General Assembly

Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 7th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 11 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Bhattarai (Vice-Chairman) . . . . (Nepal)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions*: Mr. Mselle

Contents

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 122: Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001

Visitors experience (A/55/835 and A/56/7)

1. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the proposal for enhancing the United Nations experience for visitors (A/55/835), recalled that the concept, which had been put forward by the Better World Fund, had been developed by the same consultants who had carried out the initial study on the capital master plan. The proposal was currently no more than a concept paper, proposing the acceptance of a contribution in kind; it was not a budgetary document, but if the proposal was implemented, it would have operating costs and, hence, implications for the regular budget: it was therefore being submitted to the General Assembly at the current time. The proposal would involve accepting from the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA/USA), subject to various conditions which were explained in paragraph 20 of the report, a new visitors' pavilion, which would offer interactive facilities and also provide an opportunity to expand commercial activities and improve their profitability.

2. The Secretary-General's proposal predated the events of 11 September, which would clearly have implications for its implementation. From the crucial point of view of the safety and security of delegates, staff and visitors, the relationship of the visitors' experience to the capital master plan took on an additional dimension, since security considerations required close coordination of those two elements.

3. The Secretary-General was proposing the acceptance in principle of that contribution so that UNA/USA could proceed with fund-raising and the preparation of a schematic design, on the understanding that the resources needed to construct the new pavilion and the connector link to the General Assembly building (estimated at between US$ 50 and 60 million) would be raised by UNA/USA, which would also provide contributions in kind for the outfitting of the new pavilion and the multimedia interactive facilities. The operating costs would be the responsibility of the United Nations and, if the proposal was accepted, would have implications for the regular budget, which were reviewed in section VI of the report, once the visitors experience was operational, which would be in 2004/2005 at the earliest.

4. The Secretary-General wished to confirm that the procedures outlined in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions contained in document A/36/643 would be followed during the various phases of the project. The Advisory Committee recommended that, in order to recognize the international character of the project, efforts should be made to expand the number of potential contributors by inviting other national United Nations associations to participate in the project and seeking their advice. The Secretary-General had already conveyed that recommendation to UNA/USA.

5. The Advisory Committee also believed that the Administration should devote particular attention to the issue of fixed expenditure. In order to study the way in which that expenditure would be balanced with potential revenue, it would be necessary to have a more detailed understanding of the design and content of the interactive multimedia exhibits, which would be available only after the preparation of the schematic design. A detailed budget proposal, giving accurate estimates of revenue and operating costs, could then be submitted to the General Assembly. The Secretary-General would also explore the possibility of public service advertising of the new visitors' centre at minimal cost. In his proposal, the Secretary-General envisaged the establishment of a capital improvement fund. As recommended by the Advisory Committee, the rules governing the replenishment, operation and management of the fund would be submitted to it for review in conjunction with the final proposals for the project.

Capital master plan (A/55/117 and Add.1)

6. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services) informed the Fifth Committee of the progress of the capital master plan, updating the report submitted by the Secretary-General in June 2000 (A/55/117). In its resolution 55/238, the General Assembly had authorized the Secretary-General to proceed with the preparation of a comprehensive plan and detailed cost analysis for the capital master plan, specifying measures to protect the United Nations against cost overruns and identifying all the viable alternatives, and had decided to

appropriate $8 million for that purpose. The Secretary-General, through an international competitive bidding process, had engaged the services of the Italian group Renato Sarno, which included architects and experts in mechanical and electrical engineering, together with specialized consultants (including Turner Construction Company and Syska and Hennessy Engineers, which had been involved in the construction of the United Nations buildings some 50 years previously). The conceptual design and cost analysis should be completed in February 2002. In the context of the events of 11 September, the capital master plan had taken on a new urgency and dimension. As the Secretary-General had noted in his report, the security system was obsolete and the life safety systems were inadequate (the Office of Internal Oversight Services had pointed out the deficiencies in the security system in 1998 in its annual report, A/53/428, para. 95). The events of 11 September made it necessary to expand the scope of the work planned, taking into account different threat scenarios, and the work programme had been adjusted to reflect those priorities. From February to May 2001, in response to a request from the United States Congress, the United States General Accounting Office had carried out a detailed review of the capital master plan and concluded that the planning for the proposed renovation was reasonable and conformed to best practice. Discussions with the host country were ongoing; discussions with the City and with New York State would take place as soon as possible. The advisory board of financial experts and eminent figures would be set up as soon as possible and the review of the various financing options would begin as a matter of priority. The Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly, which should be available in May or June 2002, for discussion at the fifty-seventh session, would focus mainly on the scope of the core refurbishment, detailed in paragraphs 44 (a) to 44 (e) of document A/55/117. The report would also present various options for addressing the issues raised in paragraphs 44 to 49 of document A/55/117. Efforts would be made to outline the impact of construction, particularly in terms of providing temporary office space for the departments which would be displaced by the work. Finally, the report would address methods of controlling costs and preventing cost overruns at each stage of the project. Without prejudice to the General Assembly's decision, the Administration considered it prudent to take immediate steps to ensure proper preparation for subsequent phases, and in particular to

