabulation for others (World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women).

22. With respect to UNISPACE, the recommendation by its Preparatory Committee, subsequently approved by the General Assembly, that there should be three Deputy Secretaries-General of the Conference might, in retrospect, be considered as having constituted a weakness in the administrative secretariat set-up. Difficulties arose in regard to filling these posts and ultimately six senior staff with the same rank were appointed to serve at the political level as consultants. Three of these staff were given the title of Deputy Secretary-General and the other three that of Senior Adviser to the Secretary-General of the Conference. In practice, however, it proved to be very difficult to find useful work at the appropriate level to keep all six senior staff fully occupied. The experience with UNISPACE suggests that in terms of quantity of work it would be difficult to keep even one Deputy Secretary-General fully and usefully occupied. In future, it might therefore be preferable to appoint to senior staff positions only one person with substantive responsibilities and another with executive and administrative responsibilities. They could be supported by a number of other Professional staff (P-5 and below) and by General Service staff. If serving full-time, the number of conference staff might perhaps be in the range of eight to ten Professionals and six to eight General Service staff.

23. As indicated in the JIU report, all newly-appointed staff need an orientation period in order to become fully familiar with United Nations conference processes. If such appointments are made too late in the preparatory process, many of the arrangements might already have been completed without any effective input by such temporary staff. To avoid such structural shortcomings it might be advisable rather to make provision for short-term consultants to perform specific, specialized tasks which are often of an ad hoc and briefer nature and might, in any case, not fully occupy staff throughout a preparatory period.

24. Another example of a positive experience gained in respect of the preparation and servicing of a special conference by an existing secretariat unit, temporarily strengthened, has been provided by UNCTAD, which was responsible for organizing the United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries. Since the Secretary-General of UNCTAD had been designated as Secretary-General of the Conference, a number of the problems to which the Inspectors have drawn attention in their report were not experienced on that occasion. Specifically, the question of "who was in charge" never arose (see paragraph 25 of the JIU report). Moreover, the Secretary of the Conference, appointed by the Secretary-General, was also made responsible for conference co-ordination, in line with UNCTAD's usual practice, thereby avoiding any division of tasks which might have given rise to confusion.

Recommendation 1 (d)

All reports on conference preparatory progress or on the implications of proposed changes should include a brief but clear summary of financial, administrative, policy and programme status and relationships, based on data prepared and maintained by the Conference Management Committee.

25. The Secretary-General considers the implementation of this recommendation to be feasible, but wishes to take this opportunity to elaborate further on some of the financial aspects of special conferences.
26. The role of the Office of Financial Services throughout the planning stage, and often during a special conference, encompasses the preparation and defence of initial statements of financial implications and of any revised estimates which might become necessary during the preparatory phase of a conference; the estimate of additional costs to be borne by a host government and to be included in the host country agreement; the provision of a finance officer at a conference site, particularly on the occasion of large conferences; and the finalization of accounts on the actual costs incurred under a host country agreement for presentation to a host government.
27. As noted in the JIU report, it is necessary to provide statements of financial implications to the General Assembly at a very early stage of the preparations - often at a time when the initial decision to convene a conference is taken - when very little information is available, except of the most general nature. As the work of a preparatory committee for a special conference progresses, some of the initial budgetary assumptions for the conference might be called into question. In such circumstances, existing financial limits must nevertheless be respected for the time being. New perceptions and recommendations have to be reflected in updated administrative and financial proposals to the General Assembly, since a preparatory body itself does not have the power to appropriate funds. Moreover, the evolving process of defining the scale of a conference may have many implications on the size of the secretariat and the number of staff to be sent to the site of a conference, elements which need to be reflected in the host government agreement, where applicable.
28. As regards the determination and reporting of costs of special conferences, it should be noted that the United Nations does not maintain a cost accounting system which could identify all costs involved. Budgetary requests to the General Assembly tend to be concentrated on the additional appropriations that are required to finance a conference. These requirements reflect the most visible costs of a conference, including those for any special secretariat which might be established. The public information programme is often identified in some detail, although the contribution from the existing resources of the Department of Public Information is often not quantified. By the same token, contributions by the Secretariat of the United Nations, including the permanent unit most closely related to the secretariat of the conference, are not identified, although the preparations for a conference may have a substantial impact on the workload of those units. In the absence of detailed time-keeping and cost allocation system,

which would be difficult to introduce and expensive to administer, no quantification is available on those inputs. Notwithstanding these limitations, some progress has been made in estimating conference inputs over and above those for which appropriations are requested. These estimates can include inputs to be provided by specialized agencies, if sufficient time is available to gather the required information.

