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Item 115 of the preliminary list\*

## PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1988-1989

## REVISED ESTIMATES

AddendumPart IIMeasures to improve the situation in the regional commissions and in those units of the Secretariat which have the highest vacancy ratesReport of the Secretary-General

1. In resolution 42/225, section V, on questions relating to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1988-1989, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to take the necessary measures to improve the situation in the regional commissions and in those units of the Secretariat which have the highest vacancy rates and to report thereon, in the context of the revised 1988-1989 budget estimates, in the light of paragraphs 27 and 28 of the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions." 1/
2. It will be recalled that in paragraph 27 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1988-1989 mentioned above, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) "concluded that the average vacancy rates that can be achieved over 1988-1989 in order to facilitate the implementation of the objective set in General Assembly resolution 41/213 are likely to be significantly higher than those represented by the adjustments that the Secretary-General has proposed." The Committee then recommended a "further

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\* A/43/50.

adjustment in the turnover deduction of 2.5 per cent for both Professional and General Service posts" and stated its intention "to monitor closely the movement of the vacancy rate on the basis of information to be provided by the Secretariat and, if necessary, [to] review the situation in the context of revised estimates during the biennium."

3. It is also indicated in paragraph 26 of the report that "if present trends continued, the projected vacancy rates as of 31 December 1987 would be 15.9 per cent for Professionals and 9.3 per cent for General Service staff." The present document, treating only the question of the vacancy rates for Professional staff, shows that the actual rate was, for the Secretariat as a whole, 15.1 per cent on 31 December 1987 and 15.8 per cent on 29 February 1988. The rate of vacancies considered normal in the United Nations is 5 to 6 per cent. As indicated in table 1, this was the situation in December 1985 (6.5 per cent).

4. The distribution of the current 15.8 per cent vacancy rate for Professional staff by duty station, given in table 1, shows that the most seriously affected units are the following: the World Food Council (WFC), with 31.3 per cent; 2/ the units located at Nairobi (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)), with 28.3 per cent; the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), with 28.1 per cent; the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), with 22.1 per cent, and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), with 20.4 per cent. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) had in February 1988 a vacancy rate of 18.8 per cent and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), a rate of 18.4 per cent. The rate was also 20.4 per cent in the United Nations Office at Vienna.

5. Globally, a preliminary analysis of the reasons for separation from service of staff members of the Secretariat during the period 31 December 1985-29 February 1988 does not indicate any significant deviation from the pattern observed in the past. Until recently, there has been during this period no marked increase in the number of resignations, early retirements or other voluntary separations. The current overall high rate of vacancies throughout the Secretariat can therefore be mainly attributed to the suspension of recruitment introduced by the Secretary-General on 21 March 1986 in response to the financial crisis of the Organization. The differences between the different duty stations, however, have existed for a number of years and result from a combination of factors.

6. Posts vacated at the regional commissions have tended to remain unencumbered for longer periods than in the rest of the Secretariat in spite of the special efforts made to fill such vacancies. This is mainly attributable to the specialized or technical nature of a number of posts in some units. Such specialized fields include engineering, architecture, transport and communications, shipping, electronic data processing, industry, water resources and environment. In addition, recent resignations from the Secretariat have included a high proportion of economists and statisticians, who are in high demand in the regional commissions. Also, and perhaps more importantly, mobility of staff among duty stations has been and remains difficult to achieve.

Table 1

Vacancy rates for posts in the Professional category and above

Duty station	Regular budget established posts	December 1985	December 1986	December 1987	February 1988
		%	%	%	%
Headquarters	2 059	6.6	11.0	12.5	14.3
Geneva (including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	920	4.7	8.6	10.0	11.6
United Nations Office at Vienna	157	7.9	23.6	21.0	20.4
Nairobi (including United Nations common system, UNEP, Habitat)	99	7.2	26.3	27.3	28.3
WFC (Rome)	16	37.5	25.0	31.3	31.3
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (Vienna and field)	82	4.9	6.1	11.0	9.8
Geneva (ECE)	128	7.0	11.7	19.5	18.8
Bangkok (ESCAP)	201	5.6	13.9	18.8	18.4
ECLAC (including Santiago, Mexico and Port-of-Spain)	196	6.2	28.1	29.4	28.1
Addis Ababa (ECA)	226	6.8	21.2	24.8	22.1
Baghdad (ESCWA)	108	27.8	26.2	a/	20.4
International Court of Justice (ICJ)	16	6.3	NA	12.5	6.3
	4 208	6.5	13.1	15.1	15.8

a/ To be verified.

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7. Regarding internal redeployment, a major goal of the vacancy management and staff redeployment programme, established in 1986, was precisely to concentrate first on the identification and redeployment of staff towards those Secretariat units with high vacancy rates. Twenty-five such vacancies have been filled through internal redeployment.

8. This internal mobility should be further improved. In this regard, it will be recalled that, by resolution 42/221, of 21 December 1987, the General Assembly approved the report of the International Civil Service Commission. <sup>3/</sup> In so doing, the Assembly introduced, with effect from 1 January 1988, an enhanced level of the assignment allowance to account for mobility. Under these revised provisions, staff members who are assigned to duty stations outside Europe, the United States and Canada would be entitled to the enhanced level of the assignment allowance, which, for staff members at the P-1 to P-4 levels at the dependency or single rate, amounts to \$7,200 or \$4,500 respectively, and for staff members at the P-5 level and above to \$7,800 or \$4,950 respectively.

9. Besides internal redeployment, the second approach has been to grant, on a limited basis because of the overall financial situation, exceptions to the suspension of external recruitment to those units with high vacancy rates, particularly the regional commissions, when no internal candidates could be identified. The exceptions to the freeze granted since its inception to appoint staff to units with high vacancy rates have been as follows: ECE: 2; ESCAP: 1; ECLAC: 1; ECA: 5; ESCWA: 7; WFC: 1; Habitat: 2; and the United Nations Office at Vienna: 4. These figures account for a total of 23 appointments, which is 27 per cent of the total of 84 authorized exceptions to the freeze. The number of appointments authorized for all regional commissions is 16, which is 19 per cent of the 84 exceptions to the freeze.

10. The persistence of the problem led the Secretariat, in early 1988, to renew its efforts, combining internal redeployment with increased external recruitment, with a view to filling a substantial number of vacancies within the next few months. This action is summarized in table 2 below. Currently, there are 127 vacancies in Secretariat units with high vacancy rates which are at different stages of being filled. In addition, the Secretary-General has authorized the regional commissions to recruit staff for short-term assignments of up to 11 months. It can therefore be said that these various measures have somewhat improved the situation in most of the units affected by the highest vacancy rates.

Table 2

Disposition of vacancies in Secretariat units  
with high vacancy rates as at 31 March 1988

Duty stations	Vacancies for filling	To be filled	
		Internally	Externally
ECE	12	3	9
ESCAP	15	5	10
ECA	20	8	12
ECLAC	24	14	10
ESCWA	19	6	13
UNEP	7	1	6
Habitat	11	5	6
Common services	2	2	1
United Nations Office at Vienna	12	9	3
WFC	5	1	4

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/42/7).

2/ A factor that must be borne in mind in interpreting high vacancy rates is the small number of posts in the staffing table of some units. In the World Food Council, the number of vacancies during 1987 oscillated between two and five. The high vacancy rate results from the comparison of these numbers with the total staffing table, consisting of only 16 regular budget posts, at the Professional level.

3/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 30 (A/42/30).

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