engage a construction management firm prior to the completion of the design phase, so that the designs could be reviewed from the point of view of feasibility and implementation arrangements. A small team of Secretariat staff had been given the task of overseeing the project under the supervision of the Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services, but it would be necessary, once the project had been approved by the General Assembly, to provide additional staff with the required special skills and to set up a dedicated project management team. The Secretary-General would include proposals to that effect in his report.

Information technology in the Secretariat (A/55/780; A/56/7)

7. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services) introduced the Secretary-General's report entitled "Information technology in the Secretariat: a plan of action" (A/55/780), of which the first part contained a strategy with its key objectives and the second part described the coordinated activities designed to implement the strategy. Some of the activities had already been implemented and others were planned. A survey in 2000 of the technical infrastructure in the Secretariat had shown that, overall, the Secretariat had managed to keep abreast of technological advances, but that the situation varied from one department to another and from one duty station to another, in terms of both infrastructure itself and human resources capacity. All departments and duty stations had experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining information and communication technologies (ICT) staff. In essence, the survey had highlighted the need to establish a coordinated action plan to enable the Organization to take full advantage of new technologies and to remain up to date. The action plan, which the Fifth Committee was considering, aimed to ensure that the level of technology in the Secretariat as a whole was coherent and up to date. The main objectives concerned information (access and sharing), ICT field support, technical infrastructure, capacity-building and the achievement of e-administration. The report detailed the basic activities corresponding to those objectives, action taken to date, future action envisaged and results expected. One major issue was good governance of ICT activities: it was envisaged that the governance of activities would be partially centralized, as the Steering Committee on Reform and Management had decided to

create an ICT Board at Headquarters, responsible for managing core infrastructure, setting standards, selecting methods and putting in place Organization-wide systems, while the management of equipment, software and human resources in departments and offices would be decentralized. In addition, the Board would be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the activities set out in the action plan and monitoring the Organization's needs and the development of ICT, so as to advise the Steering Committee in that regard.

Profitability of the commercial activities of the United Nations (A/55/546; A/56/7)

8.   **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on proposed measures to improve the profitability of the commercial activities of the United Nations (A/55/546), said that some of those measures were elementary suggestions, while others would entail major changes. One aspect highlighted in the review, which had been conducted by a private consulting firm contracted by the Secretary-General, was the issue of physical area, a key component in the profitability of commercial activities. The visitors' area, however, had not changed substantially in more than 40 years, and it limited the scope of the facilities that could be offered to visitors. The proposal for enhancing the United Nations experience for visitors, as contained in document A/55/835, which had been introduced earlier in the meeting, would more than double that area (from approximately 39,000 sq. ft. to around 90,000 sq. ft.), enabling the facilities and services offered to visitors to be dramatically expanded. There were also short-term measures that would improve the profitability of the commercial activities and, equally important, their quality, namely, modernization of the signage and lighting and active promotion by the guides during the guided tours of the commercial activities on offer. He noted that the cost of the renovation of the Viennese Café had been entirely borne by the contractor.