29. Difficulties also exist as regards the quantification of the conference servicing costs, a problem addressed in paragraph 92 of the Inspectors' report. While standards have been developed for the various functions involved, special conferences are often uneven in their requirements and provision might therefore have to be made for some margin of safety, the extent of which may not be known until later in the preparatory process. In particular, accurate estimates of the documentation workload have proved to be extremely difficult and therefore considerable uncertainty surrounds any determination of the correct number of conference servicing staff required. The recent United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy may be used as an example to highlight this problem: while the documentation workload was estimated before the Conference to amount to 600 pages, the actual volume reached only 309 pages. Also, the actual costs cannot be determined post facto, since there is no machinery which would allocate time and costs in relation to actual workloads.

30. These difficulties and uncertainties have a bearing on the cost figures which are presented below, and which relate to the table in paragraph 43 of the JIU report. The original estimates shown in each case reflect the initial full-scale estimate submitted to the General Assembly, often two years or more before the date of the conference and nearly always before a conference secretariat had been established and a preparatory organ had started its work. For the sake of comparability, these estimates do not include conference servicing costs, since the actual costs shown in column 3 are confined to those incurred by the substantive units.

Basic United Nations special conference costs
 (In thousands of \$US)

	Original cost estimate a/ (regular budget)	Year	Final cost (or latest estimate) b/	Additional voluntary c/ funds
	\$		\$	\$
Habitat, 1976	2,095	1973	2,754	1,150
Water, 1977	423	1975	749	194
Science and Technology for Development, 1979	4,182	1976	4,908	-
Women, 1980	1,432	1978	1,479	283
New and Renewable Sources of Energy, 1981	2,952 d/	1978	5,545	525
Least Developed Countries, 1981	730	1979	1,225	678
Aging, 1982	1,477 e/	1980	950	660
Population, 1984	710	1981	710	1,500

a/ This represents the initial full-scale estimate given to the General Assembly. It excludes conference servicing costs, but includes estimated public information where readily identifiable.

b/ Final costs (or latest estimate) for activities compatible with those shown under original cost estimates.

c/ Estimated.

d/ In addition, a substantial increase was approved in 1979.

e/ Budget estimate later reduced.

31. To provide an order of magnitude and in addition to the figures shown above, an analysis has also been made of the reports submitted to host countries to determine the approximate numbers of conference servicing staff sent to a conference site and to come up with the estimated cost of salaries paid during each conference (1981 prices used in all cases for purposes of comparison). The resulting estimates of total in-session conference services costs were as follows:

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	\$
United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (1976)	182,000
United Nations Water Conference (1977)	192,000
United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (1979)	362,000
World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women (1980)	358,000
United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy (1981)	437,000
United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (1981)	301,000

32. These costs do not include pre-session or post-session documentation, but represent regular budget charges in addition to those shown in the table in paragraph 43 of the JIU report. The above costs do not include those borne by the host country arising from the application of resolution 31/140 and costs of additional local services which are not reported to the United Nations.

33. A different budgetary approach was chosen for UNISPACE, which was planned on the basis of an over-all financial ceiling. This might be an appropriate procedure for all special conferences as it is extremely difficult for the Secretariat to provide exact estimates one to two years in advance in respect of expenditures to be incurred over a period of two to four years hence. Some flexibility might therefore be desirable, especially since priorities tend to change during the planning phase for a conference. Once a ceiling has been established, the Secretary-General could propose to the General Assembly the transfer of funds from one biennium to the other, as the planning phase for special conferences often extends over more than one biennium and in some cases requires transfers from one budget section to another.

Recommendation 1 (e)

This new preparatory mechanism should be supplemented by standard guidelines for the preparation of special and other conferences, and by the development of basic servicing requirements and costing rates where they do not already exist.

