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PROGRAMME PLANNING

Proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the
period 1984-1989

Calendar of consultations on the medium-term plan
for the period starting in 1992

Preparation of the next medium-term plan

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and
Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered a report and two notes by the Secretary-General on the medium-term plan on the following topics: proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989 (A/43/6 and Corr.1); calendar of consultations on the medium-term plan for the period starting in 1992 (A/43/329/Add.1); 1/ and preparation of the next medium-term plan (A/43/329).

Proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989 (A/43/6 and
Corr.1)

2. In paragraph 2 of the introduction to the proposed revisions, it is stated that "The purpose of the present revision is to extend the current medium-term plan to cover the period 1990-1991, to incorporate any development or mandates that may have occurred subsequent to the last revision [A/41/6 and Add.1] and to make the necessary adjustments so that the plan can provide a framework for the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1990-1991." Information on the legislative

* A/43/150.

background leading to the extension of the current plan to 1991 is provided in paragraph 1 of the introduction.

3. Paragraphs 4 to 14 provide a narrative overview of the proposed revisions, which are also summarized in tabular form in the annex to the document. Proposed textual revisions to affected chapters of the plan are contained in the detailed narrative following the summary table. In this connection, representatives of the Secretary-General informed the Advisory Committee that the narrative overview and summary table in the document represented innovations intended to improve transparency of the document and of the revisions being proposed.

4. The Advisory Committee recalls that regulation 3.2 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/PPBME Rules/1 (1987)), inter alia, states:

"The medium-term plan shall be a translation of legislative mandates into programmes. Its objectives and strategies shall be derived from the policy orientations and goals set by the intergovernmental organs. It shall reflect Member States' priorities as set out in legislation adopted by functional and regional intergovernmental bodies within their spheres of competence and by the General Assembly ...".

The Advisory Committee believes that, ideally, the medium-term plan should serve as the plan of work for the Organization, and that it should be set out in a manner that would permit Member States to review the work plan and the related priorities attached to different programmes in the plan and to give guidance as to what and how much can realistically be carried out during the plan period.

5. Seen in this light, it is difficult to assess the effect of all the latest revisions proposed to the current medium-term plan (A/43/6 and Corr.1). For example, in response to its inquiries, the Advisory Committee was informed by representatives of the Secretary-General that the deletion of 19 subprogrammes indicated in the summary table should not be interpreted as representing the elimination of programmed activities since they would be largely subsumed under other programmes. Representatives of the Secretary-General also informed the Advisory Committee that the proposed revisions were not intended to show changes in the level of activities but primarily, as stated in paragraph 2, "to incorporate any development or mandates that may have occurred subsequent to the last revision".

6. The Advisory Committee recalls that to date, excluding reports of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Advisory Committee, since the current medium-term plan ^{2/} was first issued, it has been the subject of three addenda ^{3/} and revisions published in three documents. ^{4/} In the opinion of the Committee, this situation impairs the utility of the plan document, gives rise to serious confusion and should be avoided in future. The Committee is of the view that revisions and addenda to the plan should be issued when additions, subtractions, substitutions or modifications to the plan are required (e.g., the major programme on marine affairs, which incorporates activities emanating from General Assembly resolution 37/66 on the implementation of the resolution of the

Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea). 5/ The Committee strongly believes that mere reorganization, merger or deletion of organisational units that do not materially affect the programme of work or related priorities should not lead to publication of revisions to the plan. Accordingly, the Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretariat should submit to the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and to the Advisory Committee, proposals on the best way of handling revisions to future medium-term plans. These proposals should be considered in conjunction with the review and approval of the next medium-term plan, which starts in 1992.

7. In view of the comments in paragraphs 4 to 6 above and bearing in mind that the proposed revisions - particularly those related to chapters 26 to 31 (A/43/6 and Corr.1) - may be overtaken by the ongoing reform process and related events, the Advisory Committee has refrained from undertaking at this stage a more detailed examination of the proposed revisions. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the revisions to chapters 26 to 31 of the current medium-term plan.

Calendar of consultations on the medium-term plan for the period starting in 1992 (A/43/329/Add.1)

8. This note by the Secretary-General was originally submitted to the Advisory Committee pursuant to the legislative requirements of General Assembly resolutions 41/213 and 42/215, as well as the provisions of the programme planning regulations, key aspects of which are summarized in paragraph 2 of the note. In view of its importance, the Advisory Committee has requested that this report be issued as a General Assembly document and it has since been issued.

9. The proposed calendar of consultations is described in paragraph 12 and elaborated upon in annexes I and II of the Secretary-General's note. In this connection, the Advisory Committee notes the statements that "the proposals are made on the basis of the projected meeting schedule of the existing sectoral, functional and regional bodies and the current structure of the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989" (A/43/329/Add.1, para. 3) and that "the calendar of meetings may change as a result of the Economic and Social Council's review of the intergovernmental structure in the economic and social fields and that a decision is still to be taken on the format, content and presentation of the next medium-term plan" (*ibid.*, para. 9).