9.   The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had made some specific recommendations concerning the profitability of commercial activities (A/56/7, paras. IS 3.5 to IS 3.13). The Office of Central Support Services was in complete agreement with the Advisory Committee. Those recommendations were currently being implemented or would be incorporated within the overall framework of the proposal for enhancing the visitors' experience. The Advisory Committee would be consulted before the conclusion of any new contractual arrangement when the contract with the current contractor for the Staff Cafe, the cafeteria and the Delegates' Dining Room expired in April 2003. Steps had also been taken to discuss with the host country's postal administration more favourable rates of reimbursement to be paid by the United Nations, and the possibility of outsourcing postal activities was under consideration. As to the United Nations Book Shop, the Administration, like the Advisory Committee, considered that any contractor should have a background in book sales in order to be able to expand the sale of United Nations and related publications. However, given the changes that would occur with the implementation of the visitors' experience proposal, the search for and selection of such a contractor would best be done when the Administration had a clearer picture of the overall design of the new visitors' area.

Implementation of projects financed from the Development Account (A/55/913*)*

10.   **Mr. Civili** (Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of projects financed from the Development Account (A/55/913), said that the report should be read in conjunction with the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on part XIII of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (A/56/7, para. XIII.1-XIII.5). The bulk of the report was devoted to the progress made in implementing the 23 projects approved in the programme budgets for the bienniums 1998-1999 and 2000-2001 and the impact of those projects. While the report described the situation as at 31 March 2001, he would provide updated information reflecting the situation as at the end of September 2001. Out of a total of $26,130,000 approved for 23 projects since the establishment of the Development Account, almost $12 million, or 45.4 per cent, had been spent as at 30 September 2001, leaving a balance of $14,264,800. The drafting of the report had been an opportunity to review the experience thus far and to draw lessons from it, including with respect to the management of the Account, reporting and evaluation.

11. He emphasized, firstly, the role of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs in the selection, design and performance monitoring of Development Account projects. Joint execution of cross-sectoral, interregional, regional and subregional projects, which was encouraged, would be very difficult in practice without the leadership of the Executive Committee. It should also be noted that the Development Account was helping to harmonize technical cooperation approaches and implementation modalities in the Secretariat. It was becoming increasingly clear that the use of information and communication technologies, with the encouragement of the Executive Committee, was an effective way of reducing costs and maximizing impact. Those technologies had also enabled the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to provide central support to the Development Account without having a dedicated structure, which would be costly, or additional full-time staff. The Development Account web site (http://www.un.org/esa/devaccount/), launched in the third quarter of 2000, allowed users to access, inter alia, up-to-date information on all the approved projects, the text of decisions relating to the Development Account, and guidelines on project submission, financing and reporting, and it provided links to the other departments and programmes concerned. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs had just finalized a special Development Account module of the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System. From October 2001, progress performance reporting on projects financed from the Development Account would be done online and in real time, as individual activities were actually being implemented.

12. He then turned to the weaknesses revealed by the review of the reports submitted by implementing agencies, which were discussed in document (A/55/913, Part IV, paras. 280 to 291). The programme manager had been considering them with the implementing entities, and they were being progressively corrected.

13. The review of projects financed by the Development Account had resulted in some valuable lessons. When possible, it was preferable for projects to be designed and executed jointly by two or more agencies; that facilitated the sharing of good management practices and harmonization of planning, monitoring and reporting systems. Another lesson

learned related to the need to sustain the impact of projects after completion. Given the limited resources available to the Development Account, it could not continue its support indefinitely, but it did provide supplementary funding that made it possible to undertake innovative development activities with a demonstration effect. That type of support must be built into the design and implementation of projects from the outset, including a strategy to bring in potential future donors or partners, and to nurture ownership of the project among its beneficiaries. Another lesson was that new projects should only be entrusted to an implementing agency with the capacity to execute them; new projects should not be added to the portfolio of an executing agency when delays were observed owing to conflicts with other priorities, at least until the execution capacity of the agency was seen to be effectively restored. Finally, it appeared that quite often low-cost implementation solutions led to more pronounced demonstration effects and created better conditions for long-term sustainability of activities than more complex ones. Projects costing between $600,000 and $900,000 seemed to have the best chance of being completed within one biennium. In conclusion, he said that the Development Account, the value of which as a catalyst extended beyond the content of the projects themselves, enriched the totality of technical cooperation work.

