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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Use of experts and consultants in the United Nations

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the use of experts and consultants in the United Nations (A/C.5/37/27), the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the same subject, as transmitted in a note by the Secretary-General (A/37/358 and Corr.2), and the comments of the Secretary-General thereon (A/37/358/Add.1).
2. The Secretary-General's report in document A/C.5/37/27 is an update of a report submitted to the Assembly at its thirty-sixth session and includes data on consultants and participants in ad hoc expert groups and other advisory bodies financed from the regular budget and from related extrabudgetary funds for both years of the biennium 1980-1981. According to the Secretary-General, improved reporting procedures have made it possible for the first time to correlate the financial and personnel data and to determine whether the appropriate reports on the personnel aspects were available for all reported expenditures. The Secretary-General states that "the data reported for 1981 are, as a result, much higher in quality than those reported for 1980" (A/C.5/37/27, para. 2). The Advisory Committee agrees with this assessment and trusts that improvements will continue. The Committee recommends that the next report on the use of experts and consultants should be made to the General Assembly at its thirty-ninth session.
3. The report of JIU on use of experts and consultants in the United Nations (A/37/358 and Corr.2) contains seven main recommendations, each of which has been commented upon by the Secretary-General in document A/37/358/Add.1.

4. The first recommendation states that the principles and guidelines on the use of outside expertise are valid and should be fully applied. The Advisory Committee has noted instances of departure from these principles, for example when it considered the proposed programme budget for 1982-1983. 1/ The JIU in its report has also pointed to examples of such departure. However, the Secretary-General's comments in paragraph 15 of A/37/358/Add.1 show that the Secretariat has tried to follow the guidelines and that in several cases there are valid reasons for the apparent departure from the principles and guidelines. The Advisory Committee is aware that with any set of principles or guidelines situations may arise in which exceptions may have to be made. Nevertheless the Committee expects the Secretary-General to ensure that any future departures from the principles and guidelines for the use of outside expertise will occur only in exceptional circumstances, and that if they do occur they will be fully explained in future reports.

5. The JIU's second recommendation calls for the issuance of a new administrative instruction on the use of outside expertise to replace ST/AI/232. The JIU has concluded, in paragraph 81 of its report, that one of the main difficulties in implementing the decisions of the General Assembly in this area has been the lack of a clear definition of the terms "consultant", "expert", "contractor" and "temporary staff". The Advisory Committee understands that a new Secretary-General's Bulletin is about to be issued on policies for obtaining the services of individuals on behalf of the Organization. As noted by the Secretary-General in paragraph 16 of his comments, it will be part of a series of instructions that will clearly define the terms "temporary staff", "individual contractors", "consultants" and "participants" in ad hoc expert and other advisory groups.

6. The third recommendation of JIU is that consideration should be given to the establishment of productivity norms for those categories of staff where it is feasible. The Advisory Committee agrees with the views of the Secretary-General as contained in paragraph 17 of A/37/358/Add.1, and in particular the observation that in many functions of the Secretariat, particularly those of research and development, it would be very difficult and expensive to establish and apply such norms. Moreover, as the Secretary-General points out, even if norms could be established, they would have little effect on the need for consultants and participants in ad hoc expert groups who, by definition, will have expertise, special skills, or knowledge not normally possessed by regular staff. Subject to the foregoing, the Advisory Committee believes that wherever possible the Secretary-General should explore the feasibility of establishing such norms.

7. Recommendation 4 relates to the Inspectors' belief that "some kind of mechanism is needed to provide a more effective determination of consultancy requirements associated with the approved Programme Budget and this mechanism should be interrelated with and similar to methods used for determining staff requirements" (A/37/358, para. 68). The Advisory Committee agrees that this need exists; in its examination of the proposed programme budget for 1982-1983 the Committee found several instances where requests for consultants were not identified with specific programme elements and were, in effect, little more than requests for contingency funds. The Secretary-General indicates in paragraph 18 of

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his comments that the JIU's recommendation is being implemented. The Committee looks forward to seeing the results of this implementation in the proposed programme budget for 1984-1985.

8. Recommendation 5 proposes measures to improve the selection of consultants. The Secretary-General appears to agree with this recommendation (A/37/358/Add.1, para. 19); the Committee trusts that measures will be taken to assure its speedy implementation.

9. Recommendation 6 of JIU concerns the level of remuneration for consultants who are former staff members receiving pension benefits from the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund. Over the years both the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee have been concerned about the potential for abuse in the hiring of former staff members as consultants. The proposal of JIU might help to ensure that abuses do not occur in the practice of employing former staff members by placing limits on the remuneration of such persons. The Committee notes, however, from paragraph 8 of the Secretary-General's report in document A/C.5/37/27, that the number of former staff members engaged as consultants in 1980 and 1981 was 110 or 6.8 per cent of all individuals engaged as consultants. The number of former staff members who had reached retirement age was 75 or 4.7 per cent of all the individuals engaged as consultants. To assist in monitoring the situation, future reports of the Secretary-General should include detailed information on the employment of former staff members, including the date of separation from the Organization, the period of post-separation employment, the nature and location of the employment, and how much was paid to the former staff member. Should evidence of abuse come to light in future, the Committee will consider making recommendations on how the JIU recommendation should be applied.

10. The Committee notes from paragraph 22 of the Secretary-General's comments that he has already implemented recommendation 7 which calls for adequate reporting procedures common to all departments and offices in the Secretariat.

Notes

1/ Officials Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/36/6).