10. The Advisory Committee notes that, because of the considerations outlined in paragraphs 4 to 11 of the note, the proposed calendar of consultations is quite complex. The Committee believes that, particularly with respect to the preparation of future medium-term plans, it is essential that the Secretariat should attempt to streamline the calendar of consultations further. Otherwise, if care is not exercised in this regard, the Secretariat may well become so continuously involved in the cycle of preparations for the plan that it will lose sight of other imperatives, such as monitoring the implementation of the plan.

11. According to paragraph 12 of the document, it is envisaged that during the period January to September 1989, sectoral, functional and regional bodies would

review draft chapters of the plan within their fields of competence during the regular cycle of their meetings. However, in paragraph 9 of the document, it is pointed out that "the programme areas of new and renewable sources of energy (programme 11) and crime prevention and control (programme 21) would not be covered because the relevant bodies (Committee on the Development and Utilization of New and Renewable Sources of Energy and Committee on Crime Prevention and Control) are not scheduled to meet in 1989". Following a discussion in paragraph 10 of the document of alternative methods for dealing with these gaps, the Secretary-General recommends in paragraph 13 (e) that he be authorized "to conduct consultations by correspondence with members of those sectoral, functional and regional bodies whose meeting schedule does not permit them to review the draft chapters of the plan".

12. The Advisory Committee doubts the effectiveness of this correspondence approach and recommends against its adoption. Instead, the Committee recommends that other alternatives be explored, including the possibility of ascertaining the views of the bodies in question at their last meeting before the consultations are normally scheduled. Their expressed views could subsequently be updated in the context of meetings of the Economic and Social Council.

13. With regard to the review, during the period from January to September 1989, of draft chapters of those major programmes for which no specialized programme reviewing body exists (that is, chapters 26 to 31 dealing with common and conference services), it is stated in paragraph 9 that the "CPC, ACABQ or the Committee on Conferences therefore must exercise direct responsibility". The Advisory Committee is ready to receive and be consulted on these draft chapters on the understanding that this procedure should not be construed as inhibiting the Committee's review of the proposed medium-term plan during the period April to June 1990.

14. The Advisory Committee sought clarification from representatives of the Secretary-General on proposals contained in paragraphs 11 and 12 of the document, which deal, inter alia, with procedures for preliminary prior consultations with the specialized agencies during the period from January to September 1989 and their relationship to the proposed review of the draft introduction and chapters of the plan by the sectoral, functional and regional bodies during the same time frame. In particular, the Committee sought to ascertain whether there would be two parallel exercises or whether the views of specialized agencies would be obtained first and the results made known to the review bodies.

15. In response to that inquiry, representatives of the Secretary-General informed the Advisory Committee that it was envisaged that the United Nations Secretariat units concerned would circulate their draft chapters of the plan (or portions thereof) to the interested specialized agencies as soon as they were finalized. Such action would normally take place before the scheduled meetings of the relevant intergovernmental or expert bodies. The agencies would be requested to provide their comments to the Secretariat units concerned as soon as possible. This would permit review and further consultations with a view to submitting to the various review bodies those comments which would have been agreed upon by the Secretariat units and the agencies. In cases where such further consultations were not possible because of time constraints, the Secretariat units would submit the

agencies' comments to the relevant bodies together with their own comments thereon. Similarly, if agencies were unable to transmit their comments before the scheduled meetings of these intergovernmental or expert bodies, the Secretariat units concerned would, as appropriate, submit the agencies' comments as well as their own comments during the scheduled meetings of these bodies. In any event, it was expected that the specialized agencies having comments would normally participate in the meetings of the relevant bodies.

16. On that basis, and consistent with its view that the United Nations Secretariat should streamline the calendar of consultations further, the Advisory Committee questions the utility of the proposal to conduct a second round of prior consultations with the specialized agencies during the period December 1989 to January 1990 (*ibid.*, para 12) and recommends that it be eliminated. Should such consultations prove necessary, they could be undertaken in the context of meetings of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC).

17. Subject to its observations in paragraphs 10, 12, 13 and 16 above, the Advisory Committee does not interpose any objection to the proposed calendar of consultations on the medium-term plan for the period starting in 1992. However, adoption by the General Assembly of the Advisory Committee's recommendations in paragraphs 12 and 16 above would entail modifications to the proposed calendar of consultations and related procedural proposals contained in paragraphs 12 and 13 of the note by the Secretary-General (A/43/329/Add.1).

Preparation of the next medium-term plan (A/43/329)

18. The note by the Secretary-General (A/43/329) has been submitted pursuant to the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 41/213, section II, paragraph 3 (b), and 42/215, section II, as well as the programme planning regulations. The note includes an introductory background and an annex. The first-time draft introduction to the medium-term plan beginning 1992 is contained in the annex. In paragraph 16 of the annex, the Secretary-General states:

"Two assumptions underlie the approach to the plan. One is that by the beginning of the next decade, and possibly before, the current financial crisis will be an episode of the past. The second is that all Member States will through their actions demonstrate renewed commitment to international co-operation through the United Nations. At the same time, the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations should be assessed and improved in relation to the basic purposes of the Organization."