34. The Secretary-General believes that basic guidelines already exist in the form of ST/SGB/160 and of pertinent resolutions of the General Assembly. Moreover, following consideration of the present JIU report the General Assembly, upon recommendation by the Committee on Conferences, might wish to adopt further guidelines which would complement those already approved by the General Assembly in its resolutions 35/10 B and 37/116 D. As regards the development of basic servicing requirements and costing rates, it may be indicated that such standards

already exist in some areas, such as those for conference servicing staff (see A/AC.172/75) and those which are in the process of being developed for staff in other areas.

Recommendation 2 (a)

Special conference preparations should seek new approaches wherever possible to increase the meaningful involvement of the many non-Secretariat participants, both to improve the preparations for the conferences and to increase the international support and follow-up actions which the conferences seek to generate.

35. The Secretary-General fully concurs with the view of the Inspectors that new approaches should be actively devised to increase, wherever possible, the meaningful involvement of non-secretariat participants, both with a view to improving the preparations for a conference and to increasing the international support and follow-up action which a conference might seek to generate.

36. As regards follow-up action, it might be extremely difficult at the time of convening a conference to make specific recommendations on appropriate steps in that direction, particularly on institutional questions which have proven to be the most controversial elements at past special conferences. The outcome of a conference cannot be pre-judged with any precision during a preparatory period.

37. In this context, it may be observed that in the chart following paragraph 13 of the Inspector's report which lists the various types of participants involved in the organization and preparation of special conferences, it might have been useful to make a clearer distinction between intergovernmental, intersecretariat and non-United Nations bodies and entities. Moreover the growing number of parallel and ancillary activities, which over the years have become an integral part of many conferences in various fields, e.g. panel discussions and NGO forums, should not be overlooked. On several occasions such activities have had a direct effect on the proceedings of, and the availability of facilities provided to, meetings of a conference itself, although no budgetary provisions had been made for such purposes.

Recommendation 2 (b)

The Inspectors welcome the decision in General Assembly resolution 35/10 C to use existing Secretariat machinery as secretariats for special conferences wherever possible. Whether the special representative and his staff are added temporarily to existing units or created as a special secretariat, however, they should be appointed as early as possible, and with careful attention to their specific qualifications for carrying out the preparatory tasks required and to providing a sound mix of technical, administrative and conference skills.

38. The Secretary-General has attempted to implement General Assembly resolution 35/10 B to the extent possible and will continue to do so for future special conferences.

Recommendation 2 (c)

If a special conference is to be hosted by a government away from established headquarters, a Secretariat planning and review mission should be made to the country and careful cost and servicing estimates made and discussed with the government before the invitation to host the conference is formally made and accepted. A host government preparatory committee or focal point should also be established and a conference agreement signed at the earliest possible date.

39. This recommendation reflects the current practice of the Secretariat. In the case of all major conferences held away from established headquarters at the invitation of host governments in past years, all requirements were explicitly known to the host authorities at least a year before the date of the conference. Therefore, the consternation on their part, as reported by the Inspectors, could not have been due to unsatisfactory co-ordination or imprecise information provided by the Secretariat. Rather, it appears that there is a need for constant attention on the part of host governments to assess realistically the time needed to arrange for all requirements and to take the necessary steps in that regard well in advance. Although it is an established practice to dispatch Secretariat missions to a host country to assess, in the light of the requirements of a particular conference, all available facilities on the spot, the Secretary-General wishes to stress the importance of informal discussions between the Secretariat and a potential host government on the financial and logistical aspects involved in any invitation prior to its formal acceptance.

40. A host country agreement should, as pointed out by the Inspectors in paragraphs 78 to 80 of their report, be signed well in advance of a conference. Based on the logistical problems likely to be involved in the transfer from one site to another, the signing of a host country agreement six weeks prior to the beginning of a conference might very well seem too tight a time-frame and fraught with numerous practical difficulties. On the other hand, unavoidable delays involved in the parliamentary procedures of host countries have to be taken into account in planning for a realistic date for the signing of an agreement. In the case of UNISPACE, negotiations on the agreement started nearly a year prior to the Conference, and yet it could only be signed three months before. The imposition of a longer lead time could have led to a transfer of the venue of the conference, notwithstanding the fact that there was never any doubt about the signing. What appears to be required instead of setting deadlines is a modification in the related procedures. Until now a host government has not been obliged to advance any funds against the total estimated additional cost to be borne by it until the agreement was signed. Consequently, it should be made mandatory for a host country to make a specific advance to the United Nations immediately following the acceptance of an invitation to host a particular conference. If this is done, the host country agreement could be very well signed a few months prior to a conference without the risk of a transfer to another venue or another recognized United Nations conference centre, as the Inspectors have proposed.

