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Summary record of the 13th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 22 October 2002 at 10 a.m.

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

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 112: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 *(continued)*

Decentralized budgetary and financial arrangements for central services (continued)
(A/57/348 and A/57/7/Add.3)

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Agenda item 111: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations *(continued)*

Common services (continued) (A/57/7/Add.3 and A/57/176)

1. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), referring to the report on the plan to increase the regular budget component of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/362), said that her delegation wished to reiterate its support for the efforts that had been made in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/253.

2. The United Nations Office at Nairobi played an important role in strengthening the presence of the United Nations in Africa. The Member States could help to consolidate that presence by easing the burden of administrative costs on the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), particularly in the light of their key role in implementing the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. While her delegation

welcomed the Secretariat's undertaking to propose further strengthening of the Office in future bienniums, it was concerned that the current allocation of resources was not sufficient, having declined from 15.2 per cent in the biennium 2000-2001 to 9.7 per cent in the biennium 2002-2003. It hoped that the financial requirements, resources and capacities of the Office would be duly considered when budget proposals for the biennium 2004-2005 were prepared, with a view to ensuring equitable treatment of all United Nations Offices.

3. **Ms. Attwooll** (United States of America), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the Department of Public Information (A/57/355), said that the smooth operation of the United Nations web site was an important issue for her delegation and many others. The Committee should therefore consider it carefully.

4. The Department of Public Information had made the web site a priority activity, and had redeployed resources to create and maintain it. The web site, and other technological innovations, would enable the Organization to modernize and become more responsive to the needs of the Member States. There had been nearly 20 reviews of the Department's activities since 1996, undertaken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Joint Inspection Unit, independent consultants, a task force on the reorientation of United Nations public information activities and the Secretary-General.

5. While her delegation took note of the Secretary-General's proposal and the remarks of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), it was confident that the Department could draw on the many suggestions it had received from the studies conducted to strengthen the United Nations web site using resources from within its current approved budget of \$144.7 million.

6. Referring to the report of the Secretary-General on the delivery of advisory services (A/57/363), she asked whether there had been any impact studies or other methods of judging the value of such services once they had been provided.

7. **Mr. Yamanaka** (Japan), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the Department of Public Information (A/57/355), said that his delegation had often expressed the view that public-information-related outreach was more efficient and

cost-effective when incorporated into local activities, in local languages. Strengthening the Department of Public Information should be considered not in isolation, but in the overall context of United Nations reform.

8. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division), responding to questions regarding the existing and proposed levels of staffing of the Department of Public Information, in particular for the Chinese language section of the United Nations web site, pointed out that the report contained in document A/57/355 had been prepared in response to a request for proposals to strengthen the Department in order to support and enhance the web site in all the official languages of the Organization. The web site staff currently consisted of one established P-3 post and one general temporary assistance post. The proposal was to provide one established P-4 editor/coordinator post and one established General Service assistant post for the Chinese language. The same pattern of staffing would apply to all of the other official languages except English, which would be allocated only a P-4 editor/coordinator post because its existing staffing level was already fuller.

9. Responding to questions regarding trends in extrabudgetary financing for ECLAC, particularly the effect on contributions of currency fluctuations, he said that there were two aspects to the problem. The first was that contributions were pledged in currencies which were weakening against the United States dollar, resulting in a lower level of United States dollar receipts. The annex to document A/57/364 showed that over one third of the extrabudgetary contributions in the biennium 2000-2001 had come from countries of the region whose currencies were dropping in value against the United States dollar. The second aspect was the influence of the value of the Chilean peso on expenditure at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago. For expenditure in United States dollars, the effect was negative, as contributions continued to be made in currencies other than the dollar. However, for expenditure in local currency, a weaker rate against the United States dollar could be an advantage. The general problem was uncertainty: extrabudgetary contributions were usually not expressed in the same currency as expenditure and ECLAC therefore found it difficult to programme activities to be carried out using such contributions. Their stability was jeopardized as a result. He could offer no quantitative estimate of the

effect of exchange-rate fluctuations, but since December 2001, the Chilean peso had fallen 3 per cent against the United States dollar.

10. With regard to the proposed increase in the regular budget component of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), he said that a further phase of growth would be provided for in the budget for the biennium 2004-2005. The figures given for the resources allocated to the Office, which showed a decrease from 15.2 per cent in the biennium 2000-2001 to 9.7 per cent in the biennium 2002-2003, in fact expressed a rate of growth; resources allocated to the Office in the 2002-2003 budget were 9.7 per cent more than in 2000-2001. That did, however, represent a smaller increase than the rate observed in the previous biennium for the same section (section 27) of the budget. The General Assembly had in fact approved increases for 2002-2003 in the five sections of the budget which affected UNON, producing a real rate of growth of approximately 11 per cent. The increases were summarized in paragraph 35 of the introduction to the budget proposals for that biennium (A/56/6).

11. Replying to questions regarding the evaluation of the delivery of advisory services, he drew attention to paragraph 6 of document A/57/363, which described coordination and reporting arrangements at the intergovernmental level. At the cooperation segment of its sessions the Economic and Social Council received and considered reports on operational activities for international development. In addition, the Second Committee of the General Assembly received and considered such reports in the context of its triennial policy reviews of operational activities for international development. There were in fact a number of reports before the Second Committee (E/2002/47 and Add.1 and Add.2, E/2002/59, E/2002/60, A/56/70 and Add.1 and Add.2, and A/56/320 and Add.1). Those arrangements demonstrated that there was an established reporting mechanism dealing with the delivery of advisory services.

12. **The Chairman** said that, in the light of the observations and recommendations of ACABQ, he proposed that the Secretariat should prepare for the future consideration of the Committee four draft decisions that would recommend that the General Assembly should: (a) take note of the report of the Secretary-General on decentralized budgetary and financial arrangements for central services (A/57/348) and concur with the related recommendations of the

Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/57/7/Add.3); (b) take note of the conclusions contained in paragraphs 32 to 37 of the report of the Secretary-General on the delivery of advisory services (A/57/363); (c) take note of the report of the Secretary-General on trends in extrabudgetary resources at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the impact on its capacity to carry out the programme of work (A/57/364); and (d) take note of the report of the Secretary-General on common services (A/57/176).

13. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

14. **The Chairman** said that he had received a request from Ms. Rosemarie Waters, President of the United Nations Staff Union, to address the Committee when it considered agenda items 118 (Human resources management), and 120 (United Nations common system), in accordance with General Assembly resolution 35/213. He had received a similar request from Ms. Janice Albert, General Secretary of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA), to address the Committee on those items. He took it that the Committee agreed to hear the President of the United Nations Staff Union and the General Secretary of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) when it took up those two agenda items.

15. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.