19. The draft introduction to the medium-term plan beginning 1992 (A/43/329, annex), consists of a prologue and three sections. Section I, which deals with a framework for the next medium-term plan, is further divided into subsections A, B and C (background, instrumentalities and means of action, and the structure of the medium-term plan). Sections II and III deal respectively with mandates and programmes, and comments on priorities.

20. In this connection, in the introductory background, the Secretary-General "invites Member States to consider and endorse his comments on the priorities of

the United Nations in the next decade as set forth in section III of the annex" (A/43/329, para. 8). At the same time, the Secretariat "propose[s] that Member States endorse the structure of the plan as set forth in section I C of the draft introduction" (*ibid.*, para. 9).

21. In response to inquiries from the Advisory Committee, representatives of the Secretary-General stated that section III (paras. 95-111) of the annex represented comments and not proposals of the Secretary-General on priorities, hence, the Secretary-General's invitation to Member States to endorse his comments on priorities. Such endorsement would facilitate the Secretariat's subsequent preparation of the proposed medium-term plan and designation of priorities. However, in the absence of such endorsement from Member States, it was envisaged that the Secretariat would attempt to convey to programme managers the salient views of Member States on the matter, as contained in the records of the debates in the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly.

22. The Secretary-General proposes modifications to the structure of the medium-term plan in paragraphs 33 and 34 of the annex. According to the Secretary-General, the plan would "comprise four major programmes, instead of the 31 in the current medium-term plan" (*ibid.*, annex, para. 33). "These four major programmes would comprise about 40 programmes, regrouping the existing 148 programmes" (*ibid.*, para. 34). Further, the Secretary-General states that "This simplified structure, with fewer elements, does not in any way imply an overall reduction of the role of the Organization. On the contrary, more clarity in the design of its aims and a greater concentration of its activities should lead to an enhanced role and more collective performance" (*ibid.*, para. 35). In this connection, the Advisory Committee believes that information that would explain the rationale for the proposed programme regroupings and would support the above statement should have been provided in the document, as it would have facilitated an assessment of whether the proposed changes are substantive or cosmetic. Similarly, information explaining the rationale used in the preparation of the Secretary-General's comments on priorities (*ibid.*, paras. 95-111) should have been provided. Such information should have included an evaluation of relevant programme outputs against the plan objectives in the previous period. The Committee expects that these omissions will be rectified when the proposed medium-term plan for the period beginning in 1992 is prepared.

23. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraphs 33 and 37 to 94 of the annex the results of the proposed regrouping of the 31 major programmes in the current medium-term plan into four proposed major programmes. However, with regard to the proposal to regroup the existing 148 programmes into about 40 programmes, representatives of the Secretary-General informed the Committee that the reference to "about 40 programmes" was premature at this stage since the exercise was still in progress and more precise information on the subject was therefore not available. The Committee believes that efforts to streamline the medium-term plan should be encouraged. At the same time, the Committee cautions that streamlining should not be construed as reducing activities.

24. As regards the format and presentation of the draft introduction to the plan, the Advisory Committee recommends that, in future exercises, information contained

in sections II (mandates and programmes) and III (comments on priorities) of the draft introduction should be appropriately combined. Such an approach would reduce the possibility of contradictory statements being inadvertently made and would obviate the need to cross refer between the two sections.

25. On a broader basis, and in the context of its consideration of the Secretary-General's draft introduction to the medium-term plan, the Advisory Committee draws attention to the need to clarify the intended coverage of the plan. In the Committee's opinion, if the plan is intended to cover all programmes and activities funded from the regular budget as well as all other activities funded from extrabudgetary resources, the following comments should be borne in mind. With regard to extrabudgetary resources, the Committee notes that there are two types: those under full custody of and administration by the Secretary-General, such as trust funds and special accounts, and those that are directly administered by semi-autonomous entities such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre on Human Settlements (Habitat). In the case of those semi-autonomous entities whose programmes and priorities are approved by their respective governing bodies, questions arise as to the extent that programmes and priorities so approved dovetail with those included in the United Nations medium-term plan.

26. The duration of the next medium-term plan beginning in 1992 is another issue that has to be addressed. In this regard, the Advisory Committee trusts that due regard will be given to the usefulness of maintaining harmonization of the planning and budgeting cycles of the United Nations and the specialized agencies that has evolved over the years.

Notes

1/ Previously circulated to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/CN.1/R.108) and the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (E/AC.51/1988/6).

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/37/6 and Corr.1).

3/ Ibid., Supplement No. 6A (A/37/6/Add.1), Supplement No. 6B (A/37/6/Add.2) and Supplement No. 6C (A/37/6/Add.3).

4/ Ibid., Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/39/6 and Corr.1); *ibid.*, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/41/6); and A/43/6 and Corr.1.

5/ Ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6A (A/37/6/Add.1), chap. 25.