41. The Inspectors suggest in paragraph 42 (d) of their report that the cost of a special conference to the host government can be perhaps twice as much in total as

the amount reimbursable to the United Nations. The cost depends entirely on the facilities and the scale and scope of services and programmes offered by a host government (such as conference premises, office space, equipment, local transportation, extra security, first-aid medical services and local staff) beyond the usual minimum required. Moreover, timely indications are required from a host country as to its ability to provide certain equipment or supplies in order that costly transport by airfreight (e.g. the shipment of a substantial number of typewriters with the keyboard mix required for purposes of conference servicing staff, the substantive secretariat unit and the public information staff) may be avoided.

42. The Inspector's observation that meetings held away from established headquarters would relieve pressure on the meetings servicing capacity at headquarters is not borne out by the facts. On the contrary, the normal workload of the documentation services is increased by the need to process material for the conference on the basis of tighter schedules in order to allow time for the shipping of documents to a conference site. Furthermore, the assignment of language staff for the duration of the conference entails a direct decrease of the capacity at their normal headquarters during that period.

Recommendation 2 (d)

The inspectors also welcome the General Assembly's emphasis in resolution 36/117 D on harmonizing special conference design with documentation needs, closely integrating any national paper preparation with the preparatory process, and controlling and limiting documentation. Specific documentation policy, limitations, and scheduling for a special conference should be established at an early date and closely and continuously monitored thereafter.

43. Following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 36/117 D, it is the Secretary-General's intention to take the necessary steps to implement its provisions as fully as possible, subject to approval by the preparatory organ for each special conference.

44. As regards the volume of in-session documentation, which is reported by the Inspectors to have reached troublesome proportions, it should be borne in mind that practically all documents produced during a conference emanate from delegations or committees and that their volume therefore cannot be controlled to any significant degree by the Secretariat.

45. The problem of late issuance of agenda documents is not confined to special conferences, but is common to practically all meeting activities. It is hoped that the root causes of this problem, such as the late submission of documents, the overloading of the documentation services and conflicting priorities due to uneven scheduling, can be gradually eliminated through a strict observance of the new policies on control and limitation of documentation recently instituted by the Secretary-General (ST/SGB/189/Add.20/Rev.1 and Add.23).

46. The planning of documentation for UNISPACE provides an interesting example of a well-organized and managed flow of documentation for a special conference. According to the programme of documentation approved by the Preparatory Committee, 12 background papers had to be made available in time for the preparation of national papers which, in turn, had to be submitted at a specific date, well in advance of the Conference. These national papers were limited to a non-negotiable maximum of 32 pages and distributed only in the language of submission. One to two-page abstracts of these papers were translated and distributed in all official languages of the Conference. In total, over 50 national papers from nearly 60 countries were received prior to the last session of the Preparatory Committee. The draft report of the Conference, which was the main document considered at the Conference, was circulated to all participants 90 days prior to the Conference. This report had been prepared by the Secretary-General of the Conference on the basis of the national papers referred to above and was considered by the Preparatory Committee in two stages. This procedure proved to be very successful in terms of ensuring a smooth flow of documentation.

Recommendation 2 (e)

Servicing requirements for a conference should be carefully and realistically established and made known at an early stage of conference preparation, based on the detailed planning specifications for the conference.

47. This recommendation is in line with the present practices of the Secretariat.

Recommendation 2 (f)

The Conference Management Committee should complete its work with a careful and critical assessment report to the Committee on Conferences on conference preparation successes and problems as a basis for improving future conferences.

48. The Secretary-General is in full agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation 3

ECOSOC and the General Assembly should consider developing and adopting guidelines for the formulation and evaluation of future special conferences, similar to those adopted for future international years in ECOSOC resolution 1980/67 and Assembly decision 35/424.

49. In view of the fact that the General Assembly has already adopted detailed guidelines on the organization and servicing of special conferences and their preparatory organs and on control and limitation of documentaion for such conferences, the formulation of new guidelines as suggested by the Inspectors might lead to a considerable duplication. The Secretary-General suggests that it would be preferable first to gain several years of experience with those already adopted over the past two years.