General debate

14. **Mr. Tilemans** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, and Norway, a European Free Trade Area country member of the European Economic Area, aligned themselves with his statement. While it welcomed the report containing the Secretariat's proposals on enhancing the United Nations experience for visitors (A/55/835), the European Union believed that its analysis was incomplete, because it was almost exclusively concerned with operating expenditure rather than capital expenditure. The project was inextricably bound up with the United Nations capital master plan, and would have to be re-examined on presentation of the subsequent stages of the plan. The European Union endorsed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary

Questions (ACABQ) on private sector contributions and its insistence that the respective responsibilities of the Secretariat and of the bodies participating in the programme must be clearly defined (A/56/7, para. 113). It questioned the Secretariat'ss optimistic revenue forecasts, the desirability of creating a special fund and the modalities of managing such a fund. A more detailed examination of the programme would therefore be required.

15. The European Union approved the report of the Secretary-General on the profitability of commercial activities (A/55/546) and endorsed the remarks of ACABQ. It stressed the importance of drawing up a plan defining the commercial objectives and measures to achieve them, rationalizing the administrative structures related to those activities, giving preference to sub-contracting and taking an inventory of rooms or space at Headquarters occupied by organizations other than the United Nations.

16. The European Union took note with interest of the Secretariat's willingness to improve coordination of activities in the area of information technology. The plan of action submitted by the Secretariat (A/55/780) spelled out in considerable detail the problems encountered and outlined a general approach; that was welcome. The European Union subscribed to the Advisory Committee's recommendations, especially those concerning the need for a central authority to take decisions on general policy, a strategic approach and the adoption of common standards; the tangible efficiency and productivity gains that would release resources that could be redirected to other sectors; and measures to prevent the proliferation of costly, incompatible and overlapping systems. With regard to organizational structure, the European Union favoured the principle of the partially centralized model, but noted that it could not currently be put into practice without precise criteria to distinguish between the spheres of "centralized" and "decentralized" decisions and the relevant administrative procedures. As to technical and human resources, the Secretariat gave no information on the efficiency gains anticipated through coordination. Finally, the European Union was concerned that the budgetary implications of the plan of action had not been reflected in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, which already included $150 million for information technology. The plan of action was, however, an essential prerequisite for any investment decision in

that field. Like the Advisory Committee, the European Union hoped that a revised plan of action, which would include a timetable for implementation and describe the new organizational structure, the linkage between the different information technology systems and the anticipated cost-efficiency gains, would be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

17. **Mr. Fox** (Australia), speaking on behalf of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, recalled that those three countries had been among the ones which had expressed concern, during the budget negotiations in 1999, about the fact that major resources were to be invested in information technology in the absence of an appropriate strategic planning framework. Those delegations welcomed the Secretary-General's report (A/55/780) submitted pursuant to paragraph 61 of General Assembly resolution 54/249, and noted with interest the results of the survey undertaken in 2000 on information technology holdings in the Secretariat. They also welcomed the integration of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) and information technology services in a single organizational unit. Since information technology was critical for enabling the Secretariat to deliver mandates effectively, particular care must be taken in developing a strategic planning framework for assessing the resources needed and setting priorities for action in that area. He was therefore surprised to note, from paragraph 14 of the report, that the strategy had been developed after the proposed budget for 2002-2003 had been prepared; that seemed to imply that there was no relationship between the strategic planning process and the resources that should underpin it. He asked for clarification on that point.

18. He was also concerned to note that the actions proposed were not accompanied by any timetable, implementation plan or cost estimates. Many of the expected results identified were vague and impossible to measure, and did not reflect what could be expected in view of the amount of resources to be invested. For example, the report did not specify how an increased flow of information or the global use of information technology would help to make the Secretariat more efficient. It was essential that, in the next version of the draft plan, the Secretariat should identify concrete efficiency targets and designate or create a mechanism for managing efforts in that regard. In that context, the starting point should be a zero-based needs analysis

involving a review of workflows, job design, processes and work units.

19.   He wondered whether the current structure for assessing information technology proposals was the correct one. The survey had revealed problems of duplication, incompatible systems and uneven development among different departments. The role which flaws in the current structure might have played in that regard had not been analysed in the report. He was not convinced that adding an information and communication technology board to the existing structure would provide a solution. The relationship between the central services and user departments should also be addressed to determine, inter alia, whether the support provided to the latter was adequate to their needs. In addition, proposals involving significant resources should be subject to rigorous technical scrutiny. He asked what measures had been taken to prevent further duplications while the Information Technology Services Division developed a policy framework. He was pleased that the Steering Committee on Reform and Management Policy had already identified some priority areas to be addressed by ad hoc task forces (A/55/780, para. 60), but wondered how those priorities were related to the plan of action.

