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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1974-1975
AND MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1974-1977

Public information policies and activities

Twenty-fifth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and
Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its twenty-eighth
session on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1974-1975

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on public information policies and activities (A/C.5/1547).
2. The report gives an account of recent developments in the work and organization of the Office of Public Information with special reference to the area of economic and social development and to the progress made and contemplated under the five-year programme of acquisition and replacement of equipment and installations for radio, television, film and photographic services under General Assembly resolution 2897 (XXVI).
3. As regards social and economic information, the Secretary-General requests the addition of 10 posts (five Professional and five General Service) at a cost of \$431,000 under section 27 of the programme budget for 1974-1975. 1/ The implementation of the equipment acquisition and replacement programme will not involve any requirements in excess of what the Secretary-General has included in his proposed programme budget for 1974-1975, namely, \$612,000. 2/
4. In support of his request for additional posts in the area of social and

1/ The Secretary-General indicates that the consequential requirements under section 34 (Staff assessment), would amount to \$88,000, with a corresponding offset under income section 1 (Income from staff assessment).

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/9006) para. 2719; and A/C.5/1547, para. 19.

economic information, the Secretary-General informed the Advisory Committee that the need for an effective and systematic approach to the dissemination of information on problems of development was stressed in several resolutions, including Economic and Social Council resolution 1357 (XLV) of 2 August 1968, and General Assembly resolutions 2567 (XXIV) of 13 December 1969, 2626 (XXV) of 24 October 1970 and 2897 (XXVI) of 22 December 1971, resolution 43 (III) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development of 17 May 1972 and, more recently, Economic and Social Council resolution 1806 (LV) of 8 August 1973. It was largely in response to this concern that the Centre for Economic and Social Information was established in 1968.

5. In his report relating to the functioning of the Centre (E/5358/Add.1), the Secretary-General indicated that, since its inception, the Centre has depended, to a very large extent, on voluntary contributions, in particular by the Government of the Netherlands and also the Governments of Canada, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Extrabudgetary resources of this nature have been on the decline in recent years. As indicated in table 27-1 of the proposed programme budget, 3/ they fell from \$1,042,000 in 1972 to \$851,000 in 1973, and the Secretary-General estimates that, in 1974, they would decline further to \$693,000. The Committee has now been informed by his representatives that \$653,700 might be a more realistic estimate, although they also mentioned the possibility of an additional contribution of \$200,000 from the Federal Republic of Germany, specifically earmarked for the production, in German, of Development Forum (A/C.5/1547, para. 10).

6. In his report under consideration (A/C.5/1547), the Secretary-General draws attention to the extent to which extrabudgetary resources have been used to meet staff costs at the Centre for Economic and Social Information. Of a total of 27 posts (13 Professional and 14 General Service) in the current manning table, only 8 (4 Professional and 4 General Service) are financed from the regular budget. Of the remainder, 15 posts (7 Professional and 8 General Service) have been provided from the Trust Fund for Economic and Social Information and the balance relate to special projects.

7. It is against this background that the Secretary-General has requested that a total of 10 posts, 4/ hitherto financed from extrabudgetary resources, be charged against the regular budget on the grounds that they are related to the discharge of functions of a "continuing" nature.

8. The Secretary-General originally put forward that request in a report submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its fifty-fifth session on the dissemination of information and mobilization of public opinion relative to problems of development (E/5358 and Corr.1 and Add.1). The Council, in its resolution 1806 (LV), noted

3/ Ibid., Supplement No. 6 (A/9006), part VIII, p. 313.

4/ Five Professional (one D-1 at Headquarters, one D-1 at Geneva, one P-4 and two P-3 at Headquarters); five General Service (one G-5 at Geneva and three other levels at Headquarters).

"with interest" the ideas outlined in that report and drew the attention of the General Assembly to the suggestions made therein. The Council, however, refrained from taking a definite position either for or against the Secretary-General's request.

9. A special feature of the request by the Secretary-General is that the 10 posts in question have been financed to date out of voluntary contributions. In this connexion, the Committee recalls the report on trust funds of the United Nations submitted by the Joint Inspection Unit (A/8840). In commenting on that report, the Committee considered the possibility that the "provision of voluntary funds for programmes to which the donors attach particular importance could distort the order of priorities determined by the Membership as a whole" (A/8840/Add.2, para. 4). The Advisory Committee endorsed the Inspector's recommendation - with which the Secretary-General was also in agreement - that decisions involving changes in the established manning table should be taken in the context of the total manpower resources, both budgetary and extrabudgetary (A/8840/Add.2, para. 13).

10. The Advisory Committee is of the view that a decline in available voluntary contributions does not, in itself, constitute a compelling reason for transferring activities and posts on to the regular budget. Each case must be judged on its merits.

11. In the light of the aforementioned considerations, and bearing in mind the attitude of the Economic and Social Council in the matter, the Advisory Committee favours a more cautious approach to the conversion of posts in the Centre for Economic and Social Information from extrabudgetary to established posts. It recommends, therefore, that, of the posts requested in paragraph 13 of the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/1547) three Professional posts (one D-1 at Geneva and one P-4 and one P-3 at Headquarters) and two General Service (including one G-5) be transferred to the regular budget manning table in 1974-1975.

12. Should this be acceptable to the General Assembly, additional resources of \$221,000 would be required under section 27, together with a consequential amount of \$67,000 under section 34 (to be offset by an increase in the same amount under income section 1) (Income from staff assessment).

13. Given the Centre's dwindling extrabudgetary resources, the Advisory Committee also recommends that the Office of Public Information scrutinize the Centre's projects with a view to eliminating those of marginal usefulness. The possibility of strengthening the regular establishment of the Centre by redeployment of staff resources already available in the Office of Public Information should also be explored.