20.   **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, while progress had been made in the use of information technology, the lack of full knowledge about the use of such technology in the Secretariat had made it impossible to elaborate a coherent strategy and implementation plans throughout the Secretariat and the main duty stations. As a result of the lack of coordination, a variety of technological solutions, which were often mutually incompatible, had been adopted. He noted that the proposed programme budget for 2002-2003 had been prepared before the strategy proposed in the Secretary-General's report had been developed, and that subsequent resource requirements would be brought to the General Assembly's attention separately. He shared the Advisory Committee's concern about the lack of financial information on short- and long-term requirements and on the time-frame for implementation. The use of information technology could not be increased without a corresponding increase in the human and financial resources devoted to it. He agreed with the Advisory Committee that investments in information technology

should result in tangible increases in efficiency and productivity (A/56/7, para. 89). If no such gains were achieved, the value added of investments in information technology was hardly justified.

21.   With respect to the proposal for enhancing the United Nations experience for visitors (A/55/835), he noted that the capital costs would be funded entirely from private sources. He supported the conditions proposed by the Advisory Committee, in paragraph 107 of its report, for the acceptance of in-kind contributions, particularly the need to avoid compromising the Organization's image through commercialization. In view of the international character of the United Nations, efforts should be made to expand the number of potential contributors by inviting United Nations associations of other countries to participate in and give their advice on the project. The projected increase in revenues was based on the assumption that the number of visitors would increase. The explanations on that point given in the report were very helpful. He nevertheless wondered what adjustments would be made if revenues fell below the projections, considering that expenditure in that area was projected to increase from $6.5 million to $15.3 million. He noted the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a visitors' experience capital improvement fund, and shared the Advisory Committee's concern that deficits could arise and become a potential burden to the Organization (A/56/7, para. 112). A comprehensive report on the issue, taking fully into account the observations and recommendations of the Advisory Committee, should be submitted to the General Assembly.

22.   With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of projects financed from the Development Account (A/55/913), the Group of 77 and China noted that, at the creation of the Development Account, resources in the amount of $200 million had been proposed, which were to have been generated from efficiency gains in the Secretariat. However, the actual level of resources was nowhere near that ambitious estimate. The Group took note of the Advisory Committee's view that efficiency measures did not necessarily yield immediate savings and sometimes required new investment, particularly in information technology (A/56/7, para. XIII.3). The Group noted that, since the establishment of the Development Account, 23 projects had been approved for a total amount of $26,130,000. Of that amount, a

total of $8,884,000 had been spent as at 31 March 2001, which was a low percentage. The Group of 77 and China therefore called for more determined efforts to be made for the full implementation of approved projects.

23. The Group of 77 and China noted that the coordinating functions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which encompassed substantive support for projects funded from the Development Account, were carried out within the Department's available resources. The Group also noted the finding of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) (A/55/913, paras. 292 and 293) that, given the prevailing resource limitations and the growing overall workload of the Department, the essential functions of monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the projects had yet to be matched with adequate resources. The Group welcomed the recommendation of OIOS that project proposals should include all direct and indirect costs whether financed from the Development Account or not.

24. **Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. With specific reference to the report of the Secretary-General on information technology in the Secretariat (A/55/780), he noted that hardware availability and its usage had shown phenomenal growth during the period from 1992 to 2000. While there had been some notable successes, such as the introduction of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) and the Optical Disk System (ODS), information technology development within the United Nations had been largely ad hoc, without an overall plan. His delegation noted that information technology appropriations in the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and the estimates proposed for the biennium 2002-2003, without factoring in the cost of implementation of the plan of action, were significant and constituted one of the highest lines of expenditure. The preparation of a plan of action was timely so as to ensure that expenditure incurred on information technology was within a well-defined framework that ensured the coherence of overall policy and management decisions and the compatibility of technical infrastructure, platforms and operating systems. His delegation supported the conceptual basis of the plan of action, especially the governance structure, and welcomed the

Secretariat's recognition of the need for sufficient flexibility so that user services could be provided with equipment, software and human resources to match their needs. His delegation endorsed the Secretariat's decision to rely predominantly on its in-house information technology capabilities.

25. His delegation urged the Secretary-General to elaborate further on the financial implications of the implementation of the plan of action. It understood that investments in information technology rarely yielded visible results in the short term, although the medium- to long-term benefits in cost savings were real. The Organization's increased resort to information technology was an irreversible trend, as was the desire to re-engineer work practices as part of the broader reform effort. Initial investments would be high, involving not only infrastructure, hardware or software development, but also capacity-building among the staff. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 117 of its report and urged the Department of Human Resources Management to assiduously assess the career progression and remuneration of the young and very mobile category of staff engaged in information technology.

26. As the Secretary-General acknowledged in paragraph 22 of his report, the development of information technologies should not result in sharp drops in hard-copy publications, which should be maintained at existing levels in the short to medium term and reassessed over the long term to reflect changes in demand. It would be unacceptable for trade-offs to be made between the demands of an electronic United Nations and the needs of end-users without access capabilities. In conclusion, his delegation stressed the need for adequate resources to be dedicated to implementation of the plan of action, as a support activity for the delivery of approved programmes and mandates and for innovation in information technology to be driven by concerns for efficiency, productivity and cost savings.

27. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He wondered how the term "take note" in paragraph 35 of the report on proposed measures to improve the profitability of the commercial activities of the United Nations (A/55/546) should be interpreted, given that in

its decision 55/488, the General Assembly had reiterated that the term was neutral and constituted neither approval nor disapproval. He would like the Secretariat to keep that decision in mind when it submitted requests to the General Assembly, so that the Assembly could base its work on a solid legal footing. Again in paragraph 35, when the Secretary-General requested the Assembly to encourage the Secretariat to implement the measures described in the report in a manner that would not in any way compromise the international non-commercial nature of the Organization, he noted that all the measures in question were similar to outsourcing activities. He would therefore have preferred the Secretariat to cite Assembly resolutions 54/256 and 55/232 on outsourcing practices. With reference to paragraph 33 of the report, moreover, he would welcome clarification from the Secretariat on the issue of catering services.

28.   In the report on the implementation of projects financed from the Development Account (A/55/913), his delegation noted that the resources allocated to the Account had been generated by refocusing non-programmatic costs (para. 1 of the report). It would like to know whether the concept of non-programmatic costs and programme expenditures had ever been defined.

29.   Lastly, as he knew that the Chairman of the Advisory Committee must submit a report to the Fifth Committee, he asked that the report should be submitted in writing in the Organization's six official languages, a request that his delegation had already made on numerous occasions.

30.   **The Chairman** said that he would transmit the request of the Syrian representative to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee.

31.   **Ms. Sun** Minqin (China) said that she associated herself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the group of 77 and China. With regard to the proposals for enhancing the United Nations experience for visitors (A/55/835), she emphasized that such a project must form part of a whole with the capital master plan. She welcomed the fact that the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA/USA) had offered to make contributions in kind for the implementation of the project, and recalled that the conditions set out in paragraph 107 of the report of the

Advisory Committee (A/56/7) must be respected. It was to be hoped that other associations would also contribute. Her delegation noted that the operating costs of the new facilities would be covered by the Member States and would like to know how much they would amount to annually. It was in favour of the idea of establishing a visitors' experience capital improvement fund, as proposed by the Secretary-General, which would receive a specific proportion of gross revenue. It hoped that the project would not incur any additional charges for Member States; the Advisory Committee had expressed some concern on that point.

32.   **Mr. Chandra** (India) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the group of 77 and China. He noted the appropriate observations made by the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 85 to 94 of its report (A/56/7) concerning information technology in the Secretariat, in particular its remarks about the need to strengthen system-wide coherence and coordination and to present to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, in conjuction with the proposed programme budget, a comprehensive report on the implementation of the United Nations information technology strategy, emphasizing peacekeeping information systems.

33.   His delegation noted with satisfaction that the improvements carried out at the Viennese Café had been funded entirely by the vendor. As for the capital master plan, his delegation awaited with interest the presentation of the preliminary draft containing the information requested. It welcomed the proposal of UNA/USA to provide contributions in kind for the implementation of the visitors' experience project, and emphasized that the conditions established in that regard by the Advisory Committee were highly relevant, in particular the fourth one, which was aimed at averting commercialization of the premises. It was necessary to strike a balance between the public image of the United Nations and the quest for greater profitability. He referred to an incident which had taken place at the United Nations Gift Centre when the salespeople had behaved in an unacceptable manner with Indian tourists.

34.   **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services) said that as already emphasized by the Advisory Committee, the visitors' experience project must go hand in hand with the

capital master plan if all the security conditions were to be met. He repeated that the report on the proposals for enhancing the United Nations experience for visitors (A/55/835) was not a budget submission, but said that it was nonetheless important to consider carefully the question of the amounts of income and of expenditure, bearing in mind that the latter was relatively stable while the former varied with the number of visitors (over which the United Nations had no influence) and according to the rates for guided tours. To that end, the Secretariat had considered, in particular, the cases of institutions that had launched similar projects. It was obvious that the Secretariat could not draw up any estimates unless it had an outline of the project. That was how the master capital plan had been handled, as the Secretariat had been authorized to submit a draft for implementation before any decisions were taken. As soon as the Committee gave its agreement in principle, the Secretariat would resume discussions with UNA/USA. As for the figures that had been noted, they had been revised downward from the first estimates. The suggestions made by the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China would be taken into account.

35. As for commercial activities, the Secretariat would consider more closely the questions relating to outsourcing, as well as the possibilities offered by the project, but it could only do so at a later stage. Concerning the balance that should be struck between the image of the United Nations and profitability, a point raised by the representative of India, he re-emphasized his concern to avoid commercialization of the premises. That was the reason for the proposal that visitors should be received in a separate building on 47th Street. Care would be taken to ensure that visitors were separated from delegates and staff. The Secretariat had already taken up with the Gift Centre the incident reported by the representative of India.

36. Replying to the comments made by the representative of China, he confirmed that the capital master plan and the proposal for the enhancement of the visitors' experience were indeed linked conceptually. He also confirmed that UNA/USA was quite prepared to respect the conditions set by the United Nations. He pointed out that the Association was to make a contribution in kind, in the form of a building, and that the Secretariat did not have to be concerned with fund-raising activities, but only with

questions relating to standards, the architecture and the timetable.

37. There should, of course, be some coordination between the strategy for the development of information technology and the budget to be devoted to it. However, the purpose of the plan of action was to give coherence to the project, to set out the objectives and activities and to establish the machinery. If additional resources should prove necessary for the implementation of the plan of action, a request would be submitted to the General Assembly for approval at its fifty-seventh session. Moreover, a timetable for implementation, which had already been submitted to the Advisory Committee, would be presented to the Information and Communications Technology Board, which was scheduled to meet at the end of October 2001. He believed that the management structure that had been established was appropriate. The question of the overall and local organizational structure was clearly dealt with in the mandate of the Information and Communications Technology Board and the Information Systems Coordination Committee. As for the doubts which had been expressed regarding the links between the priorities and the measures taken or planned, he explained that the latter (59 in number) were aligned with the five objectives defined in the plan of action. With regard to a criticism that had been made concerning the report on the plan of action, he explained that promotion of the circulation of information both within and outside the United Nations would enhance the efficiency of the Organization. Lastly, in response to a comment made by the representative of Ghana, he reiterated that there was no question of not circulating printed documents, but it was hoped that dissemination by electronic means could be developed.

38. **Mr. Civili** (Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that the Department of Management would be in a better position to respond to the questions that had been raised by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic respectively concerning the amounts paid to the Development Account and the non-programmatic costs. With regard to the latter, however, he said it was his understanding that one of the purposes of the Account was to ensure that savings should not be achieved at the expense of substantive activities. As for the comment made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran

concerning the amount of the expenditure, he referred to the statement he had made at the beginning of the meeting in which he had mentioned the figures appearing in the report; by the end of September 2001 the amount spent had been close to $12 million. He explained that there had been a delay in the implementation of projects for two reasons: on the one hand, there had necessarily been an initial "start-up" phase and, on the other, since the first tranche had been approved rather late, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs had had to implement two tranches during a single biennium. However, in view of the acceleration in the amount of expenditure recorded in recent months, he was sure that the delay would be made up during the next biennium.

39.   **Mr. Fox** (Australia), referring to the information given by Mr. Niwa regarding the expenditure incurred in connection with the implementation of the plan of action concerning information technology in the Secretariat, said that his delegation could not approve allocations of additional resources until it was convinced of the appropriateness of the strategy planned. He hoped that the dialogue on the subject would be continued.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.